

Positive outcomes of tannery relocation

Needs wider application and constant vigilance

We are pleasantly surprised to know that the condition of the local water bodies of Hazaribagh have started improving following the relocation of the tanneries from the area. A picture published in *The Daily Star* yesterday shows a thin stream flowing through the once severely clogged Hazaribagh canal. Tests conducted by the Department of Environment (DoE) also indicate that the water quality of the nearby Buriganga River is improving due to the halting of pollution by Hazaribagh tanneries. This is great news indeed. There is, however, a lot more that needs to be done to revive the lifeline of the city, the Buriganga.

Following the same principle of relocating polluting tanneries, the authorities should now prevent other industries located in the capital from discharging wastes into the Buriganga River and the water bodies connected to it as has been reported in this paper. The authorities must ensure installation of effluent treatment plants (ETPs) and their effective usage in these industries.

Encroachment of the river is another major concern. A large number of factories and houses are being built virtually on the Buriganga River. Most worryingly, as the tanneries are being shifted from Hazaribagh, fresh encroachments are happening in the area. This nullifies the government's efforts to save the river. It goes without saying that the government must take stringent measures to stop such illegal activities that will revert the river's condition back to what it was.

Finally, the authorities should keep in mind that as the river is a total ecosystem, any partial solution will not be effective. They should address the issue holistically and enforce regular vigilance of further encroachment.

Public places are unsafe for women

Immediate remedial steps needed

A recent research by ActionAid Bangladesh has confirmed what we already surmised – that most public places are not safe for women. The survey, carried out in four major cities of the country, has found that a large percentage of the women interviewed are subject to harassment in most public spaces including markets, bus stops, hospitals and police stations.

The extent of this malaise is quite shocking. According to the study, 50 percent of the women respondents have been groped in the market places, 30 percent have been harassed at police stations, and 70 percent think buses and bus stops are not safe for them. At hospitals, around 42 percent of the respondents say they faced rude behaviour from the service providers.

These numbers paint a bleak picture of our country in terms of its development as it reveals how much we have regressed when it comes to ensuring basic security and respect for women. At a time when the whole world is recognising the importance of gender equity and women's empowerment as prerequisites for a nation's progress, these statistics should shake us up into taking immediate steps. If women are constantly afraid when they go out, how can we expect more women to join the workforce, to participate in development activities or in politics?

It is obvious that despite laws and policies geared towards better security for women and gender equity, there has been little impact on the ground. As the study recommends, policies that aim to promote greater security and more empowerment for women have to be implemented. Law enforcement agencies and other public service providers (such as hospital staff) must be exposed to gender sensitivity programmes. The government and private sector must make greater investments that ensure that women have access to public services without having to face harassment of any kind. Without such basic preconditions, the country will be held back from its development potential.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Maintenance of the National Zoo

The National Zoo, situated in Mirpur, is not only a tourist attraction but also a research and training centre. But its condition is deteriorating. The cages of the animals are old and far too small for their inhabitants. The pond water is dirty. The road to the zoo is broken, and there is no classroom for students who are training or doing internships. I would like to request the concerned authorities to work on these issues and better the conditions of the place.

Ratan Karmakar, BAU

University admission tests

Twenty-eight vice chancellors of universities were supposed to meet to decide on probable dates for admission tests for the 2017-18 academic session. The public universities have recently declared their test dates. The admission test of KUET will be on October 20 and the test of CUET will be held the next day on October 21. Both the tests for Rajshahi University and Chittagong University are scheduled for October 22 to 26, and 30, respectively.

We can't possibly travel from one end of the country to another in the space of one or two days to take these tests. It'll also be a huge financial burden for some of us. I would like to request authorities to arrange a single admission test – one for BUET, CUET, KUET and RUET, and another one for DU, JU, RU, CU, KU, etc.

Mawduda Hasnin, By email

Worried about the future

NO FRILLS

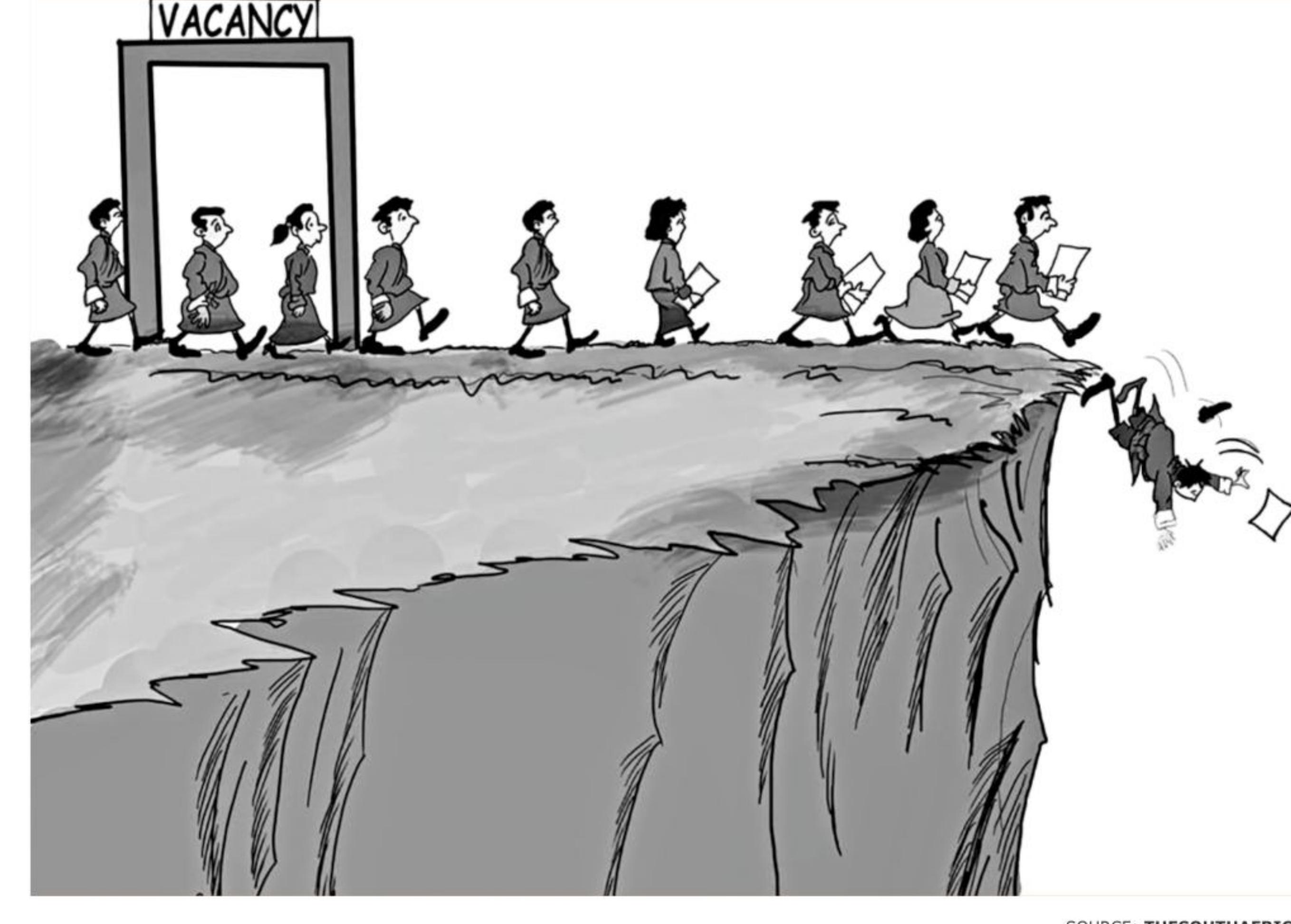


SYED MANSUR
HASHIM

A recent survey carried out by Prothom Alo on the youth's perception about the country and their future brought out some interesting facts about job prospects in Bangladesh. Although 74 percent of the respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the economic situation, 82 percent are unsure about securing a job in today's economy. Given the global recession and a lack of growth of jobs in the country, the bulk of the youth surveyed didn't provide an optimistic outlook about finding meaningful employment.

Their remarks are not off the mark when we look at the data from Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) which has stated that sustained economic growth over the past few years was unable to deliver employment opportunities. Then the question is how much of this economic growth is actually benefitting people where growth is not inclusive. That the bulk of our young people are not associated with any economic activity or any sort of skills development mechanism, leads one to the conclusion that there is a huge gulf between our expectations and the reality on the ground.

Economists have been pointing out that Bangladesh's economic growth has been performing satisfactorily with 6 to 7 percent GDP growth. However, employment opportunities have not been on a par with this growth, which leads one to think that mere economic growth does not automatically guarantee employment. Similar sentiments were echoed by South Asian Network for Economic Modelling (SANEM) in its quarterly review on Bangladesh economy. It states that although the economy has performed well, the job market has not grown correspondingly, and hence the condition of the people has not improved markedly. Similarly, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) stated in its discussion on the latest budget that the nation is fast headed towards a great depression to be triggered by joblessness. We now have more than



30 percent unemployment rate amongst the educated class.

So we are actually in the midst of a jobless growth where the standard of living for the common people does not improve despite a growing economy. Bangladesh is experiencing a persistent unemployment problem, which is getting worse by the day. Recent media reports point out that the economy creates only two million jobs every year, but a mere 600,000 new jobs were created during 2014 and 2015. We have to contend with the fact that investment in the private sector has remained stubbornly low over the past few years, so where will the new jobs come from? Again, policy action remains unclear as to how to boost domestic investment, and regardless of all the hype centring on foreign direct investment, it is obvious that the job sector will get a boost if domestic investment grows. Policies need to be

undertaken to revamp the skills development sector. Technical education remains below par and the few technical education institutions that we have in the country are not churning out enough skilled workers either for the domestic or the overseas market.

Young graduates have to get used to the idea that not all of them will be absorbed in the formal job sector and many will have to become self-employed. For them to tap into entrepreneurial skills, we need to revamp our system of education which does not truly equip them for a life in business. Education can no longer be limited to coaching centre based education and the pursuit of GPA 5 results. It needs to be a knowledge-based pursuit that requires a rethink at the policy level on what is being taught in our schooling system and what should be taught. Young people need to learn to think for

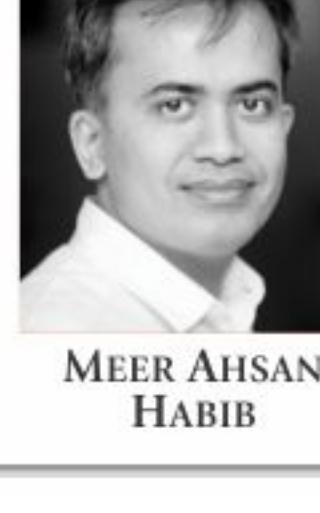
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themselves and we need to give them the tools for that thought process to begin early on.

There is a host of structural changes that need to be undertaken and those will not necessarily be painless. For a healthy growth in the job market, we will have to undergo serious policy changes in various sectors of the economy. A failure to make these will mean tens of thousands of young educated people joining the ranks of the millions unemployed with little hope for a better future. Hopelessness is a dangerous thing nowadays, especially in an age of extremism where the tendency of extremist outfits is to draw upon the educated to carry out destructive activities. We do not need to go there. What we need is a wakeup call that will help Bangladesh reap the demographic dividend.

Syed Mansur Hashim is Assistant Editor, *The Daily Star*.

Why not a code of conduct for the lawmakers?



MEER AHSAN
HABIB

On the first day of my joining the organisation where I currently work, I was briefed on its code of conduct (CoC). Human resources officials handed me a manual containing some 'dos' and 'don'ts' that an employee is expected to abide by. Such manuals are designed to safeguard an organisation against any wrongdoing or untoward incident. I was reminded of the importance of this practice after a recent parliament session in which several MPs made highly critical comments about the Appellate Division's verdict that declared

constitution of 1972"; some have even called it a "conspiracy". We understand that if an MP desires, he or she can hold anyone accountable for their action. But is there any mechanism that governs the way they can do that?

In June last year, a lawmaker from Chittagong and his fellow ruling party men beat an election official at the Bashkhali Union for not complying with his instruction of appointing presiding officers as per his wish. We know quite a few lawmakers who also made headlines for the wrong reason. The importance of a code of conduct for our MPs cannot be overstated, but so far the parliament has failed to uphold its dignity by drawing up a mechanism that would govern how an MP should behave. If there was a CoC for our lawmakers, they would have thought twice before doing anything objectionable

guided the conduct of the parliamentarians by norms, customs and conventions listed in the 'Handbook for Members'. Although this handbook does not clearly spell out do's and don'ts for the MPs, these customs are likely to be incorporated into a written rule book that the Narendra Modi government is working on. The Rajya Sabha, on the other hand, has a written Rules of Conduct and Parliamentary Etiquette. Interestingly, there are three instances of expulsion of Rajya Sabha members; Shri Subramanian Swamy was expelled on November 15, 1976, Dr Chhatrapal Singh Lodha was expelled on December 23, 2005, and Dr Swami Sakshi Ji Maharaj was expelled on March 21, 2006 for gross misconduct which brought the House and its members into disrepute and contravened the Code of Conduct



the 16th amendment of the Constitution illegal. Interestingly, the Supreme Court's past verdicts scrapping the 5th, 7th and 13th amendments had drawn an entirely different reaction. The first two scrapped the amendments that validated all actions by the military regimes, while the last declared the provision of election-time caretaker government illegal. This time, however, the MPs were not happy and chastised the judges for a verdict that they thought was "unconstitutional" and "against the spirit of the original

or unlawful. Codes of conduct for lawmakers are not without precedent in history. Take, for instance, the CoC of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. It existed over time in different forms and was finally documented in written form in June 2009 and later amended in April of 2013 and 2015. The purpose of the CoC is pretty simple: to assist all MPs in discharging their duties to the House, their constituents and the public in general. The Indian Lok Sabha has so far

for members of Rajya Sabha. In all cases, the Committee on Ethics investigated and recommended actions against the offender.

Among other South Asian countries, Pakistan Senate is set to implement a new CoC that will empower citizens to lodge complaints to the ethics committee against any senators for any misdeed. On January 14, 2016, the Upper House of the Senate passed the draft CoC which includes grave sentences for code offenders including suspension of House

membership. In another move, Sri Lankan Parliament Speaker Karu Jayasuriya presented a draft CoC and asked for the opinions of the MPs within two weeks. Any MP found guilty of unethical behaviour will be subject to sanctions, including suspension from parliament for a specific period not exceeding the limit set by the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. Bhutan kept its CoC of the National Assembly Members quite simple. Among its 14 simple clauses, two are quite interesting: a member will not operate any bank account outside Bhutan and members shall subscribe to maintaining the decorum and dignity of the House and shall desist from acts of defamation and use of physical force.

Immediately after the independence of Bangladesh, there were a number of allegations of collaborating with the Pakistan Army, corruption, abuse of power and nepotism against some members of the then constituent assembly. In order to initiate steps against them, a President Order was issued on March 23, 1972. Based on this order, 16 members were expelled from the assembly on charges of corruption on April 6, and later on September 22, 1972, 19 more members lost their assembly membership. Taking lessons from this, the treasury bench may revive a bill submitted by lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury titled "Code of Conduct Act of MPs 2010" on January 14, 2010. It may be a law or a simple set of rules for the lawmakers to make them accountable for their actions. Any wrongdoing by an MP ultimately brings disgrace to the parliament, and such acts are a clear violation of the oath the lawmakers take when they are sworn in as members of the parliament.

A CoC is important not only for ensuring justice but also to establish a lawmaker's accountability to the people and the parliament. There should also be a clear accountability system under the purview of the Ethics Committee led by the Speaker of the Parliament as its Chairman. This committee will be an addition to the already existing 51 parliamentary committees. This CoC may set out the standards of behaviour expected from lawmakers while carrying out their duties and public engagement. It may also contain rules similar to election rules issued by the Election Commission concerning the additional income, personal interests and gifts that must be declared by the lawmakers and published in the Register of Members' Interests.

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