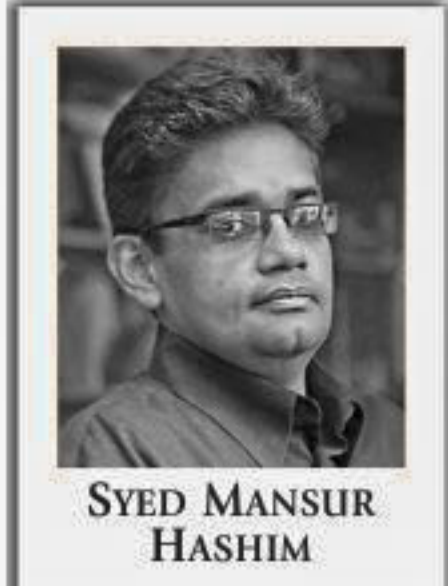


Where do we dump our e-waste?



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

BANGLADESH lacks an e-waste (electronic waste) disposal policy. Urbanisation has brought forth rapid population growth of major urban centres like Dhaka. Our fast-paced lifestyle has ushered in both consumerism and adoption of technology on a mass scale, and that is to be expected. It is also expected that as we embrace consumerism and

as our incomes rise, people will want better, faster devices like the latest phones and computers, more energy efficient household appliances - refrigerators, light bulbs and more feature rich devices like televisions and home audio systems. What we do not think about when we discard older devices is where they end up or what they do to the environment. E-waste is a growing problem that needs to be managed properly. According to media reports, we were producing approximately 500 tonnes of e-waste two years ago, and this trend has grown steadily. It is not merely a lack of policy but also a lack of awareness amongst people as to how we dump our discarded appliances.

The challenge before us is that discarding such e-waste and their ending up in landfills are a major health hazard. Indeed, we have no reliable data on precisely what type of equipment is being discarded on an annual basis. As per a report in a leading Bangla daily recently, research conducted by various bodies pose a glum picture. One research carried out in 2012 pits the number of TV stations in the country at 20 million and according to Bangladesh Electrical Merchandise Manufacturers' Association, Bangladeshis use electronic gadgets worth Tk. 30,000 crores. BTRC estimates that there are an estimated 130 million mobile phone connections and most alarming (according to Bangladesh Computer Society data); nearly 30 percent of used desktops, laptops, and tablets become unusable after the first year of use.

Precise data on the amount of e-waste is missing but according to non-government sources, the amount has crossed 100,000 tonnes a year annually. E-waste cannot be treated the same as other waste because they contain harmful substances like mercury and other toxic elements like silicon, tin, resin, cadmium, zinc, chromium, etc. which permeate soil and pose a major risk to the food chain. While there is a growing business in electronic recycling, the sheer volume of waste being generated and our failure to either recycle on a mass scale or dispose of them safely pose serious health hazards.

Managing e-waste requires a tripartite approach; new government policy and management authority, educating the population on safe disposal and bringing together manufacturers and importers of electronic appliances to take responsibility for environmental pollution. It is interesting to note that the Department of Environment (DoE) formulated a policy in 2012 that obligates Electronic Equipment producer to take

responsibility of e-waste management and cost of e-waste. We can introduce measures like Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policy. This policy approach requires, producers, importers, or brand owners of electronic equipment pay a fee to ensure proper disposal and/or recycling of the product after it reaches its end of productive life. The Annual Recycling Fee (ARF) to be paid by consumers in the same manner they pay VAT when procuring an electronic item; this fee too goes to a fund that ensures that the product is properly recycled. We have a growing informal sector dedicated to recycling in Dhaka city. But one of the problems we face in greater recycling opportunities is that consumers do not realise the importance of segregating normal waste from e-waste.

didn't feel the need to see it through and therein lay the problem. Unless people in general are made aware of the hazards posed by e-waste, particularly the health hazards that affect them directly, innovative initiatives like this one will end in failure.

At the end of the day, e-waste will end up in landfills and while prudent government policy initiatives should engage importers, manufacturers and consumers to do their part; it should start looking seriously into landfill gas extraction-to-power generation technologies and partner with multinational companies that have a proven track record of transforming methane into electricity. Successful examples exist in Asia. For instance, China remains one of the world's greatest polluters and e-waste remains a major headache for



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Educating city residents remains a key element if we want to be serious about e-waste management. The primary sorting of electronic and non-electronic garbage begins at the household level and it goes far beyond simply providing different coloured bins. The problem can be highlighted from the experience of the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund that expended Tk. 2.1 million to give residential buildings in various parts of the city waste bins in four different colours (green, yellow, red and blue). The idea was that cleaners working in these buildings would divide up the waste in four categories: organic, inorganic, hazardous and mixed and put them into the four different bins allotted. That project didn't go far because cleaners

policymakers as the country has more than 5,000 landfills. China's Shanghai Laogang (a joint Chinese-foreign collaboration), one of Asia's largest landfill-to-gas plants, started producing electricity in 2008 and the plant that operates 11 sets of gas engines produced some 24,000 megawatts (MWh) of electricity in 2012 alone. Since it went into operation, the plant has also treated approximately 58 million cubic meters of landfill gas that resulted in generating 73,000 MWh of power. The examples of successful e-waste management are out there; the question is will our policymakers take heed?

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

Lawmaker breaking the law!

Time for the AL to get its house in order

THREE major stories in some of yesterday's newspapers were related to the ruling party MP or their wards. One story had to do with an AL legislator surrendering to the police and thereafter sent to jail, having been a longtime absconder in a murder case, while another tells us about an MP's son landing in lockup for extortion. The third, and which is the subject of this editorial, is about a Cox's Bazaar lawmaker obstructing a mobile court from doing its duty.

What the MP and his goons did was prevent government officials from performing their duty, a cognizable offence under the law that should have landed any other person in jail immediately. And the local union council chairman, the MP's henchman, had the temerity to say that the eviction was illegal since the land on which the shops were built was not forest but khas land. As if it is lawful for ruling party cadres to illegally occupy khas land. It is a sad state of affairs when those who make laws violate it without compunction.

None of the stories recounted here can make a party with long political and democratic traditions proud. In fact these three instances are fairly representative of the behaviour of some AL lawmakers and party men during the tenure of office of this government, that includes hogging tender application, interfering with the legal process, illegal occupation of land and generally falling foul of the law. While from time to time some of the errant members were punished, nothing substantive that would deter such activities permanently was done. It was about time the AL looked at its backyard seriously and put its own house in order.

Sorry state of library space

JU students' woes says it all

WAITING in long queues with heavy bags on their shoulders, Jahangirnagar University students are forced to fight for library seats starting early morning, particularly in the absence of sufficient space. Despite lining up from between 6:30am and 7:30am, they sometimes have to return empty handed, having wasted precious time and energy for study. We sympathise with their sufferings for lack of library and study space.

It is already well known how congested our public university dormitories are. So much so that students often have to floor in halls. Amidst such congestion in dormitories and the lack of library space, how are students supposed to get their studies done at all, let alone comfortably? Compounding their troubles, people not belonging to the university take up whatever limited space there is for students at the JU library. A grim picture of library facilities in our most prestigious university — Dhaka University — was already portrayed in images published in this newspaper earlier this year. And the same can be said to be the case in other public universities across the country.

This cannot be allowed to continue. Education is the backbone of any nation. Thus, the authorities should set up a powerful committee with the UGC to look into these aspects and suggest measures that should be implemented by the government quickly. To create an illumined society, more emphasis on education and increased funding in the sector, we believe, is indispensable.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Truthiness on the March



LUCY P. MARCUS

THE late US Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not to his own facts." That may be true. But,

entitled or not, politicians and electorates are constructing their own alternate realities — with far-reaching consequences.

Nowadays, facts and truth are becoming increasingly difficult to uphold in politics (and in business and even sports). They are being replaced with what the American comedian Stephen Colbert calls "truthiness": the expression of gut feelings or opinions as valid statements of fact. This year might be considered one of peak truthiness.

To make good decisions, voters need to assess reliable facts, from economic data to terrorism analysis, presented transparently and without bias. But, today, talking heads on television would rather attack those with expertise in these areas. And ambitious political figures — from the leaders of the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom to US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump — dismiss the facts altogether.

The environment is ripe for such behaviour. Voters, particularly in the advanced economies, are jaded by years of broken political promises, revelations of cover-ups, and relentless political and media spin. Opaque or dubious dealings have cast doubt on the integrity of organisations and institutions on which we should be able to rely. For example, the *New York Times* recently published a series of articles on think tanks that highlighted the conflict of interest faced by those who operate as analysts, but are beholden to corporate funders and sometimes also act as lobbyists.

As soon as a few experts are found to have been offering half-truths — or worse — the credibility of the entire field can be called into question. Christine Todd Whitman, who was Head of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on September 11, 2001, told residents of New York City that the air was safe to breathe and the water was safe to drink in the days after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. But, as a 2003 EPA report noted, the agency "did not have sufficient data

and analyses to make such a blanket statement" at that time. With cases of severe respiratory illness piling up, Whitman now admits that the statement was wrong.

Likewise, as the recently published Chilcot report showed, the Iraq War was launched in 2003 under false pretenses. Intelligence reports had not established that there were weapons of mass destruction in the country, yet British Prime Minister Tony Blair dutifully

Trump's surrogates, for their part, use television appearances and social media to restate the falsehoods, seemingly operating under the principle that if you repeat something often enough, it will become true.

And many voters seem willing to go along for the ride. When 40 leading Republican foreign policymakers and national-security experts signed a letter expressing their opposition to Trump, whom they fear

The leaders of the UK's campaign to withdraw from the European Union enjoyed a similar advantage in the run-up to June's Brexit referendum. They painted a wholly false picture of the country's circumstances — from its role in the EU to the impact of immigration — and knowingly made impossible promises about what would happen if the public voted "Leave."

For example, leaders like Boris Johnson, now Britain's foreign secretary, declared that the £350 million (\$465 million) supposedly paid weekly to the EU (a deeply flawed figure that fails to take into account the benefits received) would be redirected to the National Health Services. The Leave campaign even plastered the pledge onto the side of a campaign bus.

Now that the referendum is over, Johnson and others have backtracked, and the campaign has rebranded itself the "Change Britain" movement and promised to redirect EU funds to other areas instead. This has infuriated many, especially given the recent warning by the body that represents hospitals across England that underfunding has pushed the NHS to the brink. Brexiteers have also walked back pledges to curb immigration, amid a sharp increase in hate crimes across the UK that their rhetoric helped to fuel.

The downsides of Brexit should have been obvious to voters before the referendum — not least because so many economists, defense experts, and world leaders spelled them out during the campaign. But, as leading Brexiteer Michael Gove proudly observed, people in the UK had "had enough of experts."

In fact, it seems that some people voted for Brexit specifically because so many experts spoke out against it. They seemed to believe Brexiteer MP Gisela Stuart: "the only expert that matters" is the voter. It should be no surprise that the post-referendum reality is not what many Brexit voters expected.

Yet the revelations of the falsehoods that propelled the Leave campaign to victory have hardly driven people back into the arms of experts. Truthiness is on the march, particularly across Europe and the US — in large part because so many of the authorities who should be calling out the lies are tainted by truthiness themselves.

The writer is CEO of Marcus Venture Consulting. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2016. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)



followed US President George W. Bush in ordering his military to invade. The consequences of that decision are still emerging.

If our leaders can be so willfully wrong about such consequential matters, how can we believe anything they tell us? This question has opened the door for a new, more overt truthiness, espoused by the likes of Trump, who seems to introduce freshly invented "facts" on a daily basis.

would be "the most reckless president in American history," their concerns were largely disregarded. Trump's response — that those leaders are the ones who made the world "such a dangerous place" — sounds just plausible enough to justify ignoring their warning. Even outright lies spoken in a nationally broadcast interview go unchallenged, as if Trump were indeed entitled to his own facts.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Impending power supply crisis in Bangladesh

The *Daily Star* recently published an article on equitable sharing and downstream crisis. A relevant World Bank report concludes that limited and erratic water supply reduces economic growth, induces migration, and ignites civil conflict, which fuels further potentially destabilising migration.

Bangladesh is sitting on a volcano of disaster generated by over-development of groundwater resources. Dhaka used to have wells 250-350 feet deep, which have dried up and been replaced by deeper wells of over 600 feet. Additional costs will be incurred and inherent hydro-geological problems will appear if the process continues.

It is high time that our government negotiate firmly with India for the sharing of riparian water like the Indus treaty between India and Pakistan. There will be serious portable water, cooking gas and electricity crisis unless water supply resources are developed and managed properly.

Luthfe Ali
 On email

Facilitating healthy learning environments

It is unfortunate to see high suicide tendencies among students in the news, especially during final examinations. The teaching community must take urgent steps to assist students with their psychological and emotional problems.

At the same time, we must allay prejudices about strict teachers who fight aggressively for the welfare of students — they have every right to give reports about the performance of their pupils. It is imperative to foster effective teacher-student relationships.

Having said this, creating right jobs for the educated is also important. Workstations must create conducive environments to encourage employees to learn further. A continuous learning process not only helps employees to make progress professionally, but it also paves the way for attaining sharp intellect.

P. Senthil Saravana Durai
 India