

Illegal occupancy

Public space or parking space?

A report in this paper has found that spaces under most of the flyers in the city are being illegally occupied by parked cars as well as makeshift shops choking the roads and adding to Dhaka's insufferable traffic congestion. What's more they are nullifying the purpose of these flyovers which was to relieve traffic snarl-ups. Apart from this latest encroachment, one third of all roads in this city are occupied by random on-street parking which leads to roads being narrowed leading to more traffic congestion.

Photographs published in yesterday's *The Daily Star* illustrate these findings. The pictures show vehicles being repaired and open markets set up under various flyovers of the city. One picture shows how cars have been illegally parked on both sides of one of the busiest roads in Dhaka leaving only a narrow strip for vehicles to ply.

These have become familiar sights for the city dweller. So why haven't the authorities done anything about such blatant encroachment of public roads and spaces? The answer clearly lies in lax law enforcement and unavailability of proper parking spaces in commercial buildings.

The city corporation apparently does not have enough manpower, resources and police support to check this illegal practice according to one of the city mayors. Traffic police say that despite fining offenders and seizing vehicles illegally parked, they cannot cope with the number of offenders.

All this points to two basic solutions. Firstly, there has to be a stepping up of law enforcement personnel in removing cars, shops etc from under the flyovers regardless of political affiliation. Secondly, all commercial establishments must provide adequate parking space either inside their buildings or outside. The city corporations, police, Rajuk and urban planning experts have to put their heads together to make this happen.

A doctor's gross negligence

Shocking state of healthcare service

THERE is much to be improved in the quality of healthcare service in the country. A report published in *The Daily Star* on November 27, 2017 cited a case that serves as an example of how crucial it is that maternal and neonatal healthcare be prioritised. On September 18, a doctor performed a caesarean operation on a patient at a private hospital in Comilla's Gouripur and delivered her baby girl, leaving its twin inside the womb.

In an inexplicable act of negligence, an ultra-sonogram report conducted earlier that showed that the patient was carrying twins, was overlooked, and the doctor delivered one baby and stitched up the mother's womb without delivering the other, assuming that the other was a tumour. On being admitted once more, following complications post-operation, another operation was conducted and while the mother happened to survive this precarious situation, her child did not.

This is not an isolated incident. There is gross negligence and a casual disregard for human lives that our healthcare practitioners are often guilty of. It must be ensured that service providers who are guilty of negligence are held accountable.

The High Court's orders will hopefully infuse some element of responsibility into the doctors. In addition, mechanisms to ensure this does not happen in the future should be put in place. We should hold practitioners accountable for negligence so that incidents like this do not recur.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

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Change fiscal year to coincide with calendar year

I wholeheartedly agree with the suggestion made by Biru Paksha Paul, in an op-ed piece published by this newspaper on November 12, about changing the country's financial year to make it coincide with the calendar year. The current system starts and ends in the rainy season when field development work is difficult. As a result, we see a lot of diggings towards the end of the financial year, resulting in public misery, to achieve the ADP allocation target. Making the switch to the calendar year will enable a good start and a strong finish during the dry season. I hope the government will consider the proposal positively.

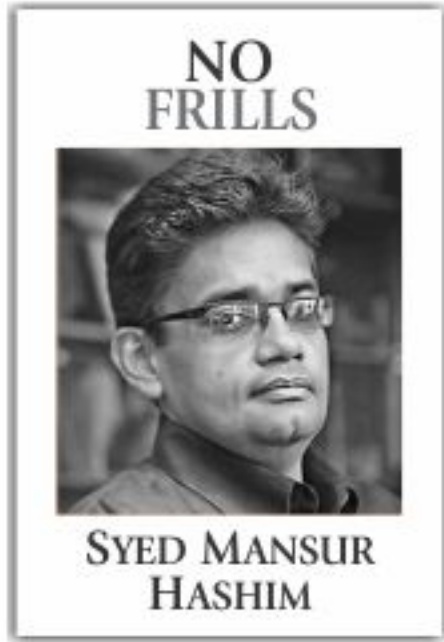
Engr. ABM Nurul Islam, Dhaka

Environment-friendly vehicle?

Recently, I came across a news story by AFP headlined VW to spend 34b euros in drive to become e-car leader. Several European nations have set a deadline to phase out diesel/petrol cars, and only allow e-vehicles. The biggest challenge to this is the charging point. To make e-cars popular, manufacturing companies need to think of establishing charging points.

Another problem is that the electricity used to charge vehicles is generated in coal-powered energy sources. I think there should be efforts to find a way to use environment-friendly power sources. Otherwise, the entire point of environment-friendly vehicles will be useless. Solar cars are another option whose feasibility deserves to be explored.

Deendayal M. Lulla, By email



When we look at World Bank data, industrial pollution contributes to about 60 percent of Dhaka's pollution and the textile industry is the second largest contributor after the tannery industry. According to IFC, about 200 metric tonnes of wastewater is generated per tonne of fabric.

Water is a finite resource; a message that has not permeated to the bulk of the industry and that is not entirely their fault. Weak regulatory mechanisms coupled with the lack of knowledge that being water



efficient can actually raise competitiveness for industry is something that most industries have little knowledge of. The PaCT programme has been engaged with the textile industry since 2013. But it has a much greater role as a facilitator, i.e. bringing together various stakeholders that include textile buyers, factories (management and owners), and policymakers and of course, the financial institutions in an effort to find solutions to attain water sustainability and efficiency.

Over a three-year period, PaCT has initiated changes by working with 215 factories that have adopted cleaner production practices. The result is a saving of 18.4 billion litres of fresh water per annum and the generation of USD 12.4 million per year in factory savings that come from resource efficiency. However, this is literally a spit in the ocean when we talk about



Bangladesh, the second largest readymade garment exporter in the world, is only about 6 percent. So, it is completely understandable that the actions of China will obviously influence the competitiveness of the other manufacturing hubs like ours.

To begin with, China's extensive material base is unparalleled. We still cannot provide a vertical supply chain and are still heavily dependent on imports of raw-materials. China has a long history of manufacturing and is constantly investing extensively in highly efficient and specialised ports, roads, bridges and services to support the movement of goods.

Our reliance on low wages for competitive advantage may soon be offset by inferior infrastructure and low worker productivity. Chinese workers are not only more skilled and experienced, but are also far more productive.

We often hear in many discussions that Bangladesh's apparel industry has a huge opportunity to avail from China shifting to high-tech industries. How authentic is this belief? A deeper dive into the present dynamics of China's apparel industry will give us an idea on how to retain our competitiveness, rather than to remain complacent.

China is aggressively pursuing technological advancement as a core driver for retaining its competitiveness. With the Chinese central government eager to push China's manufacturing sector up the value chain and looking to shift from "made in China" to "created in China", indigenous innovation is spurring. For example, Bealead Automatic Machine Co., a Chinese-based automation company, devised a system that increases the efficiency and reduces the labour component of the duck feather filling process into jackets, partnering with North Face, Moncler and Adidas.

The automated feather filling machine reduces the number of workers from five to two. The two workers require training to operate the machine and an additional technician to maintain it. In this case, investment in a single automated feather filling machine costs USD 33,000. With the average wage of a

Save water, save money

the textile industry as a whole which has thousands of factories. There are other such programmes being run by European organisations in Bangladesh and most contract-out the actual work of retrofitting factories or changing the way production lines are arranged to effect savings in water.

The message is not getting through fast enough and that has a lot to do with attitudes on the ground. When we find that inputs, like water, is supplied to industry literally at throwaway prices, there is little compulsion to save it. While PaCT and other such programmes are doing a commendable job, with the sheer size of the industry and the rate at which we are depleting our water resources (not to mention the pollution aspect), we are fast approaching a time, within our lifetimes, where water for industry will have to be rationed because there won't be enough to go around. The drive to industrialise is naturally, a priority area for the government's outlook for the country. Yet, what remains missing in this calculation is the need to protect the environment while racing to become a lower middle-income country.

Since there are substantial savings to be made in water consumption vis-à-vis water pollution (by consuming less chemicals in the WDF processes—solutions for those too are available), there is now more need than ever for a comprehensive policy to govern the issue.

While we find some of the biggest names in the apparel industry like the DBL group incorporating the knowledge that programmes like PaCT imparts, we cannot overlook the fact that there are some 719 washing, dyeing and finishing factories in and around Dhaka that discharge wastewater into Dhaka's rivers. Building a business case out of the issue of water efficiency remains the prime challenge. Major buyers like Primark, C&A, H&M, Du Pont, etc. are increasingly coming on board the PaCT programme in an effort for their partner companies to adopt processes that lessen the burden on water. This, in effect, helps get the message across that being environmentally-friendly and water-efficient actually helps reduce costs and improve branding.

A study conducted by PaCT with the Bangladesh

Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) on the sub-sector Washing, Dyeing, and Finishing (WDF) came up with some interesting results. It was found that this subsector had 719 factories where there was the possibility of greatly reducing water consumption to the point that 1 kg of fabric could be produced utilising 50 litres of water (on average, consumption of water is around 70-100 litres to produce 1 kg of fabric). Now, these are real life assessments and the technology is there to help factories make changes. The other fact of life is that IFC has the recognition to act as mediator between a prospective factory and the banking institutions to arrange for finance.

Take the case of Fakir Apparels Ltd. (FAL), a company that worked with PaCT to increase water efficiency. What was found during assessment was that total water consumption in the dyeing processes was very high due to older machines and technology being used. FAL adopted measures suggested by PaCT and invested around USD 265,000 for factory improvement which resulted in cost savings of around USD 282,000. The payback amount for initial investment was under six months. This is a real-life example of what is possible when industry works with programmes such as PaCT. Indeed, PaCT has established a Textile Technology Business Center (TTBC) that is housed at the BCGMEA Bhaban to facilitate linkages and provide factories with comprehensive technical information.

The opportunities exist. What has been missing of course is policy guidelines from government as to how water conservation should play a major role in industrial production. Since there are substantial savings to be made in water consumption vis-à-vis water pollution (by consuming less chemicals in the WDF processes—solutions for those too are available), there is now more need than ever for a comprehensive policy to govern the issue. It is not merely about enacting laws because we have enough of them. It is about enforcement of laws and regulations. The other side of this equation lies in "awareness building" and that is not just the job of PaCT; rather it involves several other actors including the government and media.

Awareness building is not a short-term initiative, it requires years of intervention to get the message across to those involved in the production process—not just owners but also factory management. It involves raising awareness of the general populace who bear the brunt of water pollution in major cities like Dhaka, residents who suffer health consequences due to unmitigated toxic discharge into the rivers from industries. City residents too must learn to conserve water because it is not an unlimited resource.

At the end of the day, we need to wake up and take heed of the fact that we are destroying the very fabric that gives us life, i.e. the environment and while industrialisation is a fact of life, so is water sustainability and efficiency at industrial level. We can choose to be responsible with our water, or pay the price of not having much water in the foreseeable future.

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CHINA'S SHIFT TO HIGH-TECH

Can Bangladesh keep up?

worker in China being USD 491, the company can recover the investment made in about one-and-a-half-years.

In a recent McKinsey survey of 130 companies across sectors, it was found that close to 80 percent of Chinese manufacturers expect that their company's competitiveness will increase with Industry 4.0 (current trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies), compared to just 57 percent of US respondents, 50 percent of respondents in Germany and 54 percent of companies in Japan.

The Digital Capability Center in Beijing is a model factory. By providing a centralised location for developing

safe test-bed for piloting digital technologies, and hosts experiential training for capability building.

The Digital Capability Center is a one-of-a-kind facility, tailor made for China, which showcases technology, provides training, and develops innovative solutions. Manufacturers can quickly learn how to put digital operations and smart manufacturing to work in their companies and see noticeable improvements in innovation and efficiency.

Like many other industries that have been disrupted with technological and digital advances and the changing consumer expectations that comes with

Shows", "Gender Neutral Fashion lines", "Modest Fashion", "Ethical and Sustainable Innovation", "Smart Wearables like the Google and Levi's Project Jacquard Denim Biker Jacket", are some of the top themes that our industry is seeing as a response to mechanisation of the retail end of the value chain.

With all this change happening at the buyers' end of the apparel value chain, can the supply chain remain unaffected? Will changing expectations not put similar pressures on the supply end of the line? Like China, do our industry leaders and policymakers have a vision to set up such digital capability



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ground-breaking solutions, supporting clients at each stage of their transformation journey, and offering customised training modules, the Digital Capability Center in Beijing aims to help manufacturers in China realise the vision put forth in China's "Made in China 2025" policy. Moreover, a Digital Technology Showroom has been established in China by McKinsey in partnership with Tsinghua University, one of China's leading academic institutions. The Center showcases cutting edge digital tools for end-to-end value chain transformations, provides a

it, our fashion and apparel industry is "ripe for disruption". A recent survey by McKinsey and Business of Fashion states that volatility and uncertainty is here to stay. The "forever connected" consumer, with shifting loyalties to brands — seeking alignment of their purchase with their deeper values — is much more difficult to please and unpredictable.

"Omni Channel", "Instant Fashion", "See now, Buy-now", "Rapid Virtual Prototyping", "Smart fitting rooms enabled with RFID and Augmented Reality", "Virtual Reality Fashion

and innovation centres in Bangladesh, to lead our nation towards a "Made in Bangladesh 2021 or 2041" policy? Can we sustain our industry by supplying commodity items in the longer run? Do we have a strategy?

I want to leave readers with these questions and mention that these are what need to be addressed to retain the leadership of Bangladesh in the race of global apparel manufacturing business during the next era of Industry 4.0.

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