

Heatwave: A Climate Change Crisis of Bangladesh

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Bangladesh is an example of the significant vulnerability caused by the climate change. The country is situated in the deltas formed by the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, making it especially prone to the destructive powers of nature. The Global Climate Risk Index ranked Bangladesh as the seventh most disaster risk-prone country in 2021. Cyclones, floods, and coastal erosion frequently occur, causing extensive damage. In this uncertain environment, extreme heatwaves are another big problem caused by the climate crisis. Blazing hot temperatures are affecting people's lives and jobs. Recently, it has been getting even hotter, making life uncomfortable and risky. This shows how easily nature can hurt us.

In the divisions like Rajshashi and Khulna the heatwave is claiming lives. On April 30th, Chuadanga district recorded the country's highest temperature, hitting 43.7°C. There's little respite from the relentless heat in near future. This extreme weather has forced the closure of all schools in Bangladesh this week, affecting millions of children, as temperatures soared to 42°C. Even road surfaces are melting under the intense sun. The scorching heat persists, disrupting lives nationwide. Marginalized communities, especially farmers, farmhands, rickshaw-pullers, van salesmen, and traffic police, are toiling most under the sun. Vulnerable groups like children and the elderly are particularly at risk, facing serious dangers from heat-related illnesses and dehydration. The situation is grave, especially for those already grappling with daily hardships.

The crisis in Bangladesh is part of a larger global climate picture. The El Niño phenomenon, characterized by warmer surface waters in the equatorial Pacific and weakened east winds, significantly influences extreme weather patterns. These El Niño-driven changes have led to hotter, drier conditions, amplifying heatwaves not only in Bangladesh but also in other regions. The Indo-Pacific, Latin America, and Southern African regions are particularly vulnerable to its effects.

In response to the escalating threat, the government has implemented a series of measures aimed at mitigating the impact of the heatwave on vulnerable populations. The Meteorological Department's issuance of a countrywide heat alert serves as a clarion call to action, signaling the urgency of the situation. Local government bodies are running campaigns to build awareness among the people to alleviate the suffering of citizens. Dhaka North City Corporation initiated spraying water on roads in the city.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and ICDDR, B have rolled out a comprehensive set of directives to minimize health risks and safeguarding vulnerable populations. The directives urge adults to drink at least 2.5-3 litres of safe water throughout the day to stay healthy and safe during hot weather. They also advise avoiding consumption of food or water prepared on the roadside. It's important to take breaks in shaded or cool areas periodically and to bathe more than once if necessary to cool down. Wearing white or light-colored loose cotton clothing can help regulate body temperature. Individuals with health conditions such as diabetes, kidney disease, or high blood pressure should seek advice from a doctor on managing their health during the summer months.

Immediate medical attention should be sought at a hospital if warning signs such as cessation of sweating, nausea, severe headache, elevated body temperature, decreased urination, urinary discomfort, seizures, or fainting occur. Mental health should also be prioritized during hot weather, and individuals can contact the government's emergency healthcare number, Shahstho Batayon-16263, for any health-related advice or assistance.

In addition to its toll on human health, heatwaves are also taking a toll on economic productivity and livelihoods. As temperatures soar, crops wither under the relentless sun, leading to reduced yields and food insecurity. Smallholder farmers, already grappling with the challenges of climate variability, face mounting pressure as they struggle to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

In the urban centers crowded streets and informal settlements lack access to basic amenities such as clean water and healthy shelter. Informal workers, including street vendors and rickshaw pullers, endure grueling conditions as work in the sweltering heat. The absence of adequate infrastructure and social protection measures further compounds their vulnerability, leaving them exposed to the ravages of extreme weather events.

High temperatures can reduce labor efficiency, particularly in outdoor industries like construction, agriculture, and manufacturing. Workers may experience heat stress, fatigue, and heat-related illnesses, resulting in absenteeism and decreased efficiency, which in turn, lead to economic losses for businesses and industries.

Moreover, heatwaves usually contribute to higher energy consumption as people rely more on electricity for cooling purposes, such as air conditioning. This increased demand strains energy infrastructure, potentially causing power outages and disruptions in economic activities. Furthermore, heatwaves can deter tourism and outdoor recreation activities, discouraging visitors from certain destinations and leading to decreased revenues for hotels, restaurants, and local businesses that depend on tourism.

To combat the adverse effects of heatwaves, it is imperative to emphasize tree planting efforts. Trees provide shade and help cool the environment through evapotranspiration, reducing surface temperatures and creating a more comfortable microclimate. Additionally, trees play a crucial role in regulating the water cycle, maintaining moisture levels in the atmosphere, and mitigating the intensity of heatwaves.

Expanding forest cover is particularly crucial in Bangladesh. The forest land controlled by the forest department accounts for only about 15.58 percent of the country's total land area. Increasing the area of forested land through tree plantation efforts can enhance the country's resilience to heatwaves by providing more green spaces that absorb carbon dioxide, release oxygen, improve air quality, and reduce the urban heat island effect. It is imperative to retain existing forest lands while also increasing community tree plantation activities.

Heat waves, a ramification of global climate change, pose dire consequences for Bangladesh. The country faces significant challenges in addressing climate change issues due to limited financial and technical resources. Investments are needed across various sectors, including agriculture, water resources, infrastructure, and public health, to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability to heat waves and other climate-related hazards. Development partners must uphold their commitment to providing adequate support to address these climate risks and help Bangladesh navigate the complex challenges posed by climate change.

Bangladesh is really affected by the climate crisis, especially when heatwaves and other natural disasters happen. Heatwaves are affecting everyone, from farmers in the countryside to people living in cities, making life hard for everyone. But even though things are tough, there's hope. Communities are strong, and the government and organizations are working together to make things better. By working together to make Bangladesh stronger against climate problems and fixing the things that make us vulnerable, we can make life better for everyone and build a safer future.

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