

Billions in Indian LoCs

But why the delay in utilisation?

WE are shocked by a report in this daily that has found that out of the USD 3 billion line of credit from India, only half a billion has been utilised in the last seven years! We are confounded by this amoebic pace of utilisation for projects that are geared towards major infrastructural development and economic growth. Such unfathomable hold up in utilisation of the funds is attributed to delays at every stage—project selection, approval, signing of loan deal, bidding prices and complexities in land acquisition. These are routine steps of any government project and it is a mystery why there should be such systematic procrastination.

This is indeed a discouraging picture given that another USD 4.5 billion LoC from India is in the pipeline. If the first two LoCs have been so grossly underutilised for seven years, how long will it take for the third LoC to be made use of?

It is unacceptable that projects as crucial as construction of the Dhaka-Tongi-Joydevpur dual gauge rail line and building of the Khulna-Mongla rail line and a bridge over the Rupsa river have been delayed because of difficulties in acquiring land. Many projects have not started merely because the body that is authorised to approve them—Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC)—has not given the go-ahead.

We are mystified by the fact that these bottlenecks have been allowed to go unaddressed. It is high time that the concerned ministries unravel the reasons behind such procrastination that has resulted in crucial development projects taking a backseat. With the latest LoC promising huge benefits in terms of power generation and economic activity, there is no time to lose.

The plight of the elderly

Design programmes to cater to older persons

EVER since being declared as a special day by the United Nations General Assembly on December 14, 1990, the International Day of Older Persons has been observed on October 1, to remind us of the contributions that the elderly make to society. It is important to recognise that the elderly have specific sets of needs that must be catered to.

Between 2015 and 2030 the number of older persons worldwide is expected to increase from 901 million to more than 1.4 billion, by 56 percent. Although Bangladesh is generally thought of as a young country with tremendous youth bulge, it should be taken into account that the older section of the population is increasing much faster than the total population. An Unnayan Onneshan policy brief report states that the elderly population in 2050 might be about three times higher than the percentage in 2000.

To better prepare ourselves for the challenges that come with an ageing population, it must be acknowledged that it is an issue not separate from social inclusion, gender parity, economic advancement or poverty. Just as women, children and persons with disabilities are more severely affected in disaster and crisis, so are the elderly. Active measures must be taken to socially integrate them and special programmes designed to accommodate their needs.

The present government has launched old age allowance, formed National Policy for Older People 2013 and Parents Maintenance Act 2013 for the welfare of senior citizens which is commendable. The elderly have invested their youth in building the nation. It is now up to us to return the favour and adequately compensate them, or at least build societies that accommodate them.

Plagiarism detected



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

IT'S good to see non-academics taking note of an academic mantra: plagiarism. The dictionary denotes it as "the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own." Plagiarism is an absolute taboo in the academic world. It is tantamount to academic dishonesty, one of the few grounds in which a faculty member can lose his or her job. Media, on the other hand, has a liberal attitude towards citing sources. Often in the name of making writing palatable and reader-friendly, academic accessories such as footnotes and parenthetical information are removed in print media. In the process, often original sources of an idea or expressions remain unmentioned. Words and ideas are thereby neutered of their authorial tags and packaged by some cut-piece writers.

Two Dhaka University faculty members, who are also linked with the media industry, have been accused of plagiarising. They probably would have gone away with such a stealth operation in a talk show or even in an op-ed, but writing for an academic journal is a different ball game. According to press reports, the University of Chicago Press has written to the DU authority pointing out that they noticed long excerpts of Michel Foucault being cited without due credits to their publication. I don't know whether DU *Social Science Journal* has any online edition or not, but the surveillance of Chicago UP is remarkable. Their radar has found two academics posing as the French intellectual Foucault. In a changed political air, DU Syndicate is all set to "discipline and punish" the writers with identity crises.

There are academic criminals and fraudsters all around us. But should we hate the criminals? Or should we hate the crime and the culture in which such criminals are produced? Foucault would have suggested the latter. In grade 5, my daughter was humiliated at school because she wrote, "The earth spins around the sun" instead of "rotates". The teacher at a reputed school that has international franchise made my daughter stand on the desk for failing to memorise the lines from the text. She was discredited for using her own language. Bangla medium schools are even worse. We were never encouraged to think on our own. We even had to memorise that the cow was a domestic animal, and the ultimate body donor. All our essays, memorised at school, ended with a common idea: we should all take care of the cow/air pollution/rainy day/journey by bus... you get the picture! And memorisation is perhaps the only prescribed method in *madrasas*. Sadly, we live in an academic

milieu that does not encourage creativity. We force our students to memorise number tables even though the calculators have become handy for about half a century. We live in a culture that boasts an adage: "Stealing is an art as long as you are not caught".

I can cite hundreds of examples where my colleagues, both senior and junior, have been accused of stealing or known to have lifted pieces of other people's works and posing them as their own. Some have been caught, chastised, or punished—depending on the political cloud of the given moment. Many have gotten away with it. Some of them are even holding positions as high as Vice Chancellors, Pro-Vice Chancellors, deans and serving in bodies responsible for punishing academic thieves. There are some celebrated writers in Bangla guilty of transcribing or translating overseas

She outwitted her supervisor by attending weekly supervisory sessions with different parts of a student paper she nicked from a Belgian university server. The supervisor told me how hard she worked over the semester, whereas she simply chunked the long essay and kept on receiving feedback on somebody else's published work. I just had to google certain phrases to expose her dishonesty.

Thankfully, there are plagiarism checkers such as Turnitins which are becoming very useful. A colleague of mine submitted a paper to a local journal and it was detected with 67 percent plagiarism by the software. The editor called me up and said, "What would you do, if you get caught stealing?" "I will probably keep quiet about it." "Well your colleague charged me for not mentioning the fact in our call for papers that all submissions are put through turn-it-ins." Guess, the loud

a cottage industry of PhD to grow. When I was the chair of a department of a public university, I had students coming to me complaining about a supervisor who was essentially asking for money. He offered a package deal where his research team would do the field work, data collection and analysis for the candidate. So I am not surprised when I hear that so-and-so-university is offering dodgy degrees. It is often worse in science where faculty members claim publication credits for sharing their labs with students.

It is about time we changed the culture that encourages academic fraudulence. We need a system in which students learn to express in their own words. While the content of the research is knowledge-based, research skills such as summarising, paraphrasing, synthesising and



SOURCE: WWW.GRAMMARLY.COM

works. I came across a novel adapted from a famous Latin American writer by one of our top-notch fiction writers. I accosted this literary don, and he told me that he had not heard of the novel to which I was referring. The resemblances between the original and the proxy could not have been any coincidence. The local author has just changed the setting and the thematic action from walking to swimming in a Bangladeshi context.

There are now online services where anonymous ghost writers write academic papers for students and academics. Mail order PhD is a menace that has infected many of our wannabe fashionable doctorates. I once had a student submitting her term papers using "cheatmyprofessor.com" as her source. Recently, I identified a plagiarised essay submitted for a national award. I caught another student of a top-tier private university during the defence of her thesis.

mouth was trying to cover up his crime.

Having gone through rigorous training on research on both sides of the Atlantic, I often feel like the proverbial barber who fails to conduct surgery after being introduced to physiology. In other words, I find it difficult to write without the right recourse to research materials and environment. I get amazed how many of my colleagues present papers on the most updated ideas sitting even in the distant corners of Bangladesh. And our collective ignorance is allowing these posers to flourish in reputation. The recent case of stolen Foucault shows the inadequacy of the reviewers and the journal editors who have failed to stop it from going in print. Everybody is in a hurry. Everybody is after cheap fame.

There is this growing trend of getting higher research degrees by non-academics. Civil servants, military officers are getting PhDs in bulk allowing

analysing ideas as well as of referencing need to be introduced at the higher secondary level. Once students have the orientation of academic writing, they can easily adapt to research methodology if they ultimately decide to pursue their higher studies.

Borrowing other people's thoughts or expressions is accepted as long as a writer acknowledges the original source. Students need to learn that academic integrity is more than just not copying or cheating at school. It is about time we instilled a sense of academic honesty through our curriculum, our textbooks and question patterns. Naming and shaming a criminal will not change a thing unless we learn to hate the crime.

Shamsad Mortuza is Professor of English at the University of Dhaka. Currently on leave, he is the Head of the Department of English and Humanities at ULAB.

GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS INDEX

Reading behind the numbers



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

WE have some good news to cheer. According to a report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF) Bangladesh has become more competitive in

2017 as compared with 2016. According to WEF's Global Competitiveness Report 2017-18 (GCR), Bangladesh was ranked 99 out of 137 (as compared with 106 out of 147 last year) in terms of Global Competitiveness Index (GCI) which is recognised as a proxy for a country's investment environment and attempts to capture the robustness of "institutions, policies, and factors that set the sustainable current and medium-term levels of (its) economic prosperity." The ranking, along with a survey result from a sample of business leaders, provides a consistent set of indicators to track our competitiveness in the global economy. While the improvement in our ranking bodes well for us, the report at the same time identifies areas where we need to work harder in the coming years to enhance the business climate.

GCI for Bangladesh is constructed by computing indices on 12 "pillars of competitiveness". GCR provides three types of numbers. First is the ranking of a country among its peers. This year 148 countries were included in the survey and Bangladesh was ranked 99 out of 137. The second measure that GCR provides is an index, on a scale of 0-7, on various indicators of economic and business climate. Bangladesh scored 3.9 out of 7 in the latest overall ratings with improved scores across all the 12 factors. Finally, it offers for each country, a list of the most problematic factors impeding its business development. For Bangladesh, the top two are corruption and lack of adequate infrastructure.

For this commentary, I will focus on three areas related to the latest GCR:

What contributed to Bangladesh's jump from 106 to 99; what are some of the factors that still keep us less competitive than most of our South Asian neighbours; and finally, what is known about the most anti-competitive elements affecting our economy, namely corruption.

Bangladesh's improved ranking is undoubtedly good news, but one needs to point out that such improvement or deterioration in a single year is not unprecedented in the last decade. The real issue is, are we consistently moving up or down, or is this year's numbers just a "flash in the pan"? We jumped eight notches in 2013-14 (110/148) from the previous year (118/144), and have also managed to regress from 92

are listed as the two most serious issues affecting business. This result comes from WEF's Executive Opinion Survey in which 87 respondents were asked to select the five most problematic factors for doing business in Bangladesh, and to rank them between 1 (most problematic) and 5.

The list in the Opinion Survey include the following: Corruption, inadequate supply of infrastructure, inefficient government bureaucracy, inadequately educated workforce, poor work ethic in national labour force, access to financing, policy instability, tax rates, government instability/coups, crime and theft, tax regulations, insufficient capacity to innovate, poor public health, foreign currency



SOURCE: CPSC

in 2007 to 118 within five years. This time, our ranking improved mostly due to better conditions in market size (our rank 38) and macroeconomic environment (56). Next, let us ask, why do we rank last but one among South Asian countries? The scores in three areas offer some clues. We scored below 3 (out of 7) in Infrastructure (2.9), technological readiness (2.8) and innovation (2.8).

According to WEF, corruption and "inadequate supply of infrastructure"

regulations, and inflation. It is noteworthy that in all the studies done in recent years, corruption and poor state of infrastructural development have always been identified as key factors dragging down our growth potential. One thing to notice is that while we do make investments in our infrastructure, it still remains a bottleneck for the business sector. What that means is that supply has not been able to keep pace with demand for infrastructure services.

Let me now turn to the related areas where we can, with some effort,

improve the business environment, viz., corruption. Corruption is consistently ranked in GCR as problem number one! Survey respondents were asked to offer their judgment on how common it is for firms to make undocumented extra payments or bribes connected with (a) imports and exports; (b) public utilities; (c) annual tax payments; (d) awarding of public contracts and licenses; (e) obtaining favourable judicial decisions. In this respect GCR reaffirms what other studies and reports have found. Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) and the US State Department's Investment Climate Statement have reported that the level of corruption is not getting any better.

As can be expected, the average person, who is less resourceful than a business, faces a situation that is much worse. A TIB survey found that the top example of corruption in Bangladesh was paying a bribe to secure a job and was cited by 45 percent of respondents.

I end this brief commentary on a happy note. It appears that while some sections of the business community have in the past pushed back against stricter enforcement of labour laws, GCR survey gives "restrictive labour regulations" a low ranking. This seems to contradict the anti-union position taken by garments owners. On weak ICT infrastructure, GCR offers the following word of caution, "Upgrading ICT infrastructure and increasing ICT use remain among the biggest challenges for the region: Over the past decade, South Asia has been the area where technological readiness stagnated the most, with a performance similar to that of sub-Saharan Africa." Recent initiatives taken by the government on this front can only help Bangladesh address some of these challenges.

Dr Abdullah Shibli is an economist and Senior Research Fellow at International Sustainable Development Institute (ISDI), a think tank based in Boston, USA.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Sustainable tourism in Cox's Bazar

Cox's Bazar is one of Bangladesh's top tourist destinations. Tourism in this area led to the development of infrastructure facilities such as hotels, restaurants, airport, etc.

But numerous problems persist. Huge crowds, unplanned hotel construction, poor waste management, security problems, etc., are just some of them.

For tourism to flourish in this area in a sustainable manner, control measures by the authorities must be taken. The authorities should adopt effective strategies—such as involving locals in decision-making and protecting the environment—to address issues that are sensitive to society and environment. There should also be more coordination between different levels of administrative structures, local governments and stakeholders.

Md Abdullah Hel Kafi, By email

NID for expatriates

Expatriates have the right to vote as citizens of this country. Our government in the past took steps to allow them to vote, but in the end no measures were taken.

Expatriates' contributions to our economy should not go unnoticed. Remittance has long played a great role in strengthening our economy. And as such, expatriates, as citizens and ambassadors of the country, deserve to have the opportunity to exercise their fundamental rights to vote in local and national elections.

One way to allow our expatriates to vote is by issuing NIDs for them, which they can collect through the Bangladeshi embassies in respective countries. Similarly, they can exercise their voting rights in polling booths set up in embassies. The election commission can help in this regard.

Sumon Kumar Paul, By email