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

Make climate finance fair and accessible

PM's five proposals at COP31 must be considered seriously by world leaders

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has rightly pointed out the financial injustice faced by countries most vulnerable to climate change at a high-level session of COP31 in Antalya, Turkiye. He said climate-vulnerable countries need grants, not more loans that add to their debt burden, calling for urgent debt relief and greater international support for these countries. The points that the prime minister raised at the climate conference reflect the long-standing concerns of developing nations: despite barely contributing to the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, these countries are being forced to spend increasingly scarce resources facing the consequences of a crisis they did little to create. Therefore, the demand for grant-based climate finance must receive serious attention from world leaders.

A recent Carbon Brief analysis found that public funding pledged under the 2015 Paris Agreement to help developing countries tackle climate change fell by more than 70 percent in 2026, following the expiry of several multi-year pledges and cuts to aid budgets by some donor countries. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also warned that the climate crisis was outrunning the international response. The situation raises serious concerns about the willingness of wealthy nations to honour their commitments.Against this backdrop, the five proposals presented by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman offer an important framework for addressing the shortcomings of the global climate finance system. These include allocating at least 50 percent of international climate finance to adaptation, providing debt relief through mechanisms such as climate-resilient debt clauses and debt-for-climate swaps, ensuring equitable access to climate-friendly technologies, and accelerating the transition to renewable energy through affordable financing and skills development. He also called for the adoption of the Belém-Antalya Action Mechanism, with fair financing and trade as its core principles.

Wealthy nations must increase their contributions to climate finance, ensure that adaptation receives a larger share of funding, and support debt relief mechanisms that allow vulnerable countries to invest in climate protection without compromising their development priorities.

Despite contributing less than 0.5 percent of global GHG emissions, Bangladesh remains among those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels, salinity intrusion, agricultural losses, floods, cyclones and extreme heat are already threatening livelihoods and placing enormous pressure on our economy. Climate-induced displacement is putting increasing pressure on our cities and their essential services.The growing costs of these impacts, alongside debt repayments and limited financial resources, are placing an increasingly heavy burden on us. This leaves the government with fewer resources to invest in climate adaptation, disaster preparedness and sustainable development. This situation must change.

Hence, COP31 must focus on action to ensure that climate finance is fair, adequate, reliable and easily accessible. Wealthy nations must increase their contributions, ensure that adaptation receives a larger share of funding, and support debt relief mechanisms that allow vulnerable countries to invest in climate protection without compromising their development priorities. Equitable access to green technologies and their transfer to developing countries must also be prioritised. The success of this year's climate conference will depend on whether the pledges and declarations made at the summit translate into tangible support for countries on the front lines of climate change.

Trafficking networks must be dismantled

Address security failures, humanitarian vulnerabilities

The rescue of 56 people from a human trafficking network in the hills of Teknaf has exposed the alarming scale of organised criminal activity along the Cox's Bazar border. This daily reports that the victims, mostly Bangladeshis, were held captive by armed traffickers who demanded exorbitant sums either for their release or for an illegal sea passage to Malaysia. Some of the victims were lured with promises of employment, only to be sold to the traffickers. The killing of an army soldier during the November 5 rescue operation demonstrates how dangerous and emboldened these criminal networks have become.

Per a survivor's account, workers seeking an honest living were abducted, blindfolded, beaten and kept in remote hideouts, with demands of up to Tk 4 lakh for their freedom. Some of the armed guards were reportedly children, while police named a 15-year-old among the accused. This points to a troubling and deep criminal ecosystem. That such operations can continue in an area with a substantial presence of law enforcement and security forces raises serious questions.

The problem, however, extends far beyond conventional law enforcement. Cox's Bazar is home to a vast Rohingya refugee population faced with uncertainty, restricted livelihoods, and declining assistance. Desperation means many are vulnerable to traffickers' false promises of employment, marriage or family reunification abroad. According to UNHCR, more than 6,500 Rohingya attempted dangerous sea crossings in 2025, with nearly 900 reported dead or missing. Trafficking networks also exploit the poverty and unemployment of Bangladeshis. That only five of the 56 rescued victims were of Rohingya origin proves that this crisis does not concern the refugees alone.

It is a matter of concern that trafficking networks have developed sophisticated recruitment, transportation, detention and extortion arrangements despite repeated operations by the security forces. The authorities must identify and completely dismantle these networks while investigating possible protection from influential quarters. Greater coordination among the police, Border Guard Bangladesh, the army, the refugee camp authorities and maritime agencies is essential. Cross-border collaboration is equally important to disrupt trafficking routes towards Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia.

The rescued victims must receive protection, medical support and justice without being criminalised for their circumstances. Stronger community awareness, safe livelihood options, and meaningful international efforts towards a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis are imperative. Unless both the criminal networks and the vulnerabilities they exploit are addressed, Teknaf's hills and coastline will remain a fertile ground for human traffickers.

Our students deserve a better university admission system

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND



Dr Shamsad Mortuza is vice-chancellor at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Here we are, at the beginning of another admission season. This is the time when public university teachers are divided into two groups: one group eagerly signs up for the paid services of invigilation, script-checking and result publication, while the other group avoids the non-compulsory duties. To make sure that the current students are not affected, the unit-wise admission tests are usually held during the weekends. The process continues across several weeks, with evaluation of the answer scripts, result publication, interviews for subject allocation, preparation of waiting lists, notification of vacant seats, internal migration, and late enrolments. The saga continues with each episode pitched as a necessary stage for an incoming student. For private universities, however, the process is much more simplified: results and admission formalities are completed within a week.

This year, Dhaka University's admission tests are scheduled for December 5-26. By the time these students have their freshers' orientation, some of their contemporaries at private universities may already be approaching the completion of a semester. The exact difference depends on the institutions and intake dates. But it raises an uncomfortable question: how much time do we consider reasonable to spend entering higher education, and who takes responsibility for that time? Many students wait to hear from their preferred institutions before choosing between those and other options. Oftentimes, the reason is financial: public universities are heavily subsidised, and the older ones enjoy a solid market reputation. Only in recent times have some of the top private universities become more preferred as they ensure timely graduation and a professional and world-class learning environment. However, coordination between public and private intakes remains notably weak, and each institution is expected to manage its own affairs.

Back in 2020, to spare students from the hassle of going to different corners of the country to take admission tests, the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed a cluster admission system. The old public universities exercised their autonomy to disregard this prescription. The rift was once again apparent this year when some of these universities defied UGC's proposal to shift the admission calendar by a month to accommodate the HSC students who have been given a second chance to improve their scores. DU and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) retained their original schedules, while Rajshahi and Jagannath universities adopted different arrangements for supplementary candidates. The second chance initiative should have been accompanied by an agreed admission pathway. Private universities also need guidance on whether they can offer conditional admissions to the supplementary examinees.

One thing is certain: our tertiary admission system is in a state of disarray. Even within a single university, there are various assessment mechanisms. At DU, most units combine 60 marks of MCQs with 40 marks of written assessment. Fine Arts and the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) have different arrangements. After noticing poor performance among students who entered the system only through MCQ tests, DU decided to return to the time-consuming written components. While they can reveal a candidate's reasoning, expression, and ability to construct an answer, they also pose the possibility of subjective grading. Examiners working under a strict deadline or without grading rubrics may not be able to do justice to the scripts. The inconsistency in marking can change a student's future forever. The UGC can take up a project simply to decide on the assessment instruments for admission tests.

My experience tells me that many of my colleagues approach admission tests as a system to terminate as many applicants as possible. We rarely design the questions to judge students' readiness to learn. The "weed out" policy relies on difficult questions that encourage repeated patterns and rote learning, allowing an admission cottage industry to thrive. Each university must have its teaching and learning centre that will conduct thorough research on their selection methods to decide whether admission scores correspond with first-year performance, persistence, or eventual completion. Does the written component identify capabilities missed by MCQs? Do the tests work comparably for students from different educational backgrounds? The admission test scripts can provide the universities with primary data on the recruitment process to select students for knowledge production.

The treatment of SSC and HSC results deserves similar scrutiny. While most universities consider previous public examination results, their numerical share in the final ranking is not that significant. The tertiary system begins with a mindset that to reach the university's own assessment, students must have additional knowledge. If that is truly the case, the higher secondary and tertiary curricula must be aligned.



An admission test in progress at Dhaka University. FILE PHOTO: **PRABIR DAS**

It is a no-brainer that shared examinations can reduce travelling, worries and costs caused by multiple applications. The engineering and medical systems have exhibited so by reducing repetition through cluster admissions. The chaos in public university admissions is enabled by the vested interest of stakeholders who find the admission season financially rewarding. We can argue that one examination does not, by itself, create an efficient admission process; applicants still need offers, choices, confirmation deadlines, and clear migration rules. When a preferred university completes admissions later, a student may leave their secured place in another institution. The vacancy then passes down the waiting list. Universities become connected through applicants' decisions, whether their administrations coordinate or not.

A common application service could help address this gap. In the UK, for instance, the Universities and Colleges Applications Services (UCAS) offers a useful example of a centralised application system where universities retain their entry requirements and admission decisions. In the US, the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) addresses a different question: whether institutions can use a common score alongside other evidence. Bangladesh could consider both ideas without requiring every programme to select students identically. Coordination must continue after enrolment, with an option of credit transfer and migration among the UGC-approved universities. The primary benefit of coordination is a centralised academic calendar. If private universities can operate under published calendars, public universities can, too.

Unfortunately, most of the public universities are notorious for deviating from their plans. Different disciplines can require different teaching arrangements while still providing students with dependable completion dates. Consequently, many of these programmes fail to leverage study abroad programmes or internationalisation. Scholarship holders need results before deadlines. A partnership becomes difficult to implement when neither students nor their overseas hosts can confidently identify an available semester.

As teachers, we ask students to respect deadlines because we consider time management a part of their education. Our institutions owe them the same discipline. When a university loses a month, its students are delayed in joining the job market while their competitors get a head start. This uncertainty, expenses and postponed opportunities should be central to every debate about the university admission schedule.

We can't adapt our way out of climate crisis

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Sir David King is founder and chair of the Climate Crisis Advisory Group, founder of the Centre for Climate Repair at the University of Cambridge, and former chief scientific adviser of the UK government.

EJAJ AHMAD *and* **DAVID KING**

Bangladesh has done very little to cause climate change. The average Bangladeshi emits about 0.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year—a small fraction of the global average. Its share of all the CO2 humanity has emitted since the Industrial Revolution is about 0.11 percent. But it pays one of the highest prices: the World Bank estimated in 2021 that up to 1.99 crore Bangladeshis could be forced to move within the country by 2050 because of climate change.

For more than three decades, the world's response to climate change has rested on two pillars: i) mitigation, which means cutting emissions; and ii) adaptation, which means protecting people from the damage. As delegates meet at COP31 in Antalya, most of the argument is again about money for both. But the data now shows that these two pillars cannot get us out of the crisis.

CO2 in the atmosphere reached about 431 parts per million in June 2026, according to NOAA. Before the Industrial Revolution, it was 280. For 800,000 years, it never rose above 300. Earth is also trapping heat faster than expected: the rate roughly doubled between 2005 and 2019. August 2026 was the hottest month ever recorded. The UN Environment Programme now says overshooting the 1.5-degree-Celsius limit is inevitable.

Think of a bathtub. The tap is still running: humanity is adding over 50 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases (GHGs) every year. The tub is already overflowing, with over a trillion tonnes of excess CO2 in the air. Net zero turns off the tap. Adaptation mops the floor. Neither drains the tub. Even if emissions stopped tomorrow, the carbon already up there would keep the planet hot for centuries.

The world needs a third job: restoration and repair. That means removing CO2 at the scale of billions of tonnes a year and stabilising Earth's systems that are drifting towards tipping points.

Alongside finance, governments in Antalya should commit to three things: a coalition of willing countries to fund stabilisation research, on the model of the 57 nations that met in Santa Marta in April to plan a move away from fossil fuels; public research spending on the scale of Mission Innovation; and a seat at the table for vulnerable nations from day one. Bangladesh, a former chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, is well-placed to lead that call.

This is the case made in Stabilising Earth's Systems, a new report from the Climate Crisis Advisory Group. It asks governments to do two things. First, rebuild the satellites and models that tell us how much heat Earth is trapping and how close we are to the edge. Second, fund research into frontier options, including large-scale carbon removal. It calls for research under open, strict governance, not deployment. Research that rules out a dangerous idea is as valuable as research that finds a safe one.

Disasters cause over $200 billion a year globally in direct losses, and more than $2.3 trillion once cascading costs are counted. On current policies, the world could lose around half of global GDP between 2070 and 2090. A research programme costing a few billion dollars would be less than one percent of what disasters cost the world in a single year.

Where should that research look? We believe the answer is the ocean. It covers 71 percent of the planet. It has already absorbed over a quarter of the CO2 we have emitted and more than 90 percent of the extra heat. Yet we have better maps of the Moon than of our own seafloor, and warming is weakening its ability to take up carbon. Ocean-based removal, from restoring mangroves and seagrass to cultivating seaweed and microalgae, is young and mostly unproven. That's a reason to study it, not to ignore it. Look at solar power: too expensive to compete 20 years ago, widely adopted today.

Bangladesh has a stake in this. Following the settlement of its maritime boundaries with Myanmar in 2012 and India in 2014, it gained internationally recognised maritime rights over around 118,813 square kilometres of the Bay of Bengal. The country also shares the Sundarbans with India, the world's largest mangrove forest and an important natural carbon store. The CCAG report argues that research should be designed and led by the most climate-exposed countries wherever possible. Bangladesh should not simply be a beneficiary of this research, but a partner and a testing ground for responsible innovation.

COP31 can help. Alongside finance, governments in Antalya should commit to three things: a coalition of willing countries to fund stabilisation research, on the model of the 57 nations that met in Santa Marta in April to plan a move away from fossil fuels; public research spending on the scale of Mission Innovation; and a seat at the table for vulnerable nations from day one. Bangladesh, a former chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, is well-placed to lead that call.

But leadership cannot stop with governments. Young people must help shape the research, technologies and institutions that will decide their future. The world has 1.2 billion people aged 15-24, and nearly 90 percent of them live in developing countries. Climate work offers them three jobs: cut emissions, protect people, and repair the atmosphere. The third is the least crowded and perhaps the most important. No one has yet removed carbon at the scale required. It is one of the biggest entrepreneurial opportunities of this century. The work must start now.

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