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FOUNDER EDITOR
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Stemming inflow of banned drugs and narcotics

Requires cooperation of our neighbours too

NARCOTICS kill slowly but surely and, if unchecked, can destroy entire generations. If the harmful drugs and narcotics are allowed to pervade the market and their flagrant use is not prevented, the nation is bound to suffer irreparably, a consequence that not all of us are able to foresee. But that is what is happening to the future of this country, being vulnerable from a two-pronged assault, from across our eastern as well as western fronts. In fact, the production of these harmful, sometimes psychedelic drugs has become a cottage industry in the areas in India and Myanmar bordering Bangladesh. A report published in this paper on Sunday—and there have been quite a few on this particular issue in recent times—illustrates how the holes in the border are being exploited by the drug dealers to smuggle phensedyl into Bangladesh. The report also shows how some extinct factories have been revived in India to supply the drug, which is banned there too, to Bangladeshi smugglers.

The matter is serious, and although the government has taken several steps to combat the menace—some of them draconian—the supply of phensedyl and yaba goes on unabated. In fact, it is on the rise, as the BCB seizure statistics in respect of both drugs shows. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that for every 100 of these units seized, several hundred gets through. In this connection, one must not overlook the disturbing reality that often drugs and illicit weapons are deeply interlinked; one is bartered for the other.

The problem needs to be addressed on two fronts. Firstly, the supply chain must be disrupted and eventually destroyed altogether. And for this, we need the collaboration and cooperation of our two neighbours. The source of production at the origin must be targeted. Secondly, it needs an equal, perhaps even greater effort on our part to prevent their entry into Bangladesh including strengthening surveillance. But if the alarming nexus between the smugglers and the police, which the said report also reveals, is not broken, then the situation will not improve. Thus, while we need our neighbours' cooperation to combat the problem, we need to address our own loopholes too and make our borders completely inaccessible to drug smugglers.

A mega project that met the deadline

RHD sets a good example for others to follow

WHILE time extension and cost escalation of the various mega projects that are underway in the country has become a common phenomenon nowadays, it is a refreshing experience to learn that a mega project, undertaken by the Roads and Highways Department (RHD), has been completed on time. What's more, by completing all the work within the deadline, the project authorities have saved around Tk 1,400 crore. Under the "Kanchpur, Meghna and Gumti 2nd Bridge Construction and Existing Bridges Rehabilitation Project", three new bridges were constructed and three old bridges on the Dhaka-Chattogram highway were repaired. As per the Development Project Proposals (DPP), the cost of the project was set at Tk 8,486.94 crore initially, but after completion of all work, the cost stood at Tk 7,098.73 crore, meaning around Tk 1,388 crore was saved.

Now, let us look at the reasons behind this success. Apparently, the project could be completed on time because, according to the RHD, there was proper planning and step-by-step preparation by the Japanese authorities, the RHD, as well as the government. Moreover, the involvement of the Japanese authorities in design, funding and in all stages of implementation helped meet the deadline. Another key reason for the quick completion of the work was that a relatively small area of land needed to be acquired for the project.

As we have seen in case of many mega projects, a lot of time is wasted in land acquisition and managing the funds, which eventually delay the projects by three to four years. There were many instances where the authorities had to redesign the projects. The most recent case of delay in project implementation and cost escalation, as reported in this daily, was the rail bridge that is supposed to be built over Jamuna river. According to our report, the cost of the project has increased by 33 percent (amounting to Tk 3,216 crore) even before the start of the physical work.

However, the timely completion of the HRD project in question gives us hope that through proper planning and strict implementation, any project can be completed on time. All the government needs to do is ensure that there are no irregularities and that those in charge of the projects are efficient enough to carry out their responsibilities. Needless to say, the government can save hundreds of crores of taka just by timely completing the mega projects.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Bring govt's bank debts under control

Finance Minister Mustafa Kamal recently said that the government had borrowed over Tk 13,27,624 crore from Bangladesh Bank and scheduled banks from January 2009 to December 2019. Within this period, it also paid back Tk 11,31,840 crore, meaning that the government's net loan now stands at Tk 1,95,783 crore. By any standard, this is a huge amount and consequently a huge burden for us as Bangladesh aims to become a middle-income country by 2021. This massive loan comes as a further disadvantage for the banking sector as it is already in a volatile state. I think the government should take urgent steps to revitalise the banking sector and also explore all possible means of revenue generation so that it doesn't have to depend too much on bank borrowing.

Md Mojammal Haque, Fatichchari, Chattogram

BANGLADESH RMG INDUSTRY

Can the new leaders build on the legacy of their predecessors?



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

IN family businesses, the concept of "succession planning" is well known. It is the process of identifying and developing new leaders who can replace old leaders when they leave, retire or die. Succession planning is vital for family businesses. Indeed, it is important for any business to be able to draw on the skills of experienced and capable employees that are prepared to assume leadership roles as they become available. Yet businesses often get it wrong in succession planning. They don't plan ahead and don't have the right people in place when the current leader decides to step down. Some businesses flounder when the founder retires.

Now let us apply these issues to the Bangladesh RMG industry. Let's say this industry is one large family business. Are we ready for the challenges of tomorrow? Are the sons and daughters of tomorrow ready to navigate the ship through uncharted waters?

These are the questions the industry is now asking itself. And I believe—and hope—we have the right answers.

First, a look back on the journey that we have made so far. The apparel industry of Bangladesh has taken huge strides since it was established in the early 1970s by our first generation of private entrepreneurs. At that time, there was no real plan as nobody knew what the future might hold. In many ways, these entrepreneurs were navigating a path without a compass, and few of them could have realised that their final destination would be the world's second largest apparel exporter.

In those 40 years, Bangladesh's RMG industry has faced many challenges and overcome numerous hurdles. It has been a remarkable journey—one without precedent, to my knowledge. The RMG industry now contributes hugely to the national economy of Bangladesh, accounting for about 84 percent of the country's total foreign earning from exports. The industry has also created employment for about four million people and is a massive contributor to the national GDP. Many have been lifted out of poverty by this industry and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to this first generation of entrepreneurs. They have

put Bangladesh on the global map. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the development of Bangladesh as a country partly hinges upon the development of this sector. This can be a blessing as it means that we are true specialists in this area, with unrivalled global knowledge. But it also places a massive burden on this industry to get things right. We have many of our eggs put in one basket.

The RMG industry itself is at a crossroads at present, and this is where

There has been a mindset in the first generation of businessmen to stick to traditional products, processes and operations. For example, even after four decades, the apparel industry of Bangladesh is still concentrated on producing basic items. But the next generation of entrepreneurs are thinking out of the box. They are opting for value-added products by setting up in-house design, development and R&D facilities. Most of the second-generation businessmen and women have studied

peers. The next generation are the future. However, I also believe they can learn from the past. The entrepreneurs of yesterday did things differently but the leaders of tomorrow can learn from them. The RMG industry was built on their dream, determination, and willingness to break down barriers. Our entrepreneurs of yesteryears went out into the world and brought that world back to Bangladesh. Every major apparel brand in the world now views



The RMG industry in Bangladesh has created employment for about four million people and is a massive contributor to the national GDP.

PHOTO: REUTERS

the issue of the succession planning comes in. Who are the industry visionaries of tomorrow? Who will take the reins and guide us as we transition from a lesser developed country?

Many of the first-generation apparel entrepreneurs of Bangladesh are now handing over the helm to the next generation, often their sons and daughters. This second generation has a different mindset in many cases, and are often open to new, different ideas. They could potentially oversee a break with the past and that is not necessarily a bad thing, as the industry is changing before our very eyes.

abroad in well-known universities of the world. This meant that they got exposed to new ideas and new ways of thinking. What worked in the past will not work in the future; our whole industry needs to recognise that and the young minds are taking this message on board.

Consequently, the next generation are using modern operations, HR and new methods. They are using the latest technologies and technicalities. They possess the mentality that sustainability and transparency are inseparable parts of the business. And they believe in the idea that "knowledge is power" and are keen to share knowledge among their

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

The coronavirus and Xi Jinping's worldview



KEVIN RUDD

IN 2012. Individuals and families across China are living in fear. Multiple Chinese provinces are under virtual lockdown. The virus has brought significant parts of the economy to a grinding halt, as firms instruct their employees to work from home. Politically, the blame game bounces between local authorities in Wuhan, the epicentre of the outbreak, and the central government in Beijing, with both sides mindful of the eternal principle of Chinese politics: when disaster strikes, someone must be seen to pay the price.

The wider world should show sympathy and express solidarity with the long-suffering Chinese people. These are ugly times, and the racism implicit (and sometimes explicit) in many responses to Chinese people around the world makes me question just how far we have really come as a human family. Too many people beyond China's shores seem to have forgotten another eternal principle: "No man is an island./Entire of itself."

Xi wields near-absolute political power over China's Marxist-Leninist state. Arguably, only an authoritarian regime could have pursued the draconian methods that China has in trying to control the virus since January. Only time will tell how effective these measures ultimately prove to be. What is certain, however, is that the crisis, once resolved, will not change how China is governed in the future.

To understand why, one must consider the underlying worldview that guides Xi as he seeks to realise his dream of making China the global great power of the future. When people have asked me what Xi wants, I have explained his approach in terms of ten priorities. This may best be seen as ten sets of concentric circles emanating from the party centre, or, in the tradition of the psychologist Abraham Maslow, Xi's Hierarchy of Needs.

The first priority is to keep the CPC

in power. Xi has never seen the party as a transition mechanism to some sort of democracy or semi-democracy. Rather, he sees China's unique form of authoritarian capitalism as essential for its future great-power status, and as a model that could potentially be applicable to other parts of the world.

Second, Xi believes that he must always maintain national unity, because that is central to the CPC's internal legitimacy. This is why there have been sustained crackdowns in Tibet and Xinjiang under his rule, as well as a consistent hardening of policy toward Taiwan.

The third task is to expand the economy. Xi understands that the economy's size, strength, and technological sophistication

Initiative (BRI).

Priority number five is to expand and modernise the Chinese military. Xi is overseeing the People's Liberation Army's biggest reform—in terms of military organisation, weapons platforms, and personnel—since 1949. The PLA is being transformed from an army-based institution for continental defence into a force for projecting power beyond China's borders, through expanded naval, air-force, cyber, space, and AI capabilities. Xi's stated mission is to build a world-class military "to fight and win wars."

The sixth objective is to secure benign and (when possible) compliant relationships with China's 14 neighbouring states and six maritime

critical infrastructure investment. Through the BRI, he also wants Central Asia and the Middle East, as well as Central, Eastern, and Western Europe, to become increasingly sensitised to and supportive of China's core foreign-policy interests.

Similarly, China sees large-scale market potential, not dissimilar to that of Eurasia, across the rest of the developing world, in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Hence, Xi's ninth priority is manifested in the "Maritime Silk Road," which is becoming as significant as the BRI. More broadly, China has also been successfully converting this global economic strategy into reliable G77 voting support in critical multilateral forums.

Finally, Xi wants to reshape the global order so that it is more accommodating of Chinese interests and values. China's leaders see the post-1945 liberal international order as reflecting the worldview of the victorious white colonial powers that created it. Xi considers the world of 2020 to be radically different from that of the post-war era. China has, therefore, developed a two-pronged strategy. While increasing its power, personnel, and financial influence within the existing global-governance institutions, China's leaders are also building new, China-centric institutions like the BRI and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Not everyone in the CPC's senior echelon shares Xi's worldview. There is much internal dissension and debate about whether China is overextending itself in departing from Deng Xiaoping's longstanding strategy of "hide your strength, bide your time, never take the lead." Time will tell how these debates shake out, particularly in the run-up to the party's 20th National Congress in 2022, which will make the crucial decision about whether to extend Xi's leadership term beyond previous term limits—through the 2020s and possibly beyond.

In this context, Xi's management of the coronavirus crisis at home, and of politically totemic projects such as 5G expansion abroad, assumes a critical new significance.

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are central to all dimensions of national power, including military capacity. Moreover, without long-term growth, *per capita* income will not rise, and China will fall into the middle-income trap. Sustained growth is thus also central to the CPC's legitimacy, as is the national effort to become a technological superpower, with global dominance in 5G, semiconductors, supercomputing, and artificial intelligence (AI).

The fourth goal is to incorporate environmental sustainability into China's growth matrix. In the past, such concerns were ignored. But now they, too, are central to the party's legitimacy. The Chinese people will not tolerate high levels of air, soil, and water pollution. Still, sustainability, including action to combat climate change, will always compete with priority three (economic growth), both in domestic industry and in the transnational infrastructure projects envisioned in Xi's signature Belt and Road

neighbours. Russia has been key to this project, having gone from being an historic adversary that occupied much of China's strategic attention to a virtual ally. On the maritime front, China has made clear that it will not yield on its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas.

Seventh, on China's eastern maritime periphery, Xi believes that he must push the United States back to the "second island chain" that runs from the Japanese archipelago through Guam to the eastern Philippines. China also wants to weaken (or sever, if possible) America's longstanding security alliances in the region, particularly those with South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. The ultimate objective here is to enhance China's capacity to secure reunification with Taiwan—by force, if necessary.

Eighth, to secure China's western continental periphery, Xi wants to turn the Eurasian landmass into a new market for Chinese goods, services, technology, and