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

COP31 must bridge the funding gap

Effects of climate change cannot be mitigated otherwise

Climate change impacts are intensifying every year, devastating lives and livelihoods across the world, with countries like Bangladesh facing the most severe consequences. Widespread displacement is one such impact. Nearly 90 million people have already been forcibly displaced in countries increasingly exposed to climate-related droughts, floods, and extreme heat, according to a report by the UN refugee agency published ahead of COP31. It also reiterated a longstanding demand of vulnerable nations that they need more funding to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Scientists have been warning for quite some time that the Earth is warming at an accelerating rate. Despite this and the impacts they themselves are experiencing, rich countries—who happen to be the biggest contributors to global warming—have thus far fallen far short of providing the funds needed by poorer nations to cope with the crisis. Adaptation requires basic measures such as suitable infrastructure, early warning systems, proper flood protection, drought-resilient irrigation, etc—all of which could significantly improve their ability to withstand adverse climate impacts.

According to the UN Environment Programme, the world's 155 developing nations will need $305 billion annually by 2035 to adapt to worsening heatwaves, floods, fires, storms, draughts, and rising sea levels. Yet climate financing from rich countries amounted to only $32 billion in 2024, with governments in Global North spending more on defence than on tackling climate change.

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As per the Global Climate Risk Index 2021, Bangladesh was the seventh most affected country by extreme weather events between 2000 and 2019, experiencing 185 such events during the period. As sea levels are rising, more land is being lost. Salinity is penetrating further inland, destroying agricultural land, reducing rice yields, contaminating drinking water, and causing serious health problems for people living in affected areas. We have also witnessed increasingly frequent and intense floods and cyclones. Even the Sundarbans, which has long shielded Bangladesh from the worst impacts of cyclones and storms, is at risk. These severe impacts have pushed hundreds of thousands of people towards urban centres such as Dhaka, Chattogram, Khulna, and Rajshahi, putting enormous pressure on already strained infrastructure. With temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius during summer, the risks of waterborne and vector-borne diseases are also rising. Other developing countries are facing more or less similar threats.

COP31, which starts on November 9, will only make meaningful progress if rich nations recognise that they must fulfil their responsibilities and commitments to increase climate funding for vulnerable countries. Investing in clean energy projects in developing and least developed countries must also be part of the agenda. If we are to protect the planet as a whole from the devastating effects of climate change, wealthy nations must honour the promises they made during past climate summits. COP31 must produce a clear roadmap for closing the funding gap, with measurable timelines and mechanisms for delivering the promised funds. Countries that have contributed least to global warming should not be left to bear its heaviest costs.

Engage expatriates in local development

Initiative in a Tangail village offers a model for diaspora-led development

In media, where a significant proportion of migration coverage focuses on darker realities, the news that expatriates have funded the installation of 100 streetlights along a three-kilometre stretch in a village in Tangail is a refreshing development. And we are encouraged by it. This is not to suggest that the hardships and vulnerabilities associated with migrants should receive less attention; quite the contrary.

Bangladesh is among the leading countries for sea arrivals in Europe, according to UNHCR data in 2025. Our young population, grappling with anxiety and uncertainty for their future, embarks on dangerous journeys abroad that often push them to the forefront of foreign wars, into digital slavery, or, in some cases, death. A report published by this daily on Saturday recounts how a Bangladeshi man who travelled to Cambodia for a data entry job was sold to an online scam compound, where he was held captive and tortured. The government must, therefore, strengthen migration oversight to protect aspiring migrants from exploitation and ensure that their hopes of building a better future do not come at such devastating costs. This brings us back to the Tangail story.

Before the lights were installed, residents of Sonalia village struggled to travel along the road at night due to safety concerns. Amazingly, over the past two years, migrants from the village provided funds to build a road, establish flower gardens, construct homes for underprivileged families, and distribute Eid gifts to 200 households. Their next initiative is to offer interest-free loans to meritorious students to help them sit for IELTS and pursue higher education overseas. These examples underscore the potential of migrants in contributing to the country's development beyond just sending remittances. Their planning and investment can significantly contribute to local socioeconomic development. The knowledge, skills, and experience they acquire overseas can also be harnessed in policymaking, technological advancement, entrepreneurship, and other fields.

Realising this potential, however, requires the government's sustained engagement with the expatriate community and institutional support for collective initiatives. Bangladesh already offers investment options for migrants such as the Wage Earner Development Bond, but to fully utilise the potential of the Bangladeshi diaspora, a bridge must be established to connect overseas Bangladeshis with opportunities for investment and mentorship at home. We urge the government to take note, while recognising that such initiatives would complement, not replace, the state's responsibility to provide essential public services.

A nation of graduates with few jobs for them

MIND THE GAP



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NOSHIN NAWAL

Bangladesh has perfected the art of producing qualified young people for an economy that is increasingly unsure what to do with them. Between graduate unemployment, miserable wages, recruitment favouritism, and an education system selling aspirations on credit, the country's employment crisis is becoming a particularly expensive national joke. There is a peculiar ritual performed in middle-class Bangladeshi households, wherein a child is sent to the best school the family can afford, enrolled in coaching classes the family cannot afford, instructed to pursue a respectable degree, and eventually presented to society as a finished product. The parents have invested two decades, several small fortunes, and absorbed around 40,000 unsolicited opinions. The graduate has a certificate, a LinkedIn profile, and a growing suspicion that the family's chauffeur might enjoy greater job security.

Bangladesh's labour market is where ambition is plentiful, opportunity is rationed and the phrase "we'll let you know" is the equivalent of parents saying "dekhi". According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, unemployment among university graduates reached 13.54 percent in 2024, compared with 3.66 percent nationally. The International Monetary Fund's October 2026 assessment paints an uglier picture: nearly 29 percent of highly educated young Bangladeshis are unemployed, while approximately half of highly educated workers occupy jobs beneath their qualifications. Apparently, the more education one acquires, the greater the opportunity to discover how little the economy values it.

Of course, employers have their complaints, such as graduates lacking practical skills, communication abilities, and industry experience. Universities, meanwhile, continue producing degrees with the enthusiasm of a printing press operating without editorial supervision. Employers often demand experience for entry-level positions, universities offer theoretical knowledge with limited practical exposure, and students are left wondering where they were supposed to acquire three years of experience before their first job. But blaming graduates absolves businesses of their reluctance to invest in training, universities of having outdated curricula, and policymakers of their spectacular failure to connect education with economic planning. Everyone identifies a skills gap, but no party seems particularly enthusiastic about closing it.

Then there is the recruitment culture, where meritocracy often show up dressed for the interview only to discover that someone else's uncle has already spoken to the managing director. Utilising connections is not unique to Bangladesh, nor is every appointment corrupt. But when recruitment processes lack transparency, personal networks become an alternative method to secure employment. The young person with excellent qualifications but no influential surname is encouraged to develop resilience, presumably because resilience is considerably cheaper than institutional reform. On the other hand, thousands spend their most productive years preparing for competitive government job exams, not necessarily because public administration represents their deepest calling, but because a secure salary and predictable career have become rare luxuries. When the private sector cannot consistently offer stability, fair recruitment, or meaningful progression, the attraction of government service is hardly mysterious.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's celebrated garment industry presents another uncomfortable contradiction. We proudly advertise our manufacturing prowess while workers struggle over wages that must somehow accommodate food, rent, transport, and the occasional extravagance of being alive. Garment workers' recent protest demanding a Tk 30,000 minimum monthly wage, up from Tk 12,500, has triggered fresh unrest. Manufacturers warn of narrow margins, rising costs, and international competition. These pressures are real, but so is the absurdity of an export economy whose competitiveness remains so dependent on keeping labour inexpensive. The World Bank estimates that about 84 percent of workers in Bangladesh operate informally. The IMF has also noted a movement of educated youth towards agriculture rather than higher-productivity manufacturing and services.

Women, naturally, receive an additional complementary obstacle course. Bangladesh has invested enormously in girls' education, only to maintain a labour market where educated women face disproportionate unemployment. An IMF analysis of data from 2024 found unemployment among highly educated women to be 16.66 percent, compared to 6.37 percent among similarly educated men. In practice, a woman finds she must be qualified but not intimidating, ambitious but accommodating, and professionally committed but also available for domestic duties. Employers worry about marriage, maternity, and childcare as though reproduction were an unfortunate personal hobby rather than a fundamental part of society's continuation. The country celebrates female empowerment at conferences while workplace structures likely assume that somebody else will handle the children. And then, of course, we lament the exit of talented women from the workforce.

Perhaps the cruellest consequence of graduate unemployment is the normalisation of wasted potential. Young Bangladeshis increasingly treat migration as an escape. Families invest in overseas degrees, professional qualifications, and migration pathways because they no longer trust the domestic economy to reward their children's abilities. Bangladesh trains its people, foreign economies benefit from their productivity, and we console ourselves with remittance figures. Even entrepreneurship, routinely prescribed as the miracle cure to unemployment, cannot flourish based on motivational speeches alone. Starting a business requires capital, reliable electricity, predictable regulation, functioning banks, and customers with purchasing power. Telling unemployed graduates to become entrepreneurs without addressing these conditions is rather like advising someone trapped in a flood to consider starting up a swimming school.

Bangladesh does not need another ceremonial employment summit featuring distinguished speakers explaining that young people are the future. It needs measurable job creation targets, transparent recruitment processes, serious apprenticeships, better vocational education, affordable financing, and industrial diversification beyond garments. The World Bank's export diversification programme, which supported the creation of nearly 1,80,000 jobs in targeted non-garment firms, demonstrated that deliberate investment can produce tangible employment. Above all, economic success must be measured not merely by GDP growth, export receipts, or the number of new graduates, but by whether ordinary people can obtain dignified, productive work and build independent lives.

Unemployment is not simply an economic statistic; it postpones marriages, erodes confidence, deepens socioeconomic inequality, drains family savings, and turns adulthood into an indefinite waiting room. Bangladesh's young people have been instructed to study more, work harder, improve themselves, learn English, acquire digital skills, and remain resilient. They have largely complied. Perhaps it is time the economy updated its own CV.



FILE VISUAL: **TEENI AND TUNI**

Keeping women in sport is the real test



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SHAFIQ R BHUIYAN

Bangladesh increasingly celebrates women in sport, acknowledging their achievements and encouraging more girls to follow their lead. This is evident in the fact that over 6.79 lakh girls registered online for the second season of the Notun Kuri Sports competition, accounting for 41.8 percent of all applicants. But what happens after a woman enters the sporting world? Does the system provide fair career opportunities, protect her during vulnerable periods, and support her future beyond competitive sport? More girls entering academies, representing the country, and winning medals certainly signal progress. But participation only tells us who has entered the system, not who was able to stay in for the long term. The real test is whether women can sustain their involvement in sport without compromising their safety, dignity, or economic security.

The Women's Professional Cricket Global Employment Report 2022, by the Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA), recorded 24 centrally contracted women cricketers in Bangladesh, but no fully professional players in the domestic structure.

Former national cricketer Suraiya Azmin's experience recently brought certain shortcomings into focus. Reportedly, after requesting paid maternity leave from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in May, she received no response. Following childbirth, however, she was dropped from the national contract list, while her leave request and unpaid salary remained unresolved. Following the incident being reported, the BCB has decided to introduce paid maternity leave for women cricketers, with the proposal expected to receive formal approval soon. Indeed, Azmin's experience laid bare the absence of a formal system to protect a female player's income, contract, and return after childbirth.

After requesting paid maternity leave from BCB, former national cricketer Suraiya Azmin reportedly received no response. Following childbirth, she was dropped from the national contract list, while her leave request and unpaid salary remained unresolved. BCB has since decided to introduce paid maternity leave for women cricketers.

Maternity protection should guarantee paid leave, protect salary and contracts, prevent pregnancy from being an undisclosed excuse for non-renewal or exclusion, and ensure medical care, rehabilitation, and a gradual return to play. The International Cricket Council's post-pregnancy return-to-play guidelines offer a framework for recovery, assessment and training, but do not guarantee paid leave or contract security. Member boards must provide those protections.

The Pakistan Cricket Board, for instance, introduced a parental support policy in 2021 that allows women cricketers to move temporarily into non-playing roles during pregnancy, avail up to 12 months of paid maternity leave, and receive a contract extension for the following year. It also provides post-childbirth medical and physical support, and allows a player travelling for cricket to bring along a carer for her infant, with the board sharing travel and accommodation costs.

In Bangladesh, however, beyond national contracts, what protections are available to domestic, emerging, or lower-paid sportswomen? A 2017 Fifpro global employment survey, covering more than 3,200 women footballers, had found that 47 percent would consider leaving early to start a family. Only 2 percent had children; of those, just 8 percent received maternity pay and 61 percent had no childcare support. Fifpro's 2026 report found that 19 percent of players considering leaving earlier than planned citing plans to start a family; 49 percent were considering an early exit overall. The figures are not directly comparable, but Fifpro identifies Fifa's 2021 maternity protections as one factor in changing perceptions. Fifa's rules still do not guarantee automatic contract extensions during pregnancy.

When selectors or administrators assume marriage or childbirth means a player will soon leave the sport, they might stop investing in her regardless of whether she has made such a decision. But, just like their male counterparts, sportswomen should not have to delay having children, conceal their marital status, or choose between family life and a sporting career.

Players' safety is another concern, as a former captain of Bangladesh's women's cricket team last year alleged sexual harassment and mental abuse by former team officials and said earlier complaints had not produced an effective remedy. An independent inquiry found prima facie evidence of inappropriate conduct in two out of four specific allegations. The BCB later banned one former official from cricket-related activities. The inquiry findings underline the need for trusted reporting channels.

Meanwhile, the BCB's announcement of an independent committee to hear sexual-harassment complaints outlined in a recent investigative report by The Whistle is a positive step. But its credibility will depend on whether players can approach the committee safely and whether complaints are handled fairly and transparently.

Institutions must also consider what happens when women leave competitive sport. How many move into coaching, officiating, administration, or talent development? And how many leave because of marriage, childbirth, injury, or financial pressure? Bangladesh lacks comprehensive data. Former athletes' experience can strengthen the next generation, but pathways into these roles need support. Sporting institutions should be judged not only by the number of medals won by players and by women's participation numbers, but also by whether sportswomen can build secure, complete careers. This requires safe training environments, fair selection, protection from harassment, paid maternity support, medical care, and opportunities beyond competition.

Alongside encouraging girls to take up sport, we need to also show them that the system will stand beside them not only when they win, but also when they become mothers or choose new roles in the game. The real measure of inclusion is not how many women enter the field, but whether they can stay, grow, and shape its future.

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