

**Jobless degree holders on the rise**  
*Higher education not delivering*

**W**E are baffled by the results of a survey by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics which has found an inverse relationship between tertiary education and employment – that unemployment rate is the highest among young people with higher degrees. The same survey has found that the unemployment rate among those without schooling was the lowest during the same period of the study (December 2013 and June 2015).

This paints a rather bleak picture of our higher education scenario and reveals a huge mismatch between the skills acquired and the demand for such qualifications in the job market. The result is a dearth of qualified candidates to fill vacant posts in certain sectors and an excess of jobseekers vying for a small number of posts in other sectors. Thus the curriculum of our universities and colleges are just not in sync with the market demand. It also points out to poor quality education in many of these institutions that churn out degree holders who have certificates to show but little else in terms of the attributes required for professional jobs.

It is disheartening to think that the number of years spent to obtain a degree plus the financial burden imposed on families or the students themselves will, in many cases, go to waste. According to the University Grants Commission, there are 33 lakh students now pursuing higher education. So how many of these young people will actually get jobs that match their educational qualifications and how many will be left in the void of indefinite joblessness?

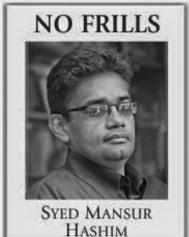
Clearly our higher education system needs major overhaul. The courses and the way they are taught must equip young people to enter into sectors that are in dire need of professional skills. Without such reform we as a nation, will keep sliding back economically and intellectually.

**Ramadan price hike**  
*A deplorable failure in market monitoring*

**I**T has become a regular phenomenon that prices of essential commodities shoot up with the commencement of Ramadan. The administration makes routine commitment of keeping the price level stable but fails utterly to fulfill it. As a result, consumers have to bear the brunt of soaring prices throughout the whole month. People from the poorer section of the society suffer the most.

There is no valid reason behind this sudden increase in price. The government has repeatedly assured that there are adequate stocks of essential commodities. But on the ground there is gross mismatch between prices prescribed by the government and actual prices. In the city market traders largely ignore the city corporation's price charts. These clearly indicate to the weakness of our market monitoring system as well as to enforce orders. There are syndicates who horde and manipulate the market following increased demand of commodities during Ramadan. The government has held numerous meetings with the business leaders to stop such unethical practices. But it fails to rein in these price hikes.

Against this background, the government should take tougher stand against the unscrupulous traders. It should enhance vigilance in the markets. The market monitoring teams should be empowered with adequate manpower and resources. The business community should also imbibe in them the spirit of Ramadan and assist the government to keep the price of essential commodities affordable.



**W**E are in love with numbers. The government loves to show off the billions of dollars it has received in investment commitment from India and

China. What it fails to say of course is that most of the mega projects are in a state of limbo. Take for instance our failure to fast-track the first tranche of Indian credit that was received in 2010. Indeed the execution of seven projects worth USD 699.07 million with Bangladesh Railway and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) has been waiting to be implemented for the last seven years. It has everything to do with our failure to implement projects and yet, we have gone on to take more Indian credit. Indeed, we have welcomed the second line of Indian credit (USD 2 billion) in 2016 and a third in the current fiscal (USD 4.5 billion) against which we have apparently undertaken 21 projects.

Things are not good. Because if the rate of implementation remains as it has been over the last seven years, we will merely be adding billions of dollars in credit with little to show in terms of project completion. When we can't get projects that were signed back in 2010 done, why on earth are we taking on more loans that will have to be paid back with interest? Precisely who are we trying to fool (except ourselves) that the country's economic backbone will be transformed if we do not get our house in order? These are not new questions, but have become much more pertinent today because we have huge investments headed our way from China (much of which will come in the form of loans and not grants).

According to a report published recently in a leading English daily, only eight projects out of 15 under the first Line of Credit (LoC) have been completed with the remaining seven (worth USD 699.07) still incomplete. The bulk of these projects (six) are being implemented by Bangladesh Railway and from what we understand, the biggest problem remains land acquisition and other procedural delays. The one BSTI is implementing has run into problems related to machinery faults but these should have been worked out by now.

So our major stumbling block to implementing any major project remains land acquisition and development. This



PHOTO: BUSINESS STANDARD-COM

has been a chronic problem, a thorn on our side for years. Unfortunately, policymakers have not done much to alleviate it. In an interview way back in 2013, the managing director of a major group of industries stated that, "It took me more than three years to acquire a 6-acre plot to set up a caustic soda plant, and the full process has not been completed yet." We certainly hope that he got his land and established his plant. For years, we have been planning to undertake a long-term industrial development plan that would take into account a mid to long-term land acquisition plan. And although the government has made public plans to establish 100 export processing zones, the dismal performance on the first tranche of the Indian LoC merely illustrates that those plans will in probability, remain plans on paper.

The typical answer anytime the issue is raised is that we are an overpopulated country with limited land. That of course is merely an excuse for inaction. Had that been the case, how do we see city states like Singapore and Hong Kong do magnificently well? One should be realistic about demands that foreign

investors will make and the fundamental prerequisite of any venture will demand the provisioning of land. While the hullabaloo about infrastructure revolves around roads, highways and power, we seldom stop to dwell on the chronic shortage of land — the acquisition of land to be more precise that is giving the government a bad name. When will we get our heads out of the sand and come to realise that it is not political unrest, physical infrastructure or lack of power, but scarcity of land that is fast becoming the single most critical problem in our quest to undertake any major project?

What has changed in the last five years is that Bangladesh has been largely successful in garnering interest of regional powers to invest in much needed sectors of the economy. Now, the onus rests squarely on our shoulders if we can't get those projects off the ground. As land remains a precious commodity, we cannot allow for unplanned industrialisation to take place, which is precisely what has been happening over the past couple of decades. We have been taking precious farmlands to turn them into industry. Similarly we have witnessed the

dumping of untreated industrial effluents into major river systems that have played havoc with both fish stocks and land fertility, because industry has been allowed to grow in and around major population centres (which usually grow up near water systems like rivers). This is hardly the best usage of land and it certainly is not sustainable.

Given our experience with the Indian LoC, policymakers need to start working on a long-term national land use policy today, that will chart out which areas of the country will be used solely for industry and which for agriculture. Such a policy will allow the government to cut through much of the problems it is facing today when the issue of land acquisition comes up, as it will keep coming up when we try to utilise our various lines of credit from foreign sources. The policy must be enacted into law (which will take the hassle out of lengthy court proceedings). Unless we take this step, meaningful industrialisation and the dream of turning Bangladesh into a middle income country will remain a dream.

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**A Geneva Convention for cyber security**

DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

**C**YBER security and the threat by hackers have been in the news headlines in the recent past. Two of the most recent incidents are well known: the Bangladesh Bank cyber theft in February 2016 and the recent WannaCry attacks for ransom in May 2017. The lesson from these and other attacks is that nobody is immune from cyber invasions and we can only expect these threats, if not actual break-ins, to increase as technology becomes more sophisticated and makes inroads into our everyday life. Since we are all vulnerable from these attacks, Microsoft has floated the idea of a Digital Geneva Convention to codify the do's and don'ts in cyber-warfare. Just as the Geneva Convention protects civilians during armed warfare, the call for a Digital Geneva Convention is an attempt to codify measures to spare the civilian hospitals, academic institutions, and other clearly identified sanctuaries.

For those who have not kept track of the recent global outbreak of the WannaCry ransomware, I will briefly summarise the issue. A ransomware is a malicious software or "malware" that will block access to your computer's data unless the hackers' demands are met. On May 12, 2017, a group of hackers unleashed a virus known as WannaCry, which attacked about 200,000 computers in 150 countries. When WannaCry found its way to a PC, data were encrypted and users were told to pay USD 300 in Bitcoin, an electronic money system, in return for a key to decrypt the data.

During the attack, thousands of computers in the British NHS network were disabled which prevented the healthcare providers from accessing the electronic health record (EHR) of patients. Surgical procedures were cancelled and emergency room visits were severely delayed. The criminals exploited a vulnerability (or flaw) in the Windows Operating System that was

originally discovered by the US government's National Security Agency (NSA) and was leaked to the world a few months ago.

The WannaCry attack, and the role of NSA in the origin of the malware weapon, came at a time when international and government-sponsored cyber attacks and break-ins have reached a new height. It is now clear that the US government, by keeping the Windows vulnerability a secret, aided and abetted the attack. Previously, a few years ago US and Israel attacked Iran's nuclear facilities using the Stuxnet malware, and

involved in the Bangladesh Bank heist, which according to a legal expert, "is just one example of a state-sponsored attack that was done on the banking sector".

Given this state of lawlessness in cyber space, and acts of criminality that are carried out with the connivance or sponsorship of nation-states, it is high time for the international community to act. The most recent call for a Digital Geneva Convention came from Microsoft's President Brad Smith in February of this year but the idea has been circulating for several years. Smith, who is also the chief legal officer of

strengthened the need for international collaboration to thwart future attacks which might pose a health risk or even catastrophe. These potential damages could have serious consequences with the new "internet of things" where all devices are connected and a single intrusion could lead to a domino effect.

The world's cyber community therefore urged the political leaders to come together for a Digital Geneva Convention soon. Unfortunately, at the G7 Foreign Minister's Conference in Lucca, Italy, in April 2017, "The Declaration on Responsible States Behavior in Cyberspace" paid lip service to the issue by simply reiterating earlier G7 and G20 commitments to norms, rules, and protocols needed to promote security and stability in the internet. Microsoft had previously circulated the idea of a "Tech Accord" to protect people and the creation of a neutral NGO to investigate attacks and identify the perpetrators. Smith was more specific and listed six requirements for an international agreement:

1. No targeting of tech companies, private sector, or critical infrastructure.
2. Assist private-sector efforts to detect, contain, respond to, and recover from events.
3. Report vulnerabilities to vendors rather than stockpile, sell, or exploit them.
4. Exercise restraint in developing cyber weapons and ensure that any developed ones are limited, precise, and not reusable.
5. Commit non-proliferation activities to cyber weapons.
6. Limit offensive operations to avoid a mass event.

While this list is ambitious and only reflects Microsoft's view of the future, it can serve as a starting point for a serious conversation on how to keep the cyber criminals, both in the private sector and the government, from creating a Chernobyl-type disaster in a modern economy.

The writer is an economist and has been working in the ICT sector for over three decades.



SOURCE: SCMP.COM

two years ago, North Korea retaliated against Sony Pictures to prevent the release of a movie that lampooned Kim Jung Un. Recently, the Russian government is reported to have interfered in US and the French presidential elections. And, if this trend continues, soon there will be a time when rogue governments as well as the super powers might decide to use cyber weapons to attack non-military targets with serious consequences for the civilian population. Last month, it was reported that the FBI has identified North Korea and Pakistan as being

Microsoft, spoke at the RSA security conference in San Francisco and offered several ideas for cooperation between nations and an international protocol protecting civilians. "The time has arrived to call on the world's governments to implement international rules to protect the civilian use of the internet." Akin to the Fourth Geneva Convention which protects civilians in times of war, a Digital Geneva Convention would commit governments to protecting civilians from state-sponsored and criminal attacks in times of peace or war. Recent attacks have also

**LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**  
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**CPD's caution over banking sector**

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has cautioned that banking sector malignancy will have a negative impact on the country's economy. The banking sector is filled with widespread corruption and irregularity - despite repeated warnings from the Bangladesh Bank, non-performing loans of banks have been skyrocketing; many government and private banks are crippled with capital shortfalls; and various scams have made the sector unstable.

The Bangladesh Bank, being the regulatory authority, must ensure good governance by ameliorating these issues in the banking sector.  
 Zonaed Emran, By email

**The right kind of teaching**

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training in English that I recently completed on April 29, 2017 has opened my eyes to the various ways in which the quality of teaching in our country can be improved. I found out the difference between skill-based teaching and knowledge-based teaching. For instance, as an English teacher, I realised the difference between teaching a subject and teaching a language. As per traditional teaching methods, students are simply expected to be able to read and write in the examinations; but a child actually needs to learn to listen, read, speak and write in the language being taught.

A good teacher is a person who can motivate his/her students and can sense their needs and expectations; someone who can draw them out of their shyness and reluctance to learn confidently.

It is praiseworthy that the government has introduced such training programmes to improve education in Bangladesh. They should also monitor the academic institutions to ensure that they are implementing such progressive and effective methods of teaching.  
 Neiamotullah, By email