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

Ramp up health worker recruitment

Coordinated planning is a must to improve healthcare services

Our healthcare system cannot provide quality services with inadequate healthcare workers to meet patients' needs. Despite an increase in the number of doctors, nurses and midwives in recent years, the country remains far below the World Health Organisation's recommended threshold. According to the latest health ministry data, the country had only 15.16 doctors, nurses and midwives per 10,000 people in 2025, against the WHO benchmark of 44.5. At the current pace of training and recruitment, this density is projected to reach 31.77 by 2030, leaving a substantial gap. To match the country's growing healthcare needs, the government therefore needs a comprehensive workforce plan.

While the recommended ratio is one doctor to three nurses and midwives and five allied health professionals, including laboratory and imaging technologists, our hospitals have fewer than one nurse or midwife for every doctor and fewer than two allied health workers. Successive governments have often emphasised recruiting doctors without giving equal attention to nurses and other essential professionals. In our public hospitals, wards designed for around 24 patients sometimes accommodate 48 or more, while doctors at upazila health complexes may have to see 100-150 outpatients a day, leaving them barely a few minutes for each consultation. Specialist services are similarly overstretched, with patients waiting months for appointments and some specialists attending to hundreds of patients a day. Such conditions are hardly conducive to proper diagnosis, treatment and follow-up care. They also place an unreasonable burden on existing health workers.

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The growing disease burden makes these gaps even more concerning. Non-communicable diseases require regular monitoring and long-term treatment, while maternal and child healthcare needs remain high. The country must also address communicable diseases and recurring dengue outbreaks that put additional pressure on hospitals. Without sufficient health workers, these multiple healthcare needs will continue to overwhelm facilities and limit access to timely treatment, particularly for people in rural areas who have fewer alternatives to public healthcare.

However, the government's acknowledgement of the shortage and announcement of plans to create around one lakh additional posts for health workers is positive. It has decided to recruit 5,000 doctors, while proposals to create 15,000 nursing posts and recruit around 25,000 midwives over the coming years are under consideration or in progress. These initiatives must translate into actual appointments within clear timelines. The authorities must also expand training capacity, improve working conditions and ensure health workers are supported well enough to remain in public service.

Workforce planning must also guide the government's recent decisions on hospital expansion. The government's plan to expand upazila health complexes to 151 beds each cannot succeed without adequate doctors, nurses, medical technologists, equipment, space and operating budgets. In other words, we need a balanced, adequately staffed workforce capable of meeting patients' needs at every level of care.

Why relax safeguards in shipyards?

Reconsider the decision to reclassify shipbreaking

The government's recent decision to downgrade shipbreaking yards from "red" to "orange" category, potentially easing the environmental assessment requirements, is a dangerous move that may backfire. In fact, we fail to see how this move could be justified when recent incidents raised the need for stricter safeguards. In an industry widely known for being occupationally and environmentally hazardous, risking workers' safety and known environmental damage is indeed baffling.

The stakes are quite clear. Even with the existing safeguards, at least 150 workers have been killed and 264 injured in shipbreaking accidents in Chattogram's Sitakunda—where most of the country's shipbreaking yards are located—between 2015 and 2026 (till October), according to records maintained by the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS). In August this year, 10 workers died from toxic gas exposure while dismantling a scrapped ship at Ferdous Steel Ship Recycling Yard. Ferdous Steel was one of the 23 "green" yards, which means it had checked all the safety boxes on paper. However, safety deficiencies were identified during an inspection six months before the accident. Ferdous Steel was also flagged by the authorities for repeatedly flouting labour law. If even certification cannot guarantee basic safety, the government should be strengthening monitoring rather than relaxing scrutiny.

Under the Environment Conservation Rules 2023, shipbreaking activities and yards fall under the red category because of their potential impacts on the environment and human health. The existing approval process includes an environmental impact assessment (EIA), public consultation, and scrutiny by the Department of Environment. Reclassifying the industry may make the EIA discretionary rather than obligatory, depriving regulators and the affected communities of a crucial means of assessing risks. Industry representatives argue that environmental clearance takes around 90 days and imposes financial costs. These concerns certainly deserve attention, but the solution is making approvals faster and more transparent, not lowering safety standards. Moreover, a decision affecting coastal ecosystems, public health and workers' safety should not have been made without consulting the relevant experts.

Lowering safeguards to boost industrial growth and attract investment can never be a solution. Strict enforcement of the existing measures is essential, including regular independent inspections, adequate protective equipment, effective emergency response and meaningful penalties for violations. A competitive shipbreaking industry should be measured by its ability to protect the workers and the environment, not by the speed and volume of business it brings in.

A roadmap for closing the skills gap in our logistics sector



Ahamedul Karim Chowdhury is former head of Kamalapur Inland Container Depot and Pangaon Inland Container Terminal, and an adjunct faculty member at Bangladesh Maritime University.

■ **AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY**

A new container terminal, a faster railway connection or a modern customs platform may improve Bangladesh's logistics capacity. Still, none can deliver its full value if the people operating the equipment, processing cargo, managing data, and coordinating across institutions are not adequately prepared. Developing a skilled workforce is not a supporting activity to be addressed after infrastructure investment. It is part of the infrastructure that makes logistics work.

This is an area that needs significant work. The National Logistics Policy (NLP) 2025, approved by the interim government, devotes an entire chapter to human resources and skills development. Last month, the BNP government formed five working groups to implement that policy, including one tasked with identifying logistics skills gaps and assessing workforce requirements. Bangladesh therefore needs neither a fresh policy declaration nor another committee. It needs an executable skills roadmap.

That roadmap should be driven by the newly formed skills development working group, with the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) as its technical anchor, consistent with the government's formal allocation of responsibilities. NSDA's legal mandate already covers forecasting skills demand, coordinating public and private training, occupational standards, assessment, certification and recognition of prior learning. Its task should not be to teach every course itself, but to connect institutions and employers through one coherent national framework.

The problem we face is not an absolute absence of training. Chittagong Port Authority has its training institute (CPATI); Bangladesh Maritime University (BMU) offers education in port management and logistics; DCCI Business Institute provides supply-chain and trade courses; while companies and professional associations organise their own programmes. The weakness is that these initiatives do not yet constitute a sufficiently integrated, demand-led system spanning public agencies, port users and the wider supply chain. A certificate earned in one setting may not correspond to a recognised occupational standard or a clear path to advancement elsewhere.

So, the first step should be to map the workforce before undertaking any training programmes. Within its first 100 days, the working group should approve an occupational mapping exercise covering ports, terminal operators, shipping agencies, freight forwarders, customs-facing service providers, inland container depots, off-docks, warehouses, road and rail transport, and export-oriented supply chains. Public and private employers should identify job roles, existing qualifications, vacancies, emerging technologies and likely changes in demand. The resulting baseline should guide all subsequent investment.

The second step is to agree on the skills each occupation requires. Crane and reach-stacker operators need equipment competence, safe lifting practices, and practical assessments. Yard planners need knowledge of cargo flow and terminal systems. Shipping and forwarding staff must understand bills of lading, manifests, delivery procedures, multimodal documents, and international commercial practice. Warehouse and Inland Container Depot (ICD) staff need inventory control, discipline in bonded operations and safety. Supervisors need performance management, problem-solving and the ability to manage exceptions rather than merely follow routine instructions.

Digitalisation makes this exercise more urgent. Bangladesh is introducing or expanding electronic platforms across customs, ports, and trade processes. Training a person to click through a screen is not the same as teaching that person the legal and operational logic behind a declaration, cargo release or container movement. Training programmes must distinguish ordinary system users from process owners and super-users, and from the ICT specialists responsible for data exchange, interoperability, cybersecurity, and system continuity. Every major digital rollout should have a corresponding workforce-transition plan, with practice environments, trainers and post-launch support.

The third step is to turn job requirements into nationally recognised competency standards and modular qualifications. NSDA can guide the standards, provider approval and independent assessment, while employers help validate the content. Recognition of Prior Learning is essential: experienced operators, documentation specialists and logistics workers should have a credible way to demonstrate competence without repeating everything they have learned on the job. Short, stackable credentials can allow young entrants and mid-career employees to progress towards larger qualifications.

A meaningful partnership with industry is indispensable. Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and other exporter groups can specify factory-to-port logistics requirements; Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) can mobilise businesses and regional training demand; Bangladesh Freight Forwarders Association (BAFFA) can contribute freight-forwarding expertise; shipping-agent associations can shape shipping documentation and port-call courses; and Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (BICDA), customs clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents' associations, transport operators and terminal companies can provide practical training opportunities at their operating facilities. These bodies should nominate practitioners, validate curricula, provide apprenticeships, and help finance training—not simply attend consultation meetings.

Delivery should be distributed, not monopolised. CPATI could serve as a port-operations and equipment-skills centre, while BMU supports managerial learning, research, and executive education. Customs authorities can support compliance and digital-declaration modules for public officials and private users alike. Chambers, associations and accredited vocational providers can deliver specialist courses in Dhaka, Chattogram, Mongla and other logistics clusters. The working group's role would be to set priorities, connect providers and measure results.



VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

International practice offers adaptable lessons here. UN Trade and Development's TrainForTrade Port Management Programme, for example, brings public and private port-community professionals into common learning networks and develops local instructors. Singapore's Maritime Cluster Fund co-finances workforce development by maritime companies. FIATA has internationally benchmarked freight-forwarding diplomas, although local delivery requires its formal validation. Bangladesh can learn from these approaches without importing another costly institutional structure.

Funding arrangements must reward outcomes. A modest, transparent programme could combine government skills allocations, development-partner assistance and employer co-financing. Public support should prioritise agreed occupations and accredited courses, with companies contributing training places, equipment access, instructors or cash. Training contracts should be judged not only by attendance and certificates but by fewer documentation errors, safer cargo handling, higher equipment productivity, more reliable digital transactions, job placement and career progression.

The programme must also include people who are frequently overlooked: women entering operational and technical occupations, experienced workers without formal certificates, smaller freight and transport businesses, and seafarers seeking suitable shore-based careers. The transition to automated equipment and electronic documentation should be accompanied by reskilling, not treated as a procurement exercise disconnected from employment. Better English, communication, customer-service and leadership skills are equally important in a sector that connects Bangladesh to global supply chains.

The implementation calendar should be explicit. In the first 100 days, confirm the working group's responsibilities and industry participation, commission the skills map, and select three to five pilot occupations. Within 12 months, complete the initial employer-demand study, publish draft standards, train instructors and launch pilot assessments in both a digital role and an equipment or operations role. Over three years, expand recognised qualifications, apprenticeships and regional delivery centres, supported by an NSDA-linked logistics skills dashboard that reports employment and operational outcomes.

There is no reason to wait until another port is built or another software system goes live. The NLP has already recognised the human-capital challenge; the new working group provides a mechanism for action. What is now needed is disciplined coordination between NSDA, operational agencies, education providers and the businesses that employ logistics workers. Bangladesh's ambition to become a competitive trade and logistics hub will depend as much on the competence of its people as on the capacity of its infrastructure.

COP31 must prioritise climate displacement



Farah Kabir is country director at ActionAid Bangladesh.

■ **FARAH KABIR**

By 2050, Bangladesh could see 1.33 crore of its population becoming internal climate migrants, according to the Asian Development Bank's Asia-Pacific Climate Report 2026. The report links this risk to rising seas, water scarcity, and declining agricultural productivity. Who pays when people lose homes, land and livelihoods to a crisis they did little to create?

Disasters already displaced people within Bangladesh 1.47 crore times between 2014 and 2023. These are displacement movements, not distinct individuals. Separately, an assessment by the International Organization for Migration, together with the Bangladesh government, estimated that nearly 50 lakh people were internally displaced by disasters when data were collected from September and October in 2025. Nearly 63 percent were displaced before April 2020. The last figure covers disaster-induced displacement, not climate-attributable displacement alone.

Displacement strips away far more than a home. Families can lose land, income, savings, education, healthcare, and the social networks that sustain them. Women lose the few assets they may have, as well as compensation rights, while shouldering more unpaid care. Persons with disabilities, older people and marginalised communities face further barriers when assistance and infrastructure are inaccessible. Communities are not passive victims. They diversify livelihoods, draw on family networks, borrow money, sell assets, move temporarily for work, or migrate when staying becomes untenable. These strategies show ingenuity, but also the limits of adaptation when households exhaust savings, take on debt, or leave home to survive.

Mobility can be part of adaptation when people have information, resources, rights, and genuine choices. Without safe shelter or viable livelihoods, distress-driven displacement deepens impoverishment. Policy must support people before, during and after movement.

Bangladesh has established foundations for action. Its National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management, 2021 and National Action Plan (2022-2042) provide a framework for durable solutions. The National Adaptation Plan (2023-2050) and Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 offer further instruments. The National Framework and Action Plan for Locally Led Adaptation, launched in February 2026, offers an opportunity to connect community priorities with public investment. It is critical to integrate development plans with climate action. The test is whether commitments reach people where they live and those already forced to move. That requires a shift in how adaptation is financed.

Funding must support community-led risk reduction, resilient housing, freshwater, livelihood diversification, early warning, and social protection. It must also recognise mobility as a legitimate adaptation response where staying is no longer safe or viable. Local organisations and displaced people need accessible, predictable funding and real influence over decisions.

The adaptation fund and other mechanisms must turn locally led adaptation commitments into support for displaced and displacement-prone communities. The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage has a different, complementary role: addressing harms that cannot be prevented through mitigation and adaptation alone. Its resources must help people recover from destroyed homes, lost land and livelihoods, disrupted communities, and cultural losses. Neither form of finance should be reduced to emergency relief after disaster strikes.

Durable solutions require more. Destination towns need affordable housing, decent work, transport, healthcare, education, and social protection. National policies must anticipate movement, preparing likely destination towns and cities with climate-resilient infrastructure and essential services, alongside social protection systems that can reach newly displaced people and host communities.

At COP31, leaders must confront the gap between climate promises and people already adapting, moving and rebuilding. Major emitters who continue to emit must cut emissions faster and honour climate finance obligations. Finance must be adequate, accessible and grant-based, without adding to the debt burdens constraining public investment.

Bangladesh must implement its plans and prepare towns and cities receiving displaced people. But disasters don't strike a level playing field: they deepen existing inequalities, push already disadvantaged households further into poverty, and make recovery harder with every successive shock. That's precisely why the country cannot be left to finance a global crisis alone. Those who contributed least to climate change must not be left to bear its greatest human costs—first through the loss of home and livelihood, then through systems that fail to protect their rights and support recovery.

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