The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

The measles outbreak is a dismal scandal

Govt must act as per the review committee's recommendations

Measles is among the most preventable diseases. A two-dose course of a cheap, decades-old vaccine protects almost every child who receives it. Despite that, 1,177 people have died of the disease in Bangladesh this year, and the outbreak is not over. It is a scandal of the worst kind because every one of these deaths was preventable. Worse, it is the outcome of years of neglect by successive governments that let vaccine stocks run dry, left key posts empty, and postponed campaigns that would have saved lives.

A joint independent review, reported by Prothom Alo, explains how this happened. The review was assembled by the World Health Organization, Unicef, Gavi, and local health officials. Reportedly, 849,619 children missed the measles vaccine over a five-year period. Stocks of the measles-rubella vaccine ran out in 2025. A follow-up campaign was due in 2024, was agreed on to be held in 2025, and was not held until April 2026.

The healthcare system's foundations were also found to be eroding. About 53 percent of cold-chain technician posts are vacant, as are 34 percent of health assistant and inspector posts in the field and 45 percent at the programme's headquarters. Some 90 percent of vaccinators in urban areas work for NGOs, with little oversight. A vaccinators' strike disrupted services for seven months last year. The review blames governments of every stripe, of which the authorities should take note. The coverage gaps predate the current government and persisted under both the Awami League and the interim administration.

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The present government has also responded too slowly and too narrowly: children over the age of five, who are among those at risk, were left out of its vaccination drive.

The government's handling of the data deserves scrutiny. Of 93,852 symptomatic patients whose samples were tested up to October 12, 73 percent had measles, according to figures presented by the review team. The health directorate, by contrast, counts just 22,840 confirmed cases among 208,570 suspected, at a rate of 11 percent. The two sets of figures are not comparable, but a low confirmation rate that reflects thin testing offers false comfort. The health minister, speaking at the review team's workshop, conceded that confidence in the quality of the vaccines Bangladesh administers is, for now, "an assumption". The government must establish a system to verify the integrity of its cold chain. The checks should be independent, and the results should be made public.

Blaming its predecessors for the crisis is not enough. Responsibility for empty vaccine stores, vacant posts, and missed campaigns now rests with those in office. The government must act on the review team's recommendations, which are sensible: ward-level micro-planning, filling vacancies, raising the age limits for campaigns, a digital registry to track who has been vaccinated, and a financing plan before Gavi support tapers off.

When can journos report without fear?

Govt must properly investigate Netrokona journalist's killing

We are dismayed by the killing of Lutfozzaman Fakir Alif, the Netrokona correspondent of private IPTV channel Ruposhi Bangla. On the night of October 15, at around 8:00pm, the journalist was shot at least five times by two attackers on a motorcycle while he was at a tea stall in Uttarail Bazar on the Shyamganj-Birishiri Road. Lutfozzaman was also known for running a Facebook page where he regularly posted about incidents of corruption in Netrokona. It is believed that the motivation behind his killing may have stemmed from one of his reports. The incident is yet another blow to our hopes for a government that would ensure journalists' safety and press freedom after years of waiting. Sadly, the wait continues.

Alarmingly, this is not the first time Lutfozzaman was attacked. On November 10 last year, unidentified assailants attacked him with a knife near Teribazar Ghat in Durgapur and threatened his colleague, who tried to intervene. Was the earlier incident thoroughly investigated by police, or do the attackers remain unidentified? Could the failure to deliver justice in the previous case have emboldened the assailants in Thursday's incident to shoot the journalist dead in public?

In May, Reporters Without Borders published its World Press Freedom Index 2026, wherein Bangladesh slipped three places down to 152nd. The country falls under the "very serious" category, which signals low press freedom and a high tally of abuses against media and journalists in connection with their work. Be it by the enactment of curtailing laws or brute force, press freedom remains under constant threat in the country. Journalists on the margins, especially grassroots and university correspondents, bear the brunt as they are more accessible. What frustrates us is that no government over the years has been able to safeguard journalists, let alone fulfil its promises of ensuring press freedom. Meanwhile, cyber laws echoing the repressive elements of their predecessors continue to be drafted, further threatening the right of journalists to work freely.

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We demand a transparent and complete investigation into the killing of Lutfozzaman Fakir Alif. Until grassroots journalists can report on corruption without fearing for their safety, no political party should claim itself to be pro-press freedom.

Bangladesh must answer for workers trafficked to war

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND



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An investigation by the Special Response Battalion (SRB), the findings of which were announced at a press briefing on October 14, revealed that 30 young men recruited to work in Russia in various roles had been sent to the front lines of the Russia-Ukraine war as "baits" to identify the locations of their enemies. Among them, 20 died in drone attacks. The irony is, these men thought they had purchased a Tk-10-lakh lottery to change their lives. Little did they know that they would be entering an active war zone where human casualties were reduced to a mere number game.

A few international outlets picked up the news. Al Jazeera, Channel 4, and DW previously flagged the recruitment patterns of Russia, which was recruiting fighters from developing countries in South Asia and Africa. While going through these reports, I was drawn to the comment sections, where most Western commentators were labelling these fighters as "greedy". They rejected the idea that these men could have been tricked into fighting a war far away from their homelands. They argued that these men had signed a contract, and thereby were responsible for their actions. There were one or two who flipped the argument to ask, "What about the foreign fighters fighting for Ukraine?"

I watched video clips of some of these recruits in combat uniforms. They were showing how the land was strewn with dead bodies. Both old and fresh bodies were lying in body bags. Per the SRB report, they were sent to the battlefield with only three weeks of training, where they were systematically hounded by drones. The drones would give images of their targets for one last time before the explosions happened. The situation is akin to a video game where reality has been transported to a virtual image-driven world. Only, in this case, these men were not players with joysticks and chosen avatars.

In July, we heard the expatriates' welfare minister telling parliament that 30 Bangladeshi men had travelled to Russia on April 24 with valid manpower clearance from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) through three recruitment agencies. The minister acknowledged confirmed deaths and highlighted the government's salvage mission through diplomatic channels. However, the recent figure of deaths reported by SRB requires a dated explanation. Are we to assume that these 20 out of 30 killed are the same cohort who went to Russia in April?

Russia and Ukraine engaged in a prolonged war. They can afford to adopt an existential spirit and a philosophical tone, claiming that everything is fair in love and war. But for us, the question is legal and ethical. We need to own up to these deaths instead of simply saying some foreign forces used our humans as decoys for their hunt. We need to ask: who approved the jobs? Who issued the employer demand letters, embassy verification, BMET clearances, and the contracts shown to the aspiring workers? Who received the money for their payments, intermediary commissions, and any payments linked to military enlistment? When did the officials get to know? Did they learn it from the complaints of the families first? What diplomatic measures is the government taking to address the allegation of dangerous deployment of our men for tactical military purposes?

Will the government come forward with medical care for the wounded, debt relief and compensation for the victims' families, protect the whistleblowers, and chase criminal proceedings if needed?

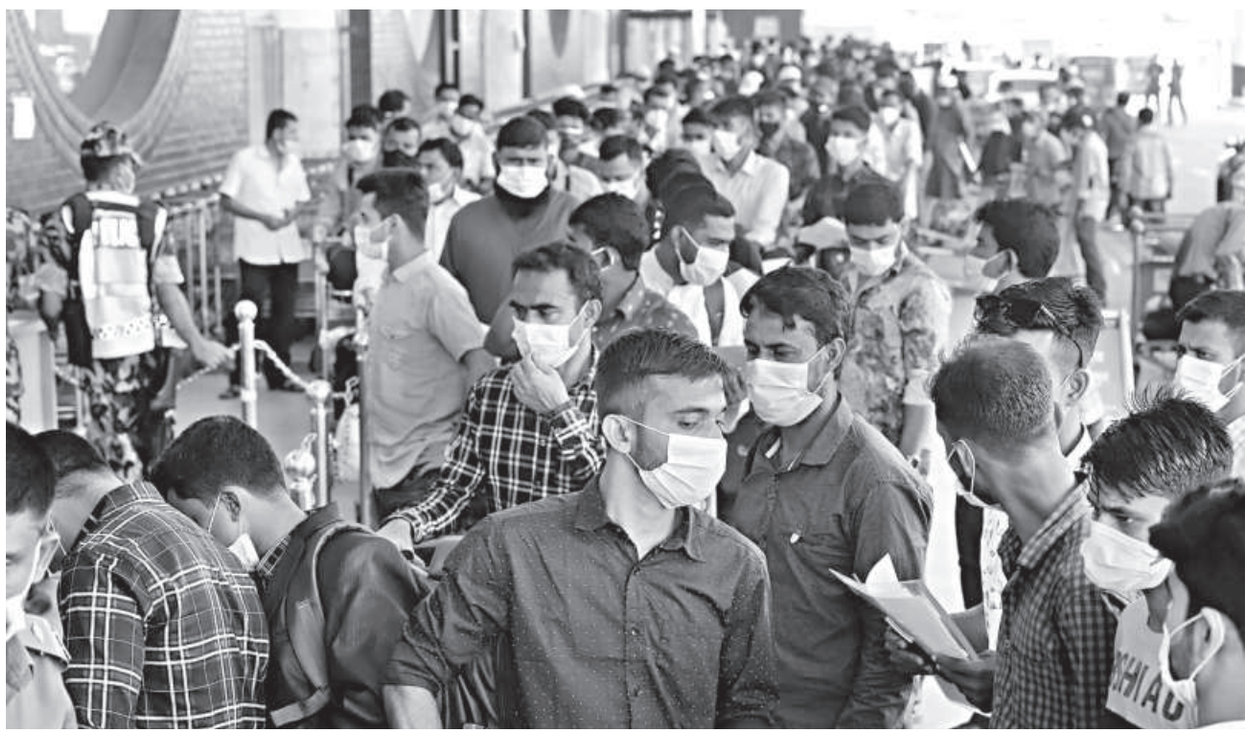
We need to sort out our mess before we blame others. But it seems we are more interested in creating a larger mess. On June 1, *Prothom Alo* reported that the government had revoked the licences of three recruitment agencies linked to the scam and launched diplomatic efforts to bring back the 30 migrants, some of whom shared footage of the front lines. This contrasts another report published on June 9, which quoted a foreign ministry statement to report that Bangladesh had proposed to increase its workforce in Russia from approximately 10,000 to 100,000 within a year. How can we consider fattening the supply chain with allegations of coerced recruitment in the air?

Should we think we are no longer "choosers" because our economy relies heavily on the remittance dollars sent by migrant workers? The decline in our RMG exports has not helped the situation either. True, we need to expand lawful overseas employment, but shouldn't we be careful in choosing a country as our work destination where military recruitment poses a documented risk?

In a chilling Channel 4 video, one Bangladeshi admits that he was recruited as a maintenance operator after paying lakhs of taka to an agent. An AP report quoted another Bangladeshi migrant as saying that after his arrival in Russia, he was forced into going to the battlefield as the employer simply said, "We bought you." These admissions don't support any idea that Bangladesh knowingly sold its workers. But a thorough audit of institutional processes is needed. Equally important is the need for assessing how the recruitment system itself produces desperation among fortune seekers. The true incentive for these individuals is the promise of a ticket to a better livelihood. But once they cross the border, they lose control over their labour and movement and are eventually exposed to death. As a nation, what safeguards are there to protect these labour-export ambitions?

There is a real cost to this ambition. Bangladesh's 2022 Labour Force Survey puts recruitment costs at approximately 14.6 months of migrant earnings, rising to 15.1 months for men. The figures show the burden these migrants end up carrying before earning anything abroad. Recovering the costs also takes longer when earnings must cover living expenses and interest. An aspiring migrant worker borrows to obtain employment. Often the promised employment fails. If lucky, they return home alive. Irrespective of the fact, returning home often leaves the debt intact. For many, the only way to recover the first investment is attempting a second desperate venture. Debt can thereby encourage trafficking, giving leverage to recruiters. This problem extends beyond Russia. UN experts have examined allegations of fraudulent recruitment of Bangladeshis to Malaysia involving non-existent jobs and debt bondage. The complacency and vested interests of some agencies here have allowed these malpractices to thrive.

We need to build a counternarrative that provides our migrant workers with full disclosure, legal support, and linguistic aid before they agree to migrate, pay a broker, or sign a contract. Our migrants need to challenge the notion that signing a contract makes a claims deception or coercion void. This is where our foreign missions must be proactive. They need to stand by our nationals who probably unwittingly gave consent to some prohibited means of trafficking. Fraudulent civilian employment offers cannot be converted to purely military work. The allegation of trafficking into military service is dangerous. We hope our government will support our nationals and encourage its counterpart to investigate the issue. The desperation of our citizens does not give a foreign entity the right to make a game of us.



Our migrant workers must be provided with full disclosure, legal support, and linguistic aid before they agree to migrate, pay a broker, or sign an overseas job contract.

FILE PHOTO: **SK ENAMUL HAQ**

How to make climate finance more equitable



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MOHAMMAD EMRAN HASAN

Bangladesh has established a National Committee on Climate Finance at a critical moment, with COP31 approaching and the gap between global climate-finance commitments and actual needs remaining enormous. Chaired by the prime minister, the committee is tasked with setting priorities, mobilising resources, and engaging international climate funds. But its real test goes beyond securing money: can Bangladesh demonstrate what it needs, negotiate effectively, and ensure finance reaches those facing the greatest climate risks?

This challenge involves two interconnected journeys. The first is availing climate finance: building credible evidence of climate impacts and financing needs, negotiating adequate global commitments, and accessing international funding mechanisms. The second is disbursing that finance: allocating resources transparently and equitably according to actual risks and needs.

COP31, scheduled for November 9-20, 2026 in Antalya, Türkiye, offers an opportunity. Its provisional agendas include long-term climate finance, guidance to climate funds, and discussions relating to Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement on developed countries' financial obligations. Ahead of COP31, Bangladesh could develop a coordinated negotiating position combining community-reported losses, geospatial vulnerability assessments, quantified adaptation needs, and financing gaps. Such evidence could strengthen collective claims by Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and other climate-vulnerable nations. However, negotiating for finance and accessing it are two separate challenges. International funds require institutional readiness, credible proposals, safeguards, and accountability.

Securing finance is only half the equation. Once resources arrive, where should they go, and to whom? Two communities facing similar floods may suffer different losses because of poverty, livelihoods, infrastructure, and adaptive capacity. Women, persons with disabilities, and landless households may experience the same hazard differently.

Yet finance does not automatically follow this geography of vulnerability. Oxfam's assessment of the World Bank's 2017-2023 climate-finance portfolio identified potential differences of $24.28-$41.32 billion between budgeted and actual expenditures, with insufficient information to reliably track climate-specific spending. This does not demonstrate misuse, but highlights a serious transparency gap. Climate justice requires evidence-based allocation and accountability, not simply greater mobilisation.

Satellites can observe floods, erosion, and environmental change. Geospatial analysis can identify where hazards intersect with people and infrastructure. But climate justice cannot be sensed from space alone. Satellite imagery may identify a flooded village, but cannot fully explain how repeated flooding pushes families into debt, disrupts education or destroys livelihoods. Community experience captures these realities, while science helps establish their wider patterns. Connecting these different ways of knowing underpins what I propose as the three senses approach: social-sensing, science-sensing, and common-sensing.

Social-sensing enables climate-affected communities to produce evidence through citizen science, participatory monitoring, local knowledge and accessible digital reporting. It captures lived experiences, losses and needs that conventional datasets frequently overlook. Science-sensing brings together community observations, climate research, satellite imagery, geographical analysis, and socioeconomic data to build a more comprehensive picture of climate impacts. It validates, contextualises, and scales community evidence across locations and time.

Common-sensing translates this combined intelligence into negotiation, policy, and resource-allocation decisions. It helps determine what finance countries should claim, which funding opportunities to pursue, and where resources should flow.

In short, social-sensing tells us what people experience. Science-sensing explains where, why, and to what extent impacts occur. Common-sensing turns evidence into decisions.

Bangladesh's emerging Loss & Damage Dashboard illustrates the first journey. By combining community-generated loss reports with geolocation, climate information, and Earth observation, it can turn individual experiences into structured evidence. If comparable approaches were adopted across LDCs, evidence could be aggregated from households to communities, countries, and collective international claims, strengthening climate-finance negotiations.

In Bangladesh, Oxfam's initiative to develop a Climate Risk Index combines hazard, exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity, and could help identify locations and populations facing disproportionate climate risks and support more equitable allocation. Such tools are examples of the approach, not the approach itself: one demonstrates how evidence can travel upwards to strengthen claims, while the other shows how evidence can guide finance back towards vulnerable communities.

The process should not end with disbursement. Did finance reach intended communities? Did vulnerability decline? Were marginalised people included? Answers generate new evidence, strengthening future decisions and negotiations. Climate finance should operate as a continuous cycle connecting community experience, scientific evidence, international claims, access, risk-informed allocation, and accountability.

Bangladesh already possesses many foundations for this approach: community knowledge, climate research, Earth observation capabilities, digital technologies, and decades of climate diplomacy. Its National Committee on Climate Finance offers an opportunity to connect them, ahead of COP31 and beyond.

Success should not be measured only by how much climate finance crosses national borders, but by how credibly needs are established, how effectively resources are accessed, how equitably they are distributed and how transparently results are demonstrated.

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