

Choice: Indispensably branded or ethically slaughtered?

Water logging woes

Little respite for those affected

THE embankment area known as Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) has trapped rainwater inside what was supposed to be flood-free zones. Thousands of people now have to wade through waist-deep waters to travel to other destinations. It is ironic to see people moving on country boats within urban areas as the recent deluge has submerged several roads. Residents have had to vacate their premises and move to higher ground in a bid to ward off being marooned. Yet, as we gather from what has been printed in this newspaper, many thousands have indeed been marooned for weeks in some pockets of the DND area. The lack of proper storm drainage system has led to a near permanent state of water logging and this becomes a chronic state of affairs during the rainy season.

What is important to note is an apparent lack of relief efforts by authorities to reach essential items like food and medicine to those who need them sorely. The DND embankment area has for years suffered from land grabbing and unregulated construction that played havoc with the sewerage system. Not only that, officials argue that there is a shortage of pumps that are needed to flush out the excess water trapped within the flood embankment area. With about a million people literally stranded and running short of safe drinking water, a major outbreak of diseases cannot be ruled out. It is imperative that resources are mobilised to bring relief to the stranded people and ward off major health hazards like skin diseases and diarrhoea.

Seeing unfit vehicles off the street

HC order must be complied with

WE wholeheartedly welcome the High Court's directive to stop unfit motor vehicles from plying on the roads. The HC's suo moto rule to freeze around 19 lakh fake driving licences is also a laudatory move.

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of deaths during travel. Research conducted by concerned private organisations has put the figure of road fatalities above 5,000 per year. A newspaper report revealed that 60 percent of accidents are caused by negligence of drivers, many of whom are adolescents. The numbers speak for themselves.

At this point, it is safe to say that the issue of unauthorised vehicles and illicit drivers have gone beyond the realm of ad hocism. Despite assurances by the government time and again that such malpractices will be monitored and tackled head on, we are yet to see visible results, suggesting the presence of a systemic problem.

While we commend the HC for intervening on this issue, it must be noted that reversing the deplorable state of the ground reality requires coordination and cooperation of all stakeholders. We hope that the concerned authorities will diligently follow up on the report to be submitted by the BRIA within 30 days after complying with the order. We also urge the government to immediately take measures to install effective surveillance and monitoring by the traffic police and instill a sense of accountability across the board -- from licence issuing authorities to law enforcing agencies to those behind the wheel.



RUBANA HUQ

KNOT SO TRUE
 One: Long ago, I remember a time when one of our factories under audit came under fire because of an "alleged" child labour case. The woman was 19, yet the auditor thought she was under age. So a doctor's certificate was not enough and we had to submit a whole range of dental records to prove her adulthood. Today, when Sofia

Mechetner, a 14-year old Israeli opens the Dior couture show and 16-year old Lily-Rose Depp lands a photo spread in the September issue of CR Fashion Book, they are treated as "child performers" and as a "role model for the boldness of teens." Apparently, while Lily-Rose Depp has been introduced by "Uncle Karl" (Lagerfeld), and while Dior's official spokesman has confirmed that Ms. Mechetner was chaperoned all the time and has gone back to Israel for schooling, the fashion world has already had a glimpse of the transparent gown of Sofia, boosting the sales of the brand. This is the line where international branding succeeds and the failure to aptly brand Bangladesh comes into question. This is where we need to reconcile with our own position.

Bottom line: Without branding, Bangladesh will only be just one more country bragging with an unsustainable RMG basket.

Two: There is not one country, one brand, one retailer, or one person in the world who's not chasing the brand rainbow. The number of users carrying fake brands is up by the minute. People feel the pull to be seen with recognisable brands on their bodies. As a result, EU textile and clothing sector is losing more than EUR26 billion and up to 363,000 jobs every year due to fake clothes, shoes and accessories. These fakes account for almost 10 percent of the total sales in the sector. Legitimate businesses across EU lose almost EUR43.3 billion of sales revenue and 5,18,000 jobs are lost.

Bottom line: Whether it's a fake or a genuine product you are wearing, the perception of brands matter.

Three: "Birkin", a bag of Hermes has taken the world by storm. Very often, it's out of stock and is priced somewhere between \$6,000-12,000 and above, depending on the leather. The British singer Jane Birkin has very recently asked her name to be removed from the crocodile skin versions of the bags, after a video containing footage of reptiles being slaughtered in a

"crude" manner was aired. The news of Hermes pledging "highest standards in the ethical treatment of the crocodiles" soon followed. Whether the crocodile was "ethically" slaughtered or not is another question. The fact that we chase such brand euphoria and become brand struck consumers is what needs to be looked at.

Bottom line: Brands can set their standards, non-brands can't.

Four: Very recently, Uzbekistan was upgraded on its assessment of human trafficking and the country was upgraded to Tier 2 Watch list from lowest Tier 3 ranking. Uzbekistan has a long history of child and forced labour with regard to picking cotton. Forced labour, in that country is almost compelled by the government. Responsible brands like Adidas, Marks & Spencer, PVH, H&M and a few others have already taken steps to stop cotton from Uzbekistan picked with forced labour from entering their supply chains. Therefore, the 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report upgrading the country to Tier 2 comes as a shock to many of us.

On a separate note, retailers in UK are being pushed to play their part in eradicating slavery and human trafficking through committing to comply with the Modern Slavery Bill. In this case, the UK government is going to work closely with Vietnam, "a priority source country". Under this new initiative, companies over a turnover of US \$56 million will have to publish its annual slavery and human trafficking report.

Bottom line: Since, Bangladesh eliminated child labour years ago and the concept of forced or bonded labour doesn't apply here, the country has to brand itself so that it becomes a brand itself that the rest of the world reckons with.

Five: It's been three years since Myanmar has legalised trade unions and just a few days back it has officially registered CTUM (Confederation of Trade Unions of Myanmar). Now, Myanmar "seems" to be a country, which is currently pledging a number of democratic reforms, where more than 1,400 new local unions have registered, where there has been progress towards minimum wage, where mid and low level education seems to have become a critical consideration by the stalwarts of the industry. Minimum wage is currently proposed to be \$3.22 per day, which is also being protested by the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association (MGMA) as they don't want to pay more than \$2.21 per day.

Bangladesh has stabilised minimum wages and is now working towards a more sustainable level of wages

based on increased product efficiency and better value added product.

Bottom line: Bangladesh can be branded in a better fashion than many other countries if we so "desire."
Six: Cambodia, in spite of having massive labour unrests, unstable production units, increasing number of strikes over wages, benefits and alleged labour abuses, still continues to attempt to look better. The French Development Agency and Sipar have decided to invest \$640,000 to provide a library resource center at garment factories for workers. This, they claim, will improve opportunities for women to access information and to fight illiteracy. At our end, Bangladesh, too, has many humane stories to tell. . . .

Bottom line: Bangladesh just needs to be aptly showcased

Now, how does a country become a brand?
 Unfortunately, branding requires strong assistance, guidance and endorsements.

Firstly, the country needs to subscribe to a "do-good; look-good; feel-good" policy. Entrepreneurs need to undertake good practices, eventually leading us to look good to the rest of the world and ultimately resulting in us feeling good about who we truly have become. Thanks to the brands and their interest in remediation, the country is moving forward and in spite of most of us being critically pushed to be the best in the league, considerable progress is in sight. Meantime, some of us are also waiting for the monitoring platforms to exit the country. That will, however, not solve any of our problems. If we have done good and set up or are setting up good practices in our factories, we need to be noticed, talked about, and written about in the international arena. Most of all, we need to be endorsed. Mutual shoulder patting or self-endorsement will not suffice. Only a national trophy will not be enough. Since we are part of an international supply chain, we need to stay tuned to the international channels in order to be part of an international success story.

This can't be achieved in isolation or through a smear campaign against any platform where we stand to lose our own credibility. So, if we are to brand ourselves, let's all join hands so that while we strive towards becoming the best in the world, we will rise to such a position of strength where no one will anymore be able to touch us with any stories of misconduct, failure or abuse.

Bottom line: Bangladesh needs to be indispensably branded for all times to come.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

ELECTRONIC WASTE

The Story of Bangladesh

RASHNA RAYA RAHMAN and NAUREEN SHAFINAZ MAHBOOB

THE vision 2021 of becoming "Digital Bangladesh" aims to make our nation stronger through effective use of modern technology on important sectors and areas like education, health, communication and alleviation of poverty levels. This clearly predicated the wider usage of electrical and electronic products throughout the country. Domestic policies aside, a worldwide surge in the use of electronic goods can be expected from a recent World Trade Organization (WTO) initiative to remove import tariffs from 201 information technology products in a \$1.3 trillion deal. It is certain that all these millions of electronic devices - cell phones, tablets, laptops etc. - will one day reach their end and will directly enter the waste stream of the country.

Current scenario in Bangladesh
 From NBR data, it is evident that in the last 3 years, 63,003,818 mobile phones have entered Bangladesh. The lifespan of a mobile phone currently stands at a maximum of 2.5 years or even less in some cases. This indicates that these used mobile phones and also unaccounted informal imports will be in the waste stream of Bangladesh within the next two to three years. Furthermore, as our nation is hoping to become digitalised in the near future, the usage of electronic equipment will rise at a faster pace. Currently in Bangladesh, recycling of disposed electronic products is mainly being handled by the informal sector. Electronic waste or E-waste is collected, segregated, dismantled and recycled in the informal sector based in Dhaka's urban slums. The first stage of the value chain includes the generators of electrical waste, which are the households and offices. The next players of the trade value chain are the informal scrap collectors or vangariwala, who buys e-waste directly

from the generators. Here the vangariwala either sells it to the second hand market, repairs and sells it again to consumers or secondhand shops, or sells them to the bulk collectors and manual dismantlers. Once they are dismantled, the different components are sent to different places around Dhaka for further processing, recycling and smelting activities. The final step of the value chain is recycling, where precious and special metals are extracted from the component. The manual dismantling and recycling stages include processes like open burning and acid treatment. E-waste contains around 1000 different chemicals, many of which contain high levels of toxins and hazardous elements. If e-waste is not recycled and disposed of in an environmentally prudent manner, it can pose serious threats to both human health and the environment.

International regulations
 The international community started regulating the issue of hazardous waste with the creation of the United Nations (UN) treaty know as the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. The Basel Convention came into force in 1992. It was designed to reduce the movement of hazardous waste between nations, and specifically, to prevent transfer of hazardous waste from developed to less developed countries. To date, 183 countries have ratified the convention. Bangladesh is a signatory

and has also accessed to the Basel convention in April 1, 1993. The import of used electronic goods is prohibited in Bangladesh as per the country's Import Policy Order (IPO). But as large quantities of e-waste already exist in the informal sector, it is unclear to what extent the ban is enforced and whether the e-waste is domestically produced or illegally imported here.

E-waste is one of the fastest growing waste streams in European countries, and as such, two pieces of legislation have been put in place to address the problem. The directive on waste of electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE directive) and the directive on the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment (RoHS Directive) became EU law in February 2003. The WEEE directive is aimed at reducing the amount of waste of electrical and electronic equipment that are destined for landfills, whereas the RoHS directive is aimed at eradicating certain hazardous substances from new electrical and electronic equipment in the first instance.

Under the WEEE Directive, producers are expected to meet the cost of collection and processing of their e-waste in accordance to the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) model. Although the producers have primary responsibility, sharing responsibilities

across the product chain among the different stakeholders - national and local government, manufacturers, distributors, vendors and consumers - is an inherent part of EPR.

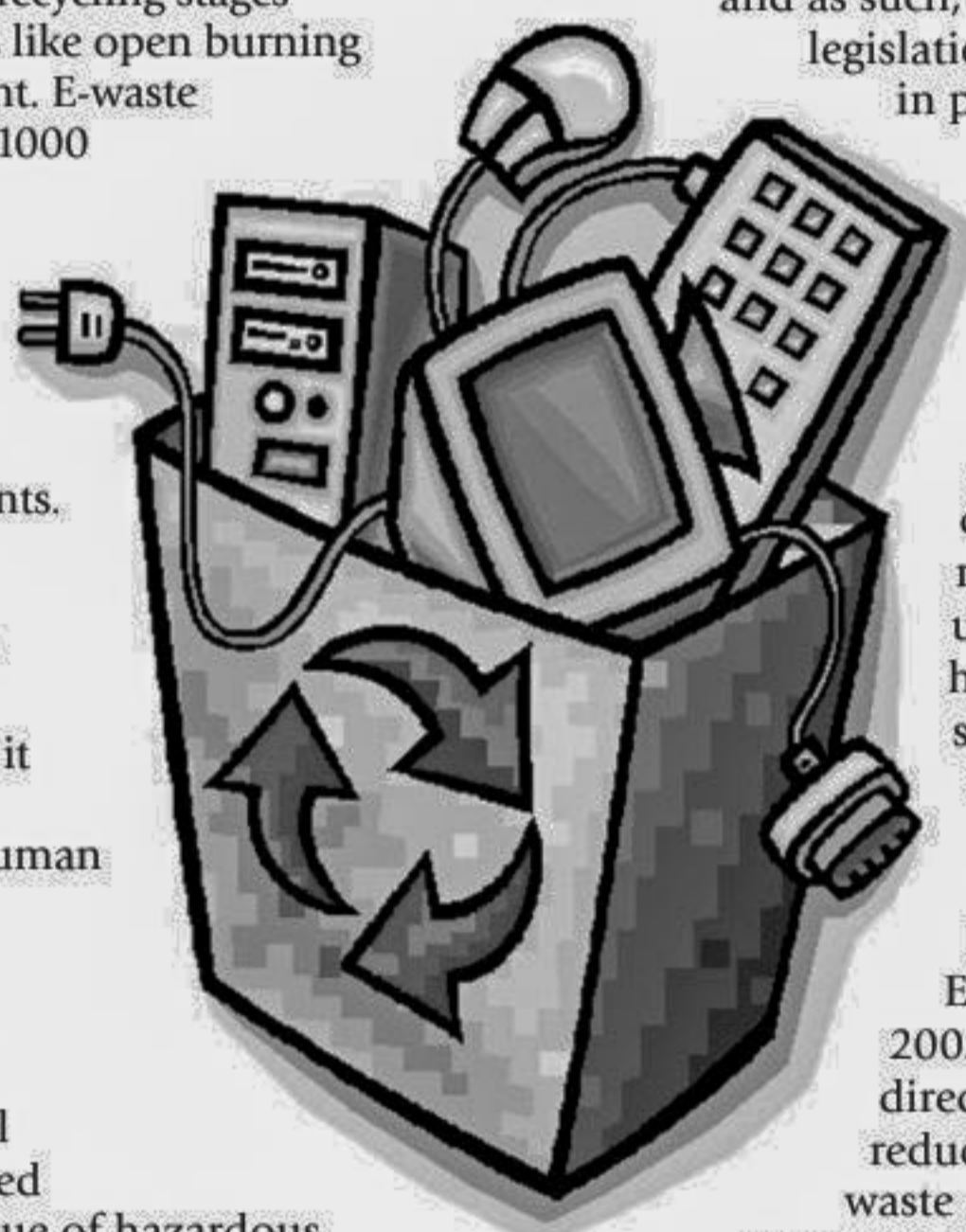
Country examples
 In Asia, the countries leading in policy implementation are Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, where e-waste management has been undertaken since around 2000. Japan has established two pieces of legislation to address e-waste that follows a variation of the EPR model, requiring consumers, retailers and manufacturers to share the burden and pay for recycling costs. Consumers must pay a recycling fee when they drop off their used appliances at either a retail outlet or collection centre.

The USA has not enacted a national legislation, but there are laws at the state level. California's legislation enables the collection of an Advanced Recycling Fee (ARF) for retail purchases of electronic goods. These fees are used to fund the state's e-waste management system.

In India, The Ministry of Environment and Forest, as part of the Environmental Protection Act of India, has enacted the E-waste (Management and Handling) Rule of 2011 that took effect on May 1, 2012. The rules largely follow the EPR model introduced by the EU's WEEE Directive.

Recommendation
 A digitised Bangladesh is unquestionably a huge opportunity for our nation. But we should be prepared for the consequences that will accompany this modernisation leap. In order to tackle the huge quantities of e-waste that will accumulate in the future, it is advisable to enact e-waste regulations at the national level, create awareness of the issue among all stakeholders and adopt a self-sustaining e-waste management model for the country.

The writers are Director, Five-R Associates, and Project Manager EHS Business Solutions, respectively.



COMMENTS

"ACC probe fails to find Bacchu's scam link" (August 4, 2015)

Abu Elias Sarker
 What a big joke!

Nidra
 How is this possible?

"Safety totally unwatched" (July 28, 2015)

N.u. Shanto
 Don't the authorities see this? Are they so blind? Those who set up these billboards are not the only culprits; those who have the duty to ensure our safety are the main culprits.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Adieu, Missile Man

We are shocked at the death of Missile Man Abdul Kalam. Not only APJ Abdul Kalam was a former Indian President and super scientist, but his human qualities were also indeed exemplary and unique.

While serving as a President, Kalam once refused to sit on a chair designated for him during a function just because it was larger in size than the rest! What a majestic display of equality! Upon reaching Shillong after a road journey from Guwahati, to deliver a lecture at the Indian Institute of Management, Kalam cared to thank a Meghalaya police constable named S.A. Lapang for the latter's dutiful vigil on the vehicle.

Only the act of compassion towards fellow human beings will be the ultimate tribute to this great soul.
 Kajal Chatterjee
 Kolkata, India

 Thanks to TDS for publishing some of the quotes of APJ Abdul Kalam under the heading "Kalam In Quotes" (28 July, 2015). These are really inspiring and should be followed by everyone. We pray for the eternal peace of his soul.
 Shafkat Rahman
 BIAM Laboratory School
 Dhaka



Ban on three-wheelers

The government has banned three-wheelers on highways to avoid frequent road accidents. The drivers of these vehicles reacted at this decision. They are demonstrating throughout the country against the ban. On the other hand, the government is adamant to implement the decision. Government should sit with the drivers, owners and transport authorities before enforcing the ban. Besides, there should be alternative roads for these vehicles.
 Muhammad Salim Miah
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