

Woes of the working woman

Women shouldn't have to choose between motherhood and a career



A few days ago, I was required to do some secondary research on the conditions of female workers in the ready-made garments (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. While most of the study findings were nothing out of the ordinary, there was one outcome that struck me and has since been lingering on my mind.

Multiple studies on the conditions of female RMG factory workers concluded that these workers refrained from having children in fear of losing their jobs. They had no formal employment contracts and anything that might possibly hinder their performance was reason enough for them to get fired. Their hope, which allowed them more scope for exercising their decision-making rights at home, was also negatively affecting their family lives. Needless to say, discrimination at work prevails.

This brings me to my main topic of discussion. How is the situation different for middle-upper class working women? The situation seems promising; increased participation in the workforce, same pay as their male counterparts, access to managerial positions and greater social acceptance. Educated women have the option to have a career and a great number of women have chosen one over the other options. Women are not keeping themselves from putting in long hours at work, but they are doing basically every other thing that is needed of them to get the job done. But are they faced with the same dichotomy of employment and disempowerment as the blue-collar women RMG factory workers?

Society has to steer clear of mistaking maternity leave for a paid vacation. Flexibilities regarding maternity leave management, working from home and openness to individual employee needs are only few of the ways to ensure that the interests of working mothers are protected.



PHOTO: STAR

The situation is not as drastic as it is for RMG workers, but it exists. It is in fact the biological anatomy of women again that is used to keep them from advancing in their careers at the same pace as that of their male colleagues. I am not talking about lower physical strength, but about women's ability to reproduce and have families. But it isn't what a disadvantage women are, but it puts them at a disadvantage in their work lives. More and more ambitious women are

putting off having children for their careers. The women who are making an attempt at managing the two are suffering from insecurities at both ends. Two weeks of paternal leave that is far more onerous, meaning that at the end of the day, it is the woman who is playing a dual role; torn between being a mother and a working woman. Women are required to prove their worth upon returning from their maternity leaves

and have to face constant skepticism in terms of their performance by their colleagues and superiors. Not to mention the dip in confidence when they discover that their counterparts have progressed and moved on to higher positions. They say that being a mother is the greatest achievement for a woman, but say that to a woman who promotion to maternity leave and lost a promotion to a colleague who did not put in half the effort. What are the mental implications of this on a career-oriented

working woman? Does this imply that middle-class women would eventually delay or decide not to have children? And, what would be the social implications of that? Anything to do with the well-being of women has a national-level impact—be it education, employment or health. I also wonder whether Bangladesh as a nation can afford to lose women in the workforce after claiming its tremendous success in women empowerment and reducing the gender gap. Now, I do not advocate that women be given undue advantage for having children and taking time off from work, but rather urge that employers reform their policies regarding maternity leave. If working mothers are to not lose out in their careers, there needs to be a change in perspective. Society has to steer clear of mistaking maternity leave for a paid vacation. Flexibilities regarding maternity leave management, working from home and openness to individual employee needs are only few of the ways to ensure that the interests of working mothers are protected.

What we do so far in their careers only to lose their pace because of motherhood. It is also high time to look at paternal leaves policies that allow fathers to not be equally responsible for their children and foster backed socially determined roles that women should rear children.

Taking steps in this regard will not bring an end to the uncountable challenges that women face, but it is surely going to be a step forward in ensuring that the progress that women have achieved is safeguarded and its continuity ensured.

Shifat Ara is senior business consultant at Swisscontact-Katalyst. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way the views of Swisscontact-Katalyst.

Reflections of an international student



A I sit and write this article at a hotel in Dubai. I am happy, in fact ecstatic, to be able to return to Bangladesh for my three-week winter break. As I write this, I do not have access to the internet or any academic journal. The contents of this piece remain purely opinion-based, and as a reader, one is welcome to disagree with my chain of thoughts.

My 24-hour journey from Canada to Bangladesh comprises of an eight-hour transit in Dubai, where the anticipation of going back home supercedes any and all expectations of sleep, food, shopping or moving around the city. Hence, I sit and wait for that Emirates flight to take me back home.

International students like me, especially those from an emerging economy such as Bangladesh, do undoubtedly come from a privileged background, if not from a purely wealthy one. Some of us who are able to go for higher education abroad are not necessarily the best students in the academic system, in addition to the financial backing to fund their education. A majority of talented students are indeed deprived of this experience because of financial constraints.

Recently, I read somewhere that only six percent of the global population has access to post-secondary education. That is a very small and distinguished group of people. Distinguished, not because we are simply able to access this service, but because it entails wider responsibilities for global socio-economic development—beyond the mere avenues of getting a degree and pursuing a job. We are expected to be the investments behind and follow through on the thoughts leaders made on us, both by our families and other stakeholders. And such an expectation is certainly justified.



Dhaka may be a difficult city to live in. But for many Bangladeshis living abroad, Dhaka is the only home they have ever known.

PHOTO: PRABRIT DAS

But what does the life of an average expatriate student look like? The freedom of doing what we want, when we want, and how we want, allows us to have total access to the world and its perks. No parents, no guardians, and no continuous oversight over our day-to-day activities give us a free pass to any and all activities we see fit. Nevertheless, in this freedom, there is an ironic growing sense of responsibility.

As an international student at the University of Toronto, over the past three years, I have learned and got accustomed to small things which I was not used to before. After classes or work, I go back to my apartment, with no fixed idea about what I am going to eat for dinner. I am learning to cook. I am learning to clean. I am learning to wash my own clothes. I am learning, every day, how to manage simple responsibilities.

One tends to think that the ease of freedom international students like us is a cause for celebration. To an extent, and for many, it is. But over time, as part of this process, one learns how to manage this freedom and independence. And most importantly, managing ourselves as human beings and as a part of society. We adjust, we learn, and we adapt, but at least in my experience, and in my associations with members of the bangladeshi student community, we do not change to the society we live in; we remain deeply indebted to our familial and nationwide values and norms.

For international students, loneliness and anxiety can lead to depression, which has been cited by medical experts as a common trend across universities. While I myself have faced this in small spurts over the course of

my academic journey, I have my own way of dealing with it. Yet very are not that fortunate.

Home, you see, is a paradox. Dhaka is a city with high levels of pollution, congested roads, questionable state of safety, etc. Yet it is the same place which I and Dhakaites around the world call home. I tell my friends in Toronto, and do so proudly, that Toronto may be where I live, but Dhaka will always be my home. We love it, we cherish it, we miss it. So, as I return to Dhaka for these three weeks, I am overjoyed to be able to meet my family, and all the people I have called friends since my playground days in Sreemangla. I look forward to the intense football and cricket matches between friends, family, and random people who I don't even know. I am thrilled to be able to get a taste of the

elusive *bhai barrir kachchi biryani*. It is difficult for every international student to acclimatise himself or herself to a foreign culture, that too in a constantly evolving, high-pressure academic environment. Being a foreign student is much more than just doing well in studies. Our responsibilities cannot end with getting a degree, neither should it. As international students, we have the ability to make ourselves better, and make our country better, in whatever capacity we see fit. But we cannot do it alone. Support us, advise us, believe in us and guide us, as you have, believe in us and we will deliver. We may be living, working and studying in a foreign country, but our hearts belong to our country, our beloved Bangladesh.

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"Office of the Project Director" Establishment of Fish Landing Centres with Ancillary Facilities in 3 Coastal Districts at a Selected Area Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, BFDC Bhaban, 23-24, Kawnar Bazar, Tejgan, Dhaka-1215

বিঃ নম্বর/Division		Invitation for Tenders	
১		Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock	
২		BANGLADESH FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION	
3	Procuring Entity Name:	Office of the Project Director, Establishment of Fish Landing Centres with Ancillary Facilities in Coastal Districts at a Selected Area, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, BFDC Bhaban, 23-24, Kawnar Bazar, Tejgan, Dhaka-1215	
4	Invitation for:	Installation of Electrical Instrument at Alpur Fish Landing Centre, Patuakhali (Construction of Sub-Station Room, Installation of Sub Station Instrument & Campus Lighting)	
5	Invitation Ref No:	13/13/000/17/1/21	
6	Procurement Method:	Open Tendering Method	
7	Budget and Source of Funds:	GOB	
8	Project/Programme Name:	Establishment of Fish Landing Centres with Ancillary Facilities in 3 Coastal Districts at a Selected Area	
9	Tender Submission Date & Time:	03-01-2018 to 24-01-2018 (09:00 am to 5:00 pm)	
10	Tender Place:	a Office of the Project Director, Establishment of Fish Landing Centres with Ancillary Facilities in 3 Coastal Districts at a Selected Area, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, BFDC Bhaban, 23-24, Kawnar Bazar, Tejgan, Dhaka-1215. b Account Director, Chittagong Fish Harbour, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, Ichangura, Karmaliya, Chittagong. c Fish Landing Centre & Wholesale Market, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, 5 No. Shid Ghat, Khulna. d Fish Landing Centre & Wholesale Market, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, Parshurama, Barisal.	
11	Tendering Place:	a Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka Division, Segunbagicha, Dhaka. b Police Commissioner, Office of the Metropolitan Police-DMP, Ramna, Dhaka. c Office of the Project Director, Establishment of Fish Landing Centres with Ancillary Facilities in 3 Coastal Districts at a Selected Area, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, BFDC Bhaban, 23-24, Kawnar Bazar, Tejgan, Dhaka-1215	
12	Tender Opening Date & Time:	25-01-2018 Time: 09:00 am - 12:00 noon	
13	Tender Closing Date & Time:	25-01-2018 Time: 03:00 pm	
14	Tender:	Office of the Project Director, Establishment of Fish Landing Centres with Ancillary Facilities in 3 Coastal Districts at a Selected Area, Bangladesh Fisheries Development Corporation, BFDC Bhaban, 23-24, Kawnar Bazar, Tejgan, Dhaka-1215	
15	Eligibility of Tenderer:	This invitation for Tenders is open to all eligible Tenderers as mentioned below:- a) The Contractor shall be a Bangladesh nationality. b) Experience in Completions of Similar works at least 10 (Ten) (Up-to-date Income Tax Certificate d) VAT Registration Certificate e) Trade License (Up-to-date). f) Banked Security Certificate Tk. 100 (One Hundred) Lac. g) Firm Turnover is minimum Tk. 200 (Two Hundred) Lac. h) Registration of Firm with ABC License. i) Other required eligibility and condition of the tenderers stipulated in the Tender Data Sheet, Tender Documents & Public Procurement Act & Regulation.	
16	Price of Tender Document:	Tk.2,000.00 (Two Thousand) only in cash (Non refundable).	

A WORD A DAY

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Cobbler's tools
- Christmas song
- 10 Lack of order
- "Amahl and the Night Visitors"; e.g.
- 13 Parson's house
- 14 Pulp
- 15 Series-ending abbr.
- 16 Guest's bed
- 18 Fall mo.
- 19 Afternoon break
- 21 Part
- 22 Christmas baked treat
- 23 Speculative question
- 24 Windsor
- 25 Christmas baked treat
- 26 Cavalry soldier
- 27 Tyne of TV

DOWN

- 6 Gifted
- 7 Do over, as travel plans
- 8 Free of wisdom
- 9 Espresso order
- 11 Piece
- 17 Winter breakfast
- 20 Free of clouds
- 21 Dangerous gas
- 23 Brief rests
- 25 Con quest?
- 26 Niche
- 27 Writer Gordimer
- 28 Votes in
- 29 Titled women
- 30 Wryly excessively
- 31 Boomer of "Daniel Boone"
- 32 Gancy cane stripe color
- 38 Bitterly cold

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

MAJOR ROARERS
AMORE AUDIT
RIVON CREDIT
TINTEUR EGRESSOR
INDO SEG FERRY
NATS DANES
HOP REF
MEDIC WIDE
LOW RAP DITX
AVOID BEWE
PEROT PLEER
SOLVE INERT
ENDE NESTS

OCULUS NOON

A circular opening in the centre of a dome or in a wall.

Size: 8"x3
GD-1814

17 The Procuring Entity reserves the right to reject all the Tenders or any of the Tender processes.

Md Jannatun Naima
Project Director
Establishment of Fish Landing Centres with Ancillary Facilities Coastal Districts at a Selected Area, BFDC, Dhaka.