

Land registration hampered

Pay deed copiers' dues

WE are surprised by the report in this daily regarding the strike of extra-muharris (copiers of deeds) of land registry offices across the country because they have not been paid for the last 13 months. How is it possible that individuals employed by a government body can be denied their salary for over a year? The excuse of fund constraint is hardly convincing given that an estimate states that just five days of work abstention by the extra-muharris has deprived the government of TK 4 crore, an indication of the huge revenue this department earns. These deed copiers are paid only TK 7,200 a month for 300 pages of writing while the government gets TK 12,000 as revenue.

The strike has also caused immense suffering for individuals trying to get their land-related business done such as purchase, sale, mutation of land and mortgage. The backlog of work is also staggering and will cause huge delays if and when the strike is called off.

The government, no doubt, must investigate why these individuals have not been paid their salaries, incomes they need to sustain their families. The demand for deed copiers to be included in the national pay scale is not unjustified in context of such callous treatment from the offices they work for. Half of these deed copiers are women who are not entitled to maternity leave.

We hope the authorities will immediately pay these people their dues and take their demands seriously. Extra-muharris perform an essential function in land registration and without their services these offices will virtually stop functioning, wreaking havoc for many ordinary citizens needing land-related documents.

Fire at Karwan Bazar

Investigate allegation of foul-play

ON May 1, a fire completely destroyed 186 shops in Karwan Bazar, causing irrevocable loss to the shopkeepers. We shudder to think of the dire consequences had the fire broke out on any other day than May Day, when the shops were open and employees at work. Still, the havoc caused by the fire is considerable – according to the Babosayee Samity Organising Secretary, the loss in the fire incident was about Tk. 50 crore. The small traders lost their stores as well as their storage units—and their only source of income.

The fire is a reminder of the danger of unsafe, makeshift structures made of bricks, wood and bamboo, with no provisions for fire safety. It is a wonder that makeshift markets such as these have been allowed to function in their vulnerable forms in the heart of the city with no attempts from the respective authorities to ensure the minimum safety standards. This must be corrected immediately.

Meanwhile, a section of the shopkeepers suspect foul-play, given that DCC-North had been trying to relocate the market elsewhere for a while now. The mayor has staunchly denied this allegation, and we take him at his word. However, there should be a fair probe to preclude such a possibility.

The government and the city corporation should provide some form of compensation to the traders who have now lost everything they own. If traders have to be moved, the authorities ought to provide a suitable alternative and partly bear the cost of relocation.

COMMENTS

"SIM re-registration: New deadline May 31"

(May 1, 2016)

Lamia Hasan

It is a good decision because there is still a large number of people who haven't registered their SIMs yet.

Do government websites have enough public information?

MD. RIZWANUL ISLAM

THE present government's aspiration of advancing the use of information technology and ensuring greater access to information is well known. These are important goals as the empowering value of information is well recognised and similarly, the use of information technology may create opportunities and help to reduce the gap between the people living in the urban and rural areas. Promoting the use of information technology is dependent on the availability of resources, but achieving the other objective, i.e. greater access to public information, is much less resource-dependent. At the least, mobilisation of governmental resources can make some progress in this regard. The government has made some strides in this regard and surely more public information is now available than in the past; but more can and needs to be achieved.

A common problem with some of the pieces of public information appearing on the various websites is that often these are presented in such a partial format that outsiders would hardly be able to make any reasoned analysis of them. They typically contain the achievements of a public body in such a fragmented way that third parties would be able to extract very little from them. Let us take the example of the various pieces of public information made accessible on the website of the Ministry of Land (<http://www.minland.gov.bd/>). It contains various types of information on the success of the ministry in the last few years, allocation of business among the

various departments of the ministry, yearly lease value of land for tea gardens, settlement of agricultural *khas* land (land owned by government recorded in the name of Collectors), land acquisition and requisition laws, *jolmohal* (water bodies under the control of the government), and Information Publication Policy, 2015 etc.

However, upon closer scrutiny, the limited value of the above pieces of information made available would be easily evident. The information on land acquisition and requisition laws is

area covered by them. Even the Annual Report 2014-2015 of the ministry, though containing some information on the ministry's various projects, does not shed much light on the missing pieces of information highlighted here.

Understandably, many of such missing pieces of information may not have been made public because they may not be available to the Ministry of Land itself. However, since under various laws, by-laws, and policies, land administrators are already required to report to their higher officials about their activities, it is

relevant provisions of this law. Indeed, to some extent, some investigative journalists and members of the public are already using this law to get the information which are of interest to them. However, despite that avenue being available, it has its limitations. First and foremost, it will take time and effort to access the necessary information. It is also possible that based on these requests, being addressed to specific office bearers, the information that is obtained would be limited to what is available to that particular office and may have limited use.

Of course, it may be wrong to assume that all public information contained in the websites of government ministries and departments are made available for public scrutiny. Some may be made available only for extolling the accomplishments of the respective departments, or simply for providing the public with some information on the activities of the government. Having said that, partial reporting would actually create only a mirage of transparency, missing the opportunity of achieving the full potential of the information which is made available to the public. Unless there are unavoidable reasons justifying partial secrecy, the information made available to the public should be as complete as possible, particularly when such information is already available to the public officers of the respective public bodies. Nothing less than a strong commitment to greater transparency can make them available to the public.

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nothing more than background information on the laws and tells us nothing regarding the actual quantity of land acquisition or requisitioned, or to what extent they have actually been used for the purpose for which they may have been acquisition or requisitioned. The information on the lease of tea gardens is only limited to the mentioning of the annual lease value of tea gardens and says nothing about the revenue earned from the land leased. The information on *jolmohals* is only limited to the district-wise number of *jolmohals* and the land

perhaps possible if there is the willingness for opening these pieces of information to greater public scrutiny that can be achieved without much further expenditure. The purpose here is not to single out the Ministry of Land in this regard; the state of affairs in other ministries or departments may not be much different.

One can argue that since the promulgation of the Right to Information Act, 2009, interested analysts or members of the public can obtain desired information by utilising

COPENHAGEN CONSENSUS

The smartest ways to adapt to climate

BJORN LOMBERG

BANGLADESH is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world when it comes to climate change. Millions of citizens are already exposed to severe natural disasters like cyclones, flooding, tidal surges, heat waves, and drought, and rising sea levels are compounding the effects of the sinking Ganges River delta.

Shifts in global climate will exacerbate some extreme weather and threaten even more of the vulnerable people who live in the country's coastal regions. Moreover, it is clear that poverty is one of the biggest causes of climate vulnerability, so to help we should also consider general policies to reduce impoverishment.

New research by economists Alexander Golub and Elena Strukova Golub examines several solutions that can help tackle climate impacts over the short or long term.

Without adaptation, future climate change could have profound consequences on Bangladesh's economy. Coastal areas are most vulnerable to flooding and other climate change effects, therefore the solutions proposed focus on adaptation in these regions.

Their first solution looks at mangroves. Bangladesh could protect and replant mangroves in coastal regions, which would serve as a natural buffer to cyclones while also sequestering carbon. And mangroves offer additional benefits, including increased biodiversity, fish habitat, and ecotourism opportunities. It's very expensive, however, because it involves moving 20 million cubic metres of land each year and planting mangroves on about 40 kilometres of coastline each year. Protecting mangroves in the Sundarbans Reserved Forest would require more than Tk. 105 billion (Tk. 10,500 crore) over the next 30 years. On balance, mangrove protection and reforestation would provide benefits, for climate protection as well as ecosystem services and tourism, of Tk. 2.8 per taka spent.

A second proposal is to build early warning systems and shelters where people can take refuge when a cyclone strikes. Many people do not use the current shelters because they cannot accommodate cattle and other valuable livestock, so the proposed structures would accommodate both people and livestock. They would help prevent both human deaths and injuries as well as loss of livestock. Bangladesh would need about 530 shelters in coastal regions, but they are quite expensive per storm given that the most devastating cyclones occur infrequently—with a serious cyclone every three years on average (GoB: Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2009). Each multipurpose shelter would cost about Tk. 85 million (Tk. 8.5 crore), and each taka spent would do Tk. 1.8 of good.

A third potential solution is to build polders, tracts of land surrounded by dikes that protect agriculture, housing, and infrastructure from flooding. However, the benefits depend strongly on the likelihood of flooding. If it rises above three metres - a frequent



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

occurrence in some localities - then polders will often be breached and provide no benefit at all. They are also extremely expensive and would cost Bangladesh more than Tk. 372 billion (Tk. 37,200 crore) to build. Constructing polders where flooding would exceed three metres would cost more than the benefits provided. A better proposal is to focus on the areas where flooding is likely to be less than three metres - which is still enough to kill and destroy. Because lower polders are cheaper and because they won't fail as much, they will do more good: Tk. 1.8 of climate benefits for each taka spent.

These solutions help with specific problems that have specific solutions. A more all-encompassing solution would focus on making Bangladesh a wealthier country so that her people can tackle climate shocks better. It is well known that a more developed economy is better suited to cope with many challenges, including adaptation to climate change. The authors examine two long-term solutions that broadly aim to boost economic growth, diversify the economy, and increase human capital formation.

Indeed, the authors' study is part of the larger Bangladesh Priorities project, which looks at many other solutions that can help make Bangladesh a stronger and more prosperous society.

The first of the more general climate proposals aims to increase productivity of labour employed in agriculture through investment in capital and training. The cost would be just over Tk. 700,000 per worker over the next two decades and could increase

agricultural productivity by 10 percent. In all, each taka spent could provide a return of Tk. 3.7 over 20 years.

Another option is to move workers from agriculture into more productive jobs by relocating them to second-tier manufacturing cities. Over the next decade, 1 million people who live in areas unprotected by mangroves could be relocated, reducing damage from cyclones. This alone would do just over Tk. 1 of good for each taka spent. But moving them to manufacturing cities and providing them with training creates potential for the type of productivity growth necessary to improve resilience to climate change, while improving quality of life for the individuals.

It would require investment between Tk. 439,000 and Tk. 1.3 million per person trained and relocated. But by increasing productivity and removing people from dangerous coastal zones, you would do Tk. 2.6 of good for each taka spent.

Climate change presents many challenges, but there are promising strategies to help Bangladesh cope. With scarce resources, is this where you would start, and which of these many solutions would you focus on first? Let us hear from you at <https://copenhagen.fbapp.io/climatepriorities>. We want to continue the conversation about how Bangladesh can do the most good for every taka spent.

The writer is president of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, ranking the smartest solutions to the world's biggest problems by cost-benefit. He was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time* magazine.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"Flat handover starts in Dec"

We are delighted to read the above mentioned news published in TDS on April 20 stating that Uttara apartments would be handed over to the owners in December by Rajuk. However, there are lessons to be learnt from our neighbouring country.

In order to solve growing housing problems, the West Bengal government in India sold plots of land to more than four persons per plot in Salt Lake area, Calcutta in the early sixties. Later on,

the New Town project was undertaken and implemented in Rajarhat near Calcutta. A multi-storied building complex with modern facilities like schools, colleges, shopping mall, cinema theatres were built in Rajarhat which is well connected with Calcutta by roads. The Metro will also extend to the New Town. However, there was no allotment of plots to individuals.

Incidentally, Calcutta contains more land area than Dhaka. Dhaka cannot

afford the luxury of individual plot housing. The government should not allocate any more individual plot in Dhaka and Chittagong. Instead, it may acquire land and lease/sell them to Rajuk or private builders who will build model towns with high-rise apartments, roads, schools, colleges, mosques, temples, playgrounds and shopping malls well connected by roads.

Dr. SN Mamoon
Dhaka

A death resulted from negligence and some questions

A couple of days ago, I rushed to a government-run hospital with a road accident victim at midnight. The accident took place in front of my house. The hospital authorities spent nearly 30 minutes to get the details from the critically injured man, who could barely answer the questions. Eventually, when he was referred to the surgery department, nurses showed no

interest in approaching him, although two nurses were sitting next to us and were busy chatting. After a while, the duty doctor showed up, prescribed some medications and asked me to bring those from outside. I didn't know the man before the accident and I did not have enough money to buy the medicines. All these procedures took nearly hours before his operation started. The

following morning, the man died. My questions are: Is it necessary to spend 30 minutes for collecting details from a critically injured person who can barely speak? What's the first and foremost job of a hospital? Can't our government hospitals afford to provide life saving treatment in emergency situations free of cost? Afzal Hossein
Shankipar, Mymensingh