

Hospital waste management

Recent HC orders should help enforce the laws

WE have been covering the issue of reckless disposal of hospital waste and the health hazards they pose to the public for some years now. Unfortunately, our words have fallen on deaf ears of the management of hospitals and diagnostic centres. The ruling by the High Court on April 9, that the government form a three-member committee at all eight divisions to monitor and supervise medical waste management at these health institutions comes as a much welcome piece of news. The HC has also asked why ETPs should not be set up in all hospitals and diagnostic centres.

This careless behaviour is most apparent outside public hospitals where used products like syringes, bandage dressings and used saline bags can be seen littering pavements and clogging the drains. The problem of course is that these are often repackaged, particularly syringes, to be sold by spurious companies to unsuspecting customers.

The rules have existed for some time now, and we hope the implementation and enforcement of those would be effected immediately. With the explosion of diagnostic centres and hospitals all over the country, it is high time also that authorities make it mandatory for such institutions to set up effluent treatment plants (ETP) so that liquid medical waste may be treated before discharge into sewerage lines that end in our water systems. Proper waste management practices must be tagged to granting of or renewal of license because public health cannot be allowed to be trifled with.

Implementation of the HC ban long overdue

Brutal torture of a madrasa student

THE brutal torture of Omar Faruq, a 12-year-old madrasa student, by his teacher in Mymensingh has again proved the ineffectiveness of the laws to protect our children from various forms of violence that they are subject to. In this particular case, the child was not only beaten up but confined inside the madrasa for three days. He is still in an unstable condition and undergoing treatment in MMCH.

Although the High Court has imposed a ban on corporal punishment in 2010 declaring it as "cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and a clear violation of a child's fundamental right to life, liberty and freedom," the ban is not enforced widely. Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum's Child Rights Violation Data 2018 shows that in the first three months of this year, a total of 56 students were injured as a result of physical torture at educational institutions. Only in last March, an 11-year-old madrasa student named Tauhidul Islam died after being severely beaten by his teacher.

Besides implementation of the relevant law, social awareness is a must in order to stop corporal punishment in all educational institutions. To do that, teachers as well as parents must be made aware of the harm physical punishment causes children. In addition, the issue must be covered by the media more often. And the government must have a monitoring mechanism to oversee implementation of the law. In this case, the government must ensure proper treatment of the victim and the teacher must be dealt with severely.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Reform the quota system now!

The government should understand that the nation cannot move forward with an unjust system. A large section of students has raised their voice against the current quota system making it clear that they feel it is unfair. Simultaneously, it should be remembered that it is also inconsistent with our constitution.

In fact, it reminds me of the various forms of discrimination that existed prior to our independence. Such favouritism should have ceased to exist four decades on and the government should make reforming the quota system its utmost priority.

Md Golam Azam, By e-mail

Better bus service means less traffic congestion

To contain the daily chaos in our public transportation system, there really is no alternative to BRTC buses gradually taking over all the bus routes in Dhaka. It may also necessitate the restriction of inter-district buses from entering Dhaka. For example, buses coming from northern Bangladesh should not be allowed to ply beyond Uttara or Gabtali. Likewise, buses coming from the southern part of the country should be prevented from crossing Saidabad.

The government could also reserve the Mohakhali bus terminal as the depot for BRTC buses only. It should also consider giving bus drivers and assistants better benefits for the sake of better services to the public. If the government can streamline the sector to an extent where buses provide citizens with more satisfactory service, traffic congestion should reduce considerably.

Ziauddin Ahmed, By e-mail

Selective Conscience

KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

IN a discussion of inclusive growth two days ago, someone across the table brought up the topic relating to new employers coming into the F-commerce (Facebook commerce) and asked if they would be subjected to labour standards as well. I laughed in faith. Somewhere deep down inside, I know the new entrepreneurs using virtual platforms go by a higher code of conduct. I sense more empathy in all of them, much more than I ever sensed in our generation in business. Youth has always been better and as the secretary general of the ruling party has just said, the PM has never underestimated youth. She was there once and she knows how youth can yield change in society. Youth has always impacted our landscape. And that is why we have always viewed youth as an agent of change.

Years ago, when Google adopted "Don't Be Evil", people knew that the young Silicon Valley entrepreneurs won't subscribe to unfair practices and would never do the wrong thing. After all, data was holy and Cambridge Analytica was the farthest nightmare. But that was yesterday. Today, data is manipulated, gathered and today, Zuckerberg appears before Congress, to defend himself and to "Fix Facebook". Then, has wealth been able to soil the incorruptible youth? Does wealth really give birth to murky fears of insecurity and promote greed? Perhaps.

Or is it just strategic power that silences the call for justice? Perhaps.

Today, bleeding from issues wrapped in doubt, I am caught between writing an op-ed on two images that have touched me the most. One of a photograph from a young journalist capturing a young man standing with a flag of Bangladesh. Two, an image of painter Shahabuddin's Rohingya (2017). The first one captures the essence of being fearless. Unlike many of us, he is standing with the flag, amidst a haze of tear gas, fearless of the consequences that he might face. Unlike many of us he will not have to measure his words or temper his angst. But that's being fearless when one has nothing to lose.

And then, there's the second image of the painting, covered on a publication of Cosmos under the title of "Art against



Standing with the flag, amidst a haze of tear gas, fearless of the consequences that he might face, he will not have to measure his words or temper his angst, unlike many of us.

COURTESY: FACEBOOK

Genocide". That makes me think doubly hard about those who are devoid of any fear of being derided or couldn't care less about being judged while the world also turns blind due to the favours they reap from the aggressor's misdeeds. Really, what about the Burmese authorities who force their own to be homeless?

Come to think of the 1.1 million Rohingyas who we have just given shelter to. And then, come to think of the 1,134 lives that we lost in Rana Plaza on April 24, 2013. And now compare the international responses we received to these two. While Rana Plaza ushered in a host of bad press, censure and prescriptive corrective action plans with our business being threatened, Rohingyas fleeing to our territory just meant the international community urging Myanmar to take them back, albeit calling it a genocide and yet imposing no sanctions and not being half as generous as they ought to be. What is it that prompts discrimination of coverage? And who gains while we are treated with indifference?

With Turkey hosting 1.83 million refugees and Pakistan following with 1.54 million and Lebanon with 1.1 million, Bangladesh too joins the rank of the top hosts for refugees in the world by hosting

1.1 million. Yet strangely the data on refugee dates back to a few years. While any disaster in Bangladesh attracts big headlines, the generous positives take a while to make press waves.

Truth is, power and wealth both create illusions of absolute control. While the Burmese army stash their wealth beyond their own habitat, while the international community still continues to trade with Myanmar in the most favoured manner, while we all sit back and watch the innocent being driven to despair and death, the world will still move on and opt for a selective agenda and decide on tomorrow's headline. Meantime, Bangladesh will still be pushed to do more and we will never be perceived as being good enough for glory.

Since I began with a reference to a roundtable in the first para, I will end with the same discussion thread. In that meeting, Sultan bhai of Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies pointed out that exactly a month ago, at least 10 people were killed and 20 others injured in two separate road accidents on Dhaka-Rangpur highway in Palashbari upazila of Gaibandha. Exactly around the same time, a US Bangla Bombardier Dash 8 Q400 twin turboprop caught fire after

careening off the runway, killing almost 50 passengers. Out of the two cases, US Bangla passengers received 1 crore taka as compensation, while the Gaibandha victims were paid nothing.

We have a choice. Either we, within our own territories, can be more attentive, diligent and fare better than the rest of the world. Or, we can all pretend to be good and at one point, try to fool God. Perhaps the second option is easier? Then let's just close our eyes to bias, selective headlines and hurt. Let's stand for unexamined lives. Let's all read history, read and weep and forget it the next hour. Let's not preach anymore, and let's daydream about God. Let's just accept that whatever is served as justice and whatever that's chosen as headlines, these are disappointments to which little or no remedy exists. Thus, every time we feel being let down by the injustices all around us, every time we sense disappointment, let's not get caught up between laughter and tears, like I often do. Let's just choose laughter as it's a lot less-messier and doesn't require any cleaning up. Tears are much harder to manage, aren't they?

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Why is solar power development so slow in Bangladesh?



BADRUL IMAM

THE pace at which renewable energy including solar and wind is being developed worldwide suggests that these will overtake the fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal) as

dominant sources in power generation in a shorter time frame than previously forecasted. In mid-1990s renowned energy experts predicted that oil, gas and coal will remain the predominant fuel for power generation until 2030. This will give way to natural gas becoming the universal fuel in 2050; the battle between fossil fuels and renewable (solar and wind) for dominance over world energy market will begin in earnest by 2060 and the battle will clearly swing in favour of renewables by 2070.

The scientists are beginning to believe that this will happen in a timeframe earlier than suggested above. There are two reasons for such notion: firstly, the advances in solar and wind technology have been and will continue to be fast moving, thus lowering the cost and becoming logistically more acceptable and secondly, the green lobby has successfully influenced the governments worldwide to be more proactive towards the campaign for renewable replacing fossil fuels.

Bangladesh has a success story in developing off-grid rooftop solar power known as solar home system (SHS) which has given electricity to a large number of people living in rather remote off-grid areas and who would not have electricity otherwise. More than four million SHS installed domestically have uplifted the lifestyle of these impoverished people by providing small-scale power at their homes. But in the context of national power demand and generation, the contribution of SMS is tiny, a mere 250 megawatt, which is only two percent of the total power generation capacity in the country. In fact, in the solar industry worldwide, large-scale solar power generation essentially means on-grid solar (grid-connected).

According to the government plan, renewable sources should provide about 10 percent of the total power generation capacity by 2021, meaning 2400MW power generation from renewable sources. The prospect of wind power (presently

total installed capacity is 2MW), bio-energy (present installed capacity 1MW) or new hydro-power have been limited in Bangladesh and therefore, growth of renewable energy in Bangladesh will rely mainly on the development of on-grid solar power. At present the on-grid solar power generation capacity amounts to 15MW (Sreda 2018) including one well-publicised solar park with 3MW capacity built on 8 acres of land in Sarishbari in Jamalpur district.

With such low level of development it would be impractical to believe that the growth of solar power would reach anything near the projected target by 2021. To date, the government has approved proposals for establishing 19 on-grid solar power parks submitted by different private companies. Individually

grid solar has so far failed to provide a realistic hope of achieving projected government target.

What holds Bangladesh back in developing solar power? Realistically, there are a number of reasons that are restricting expected growth of on-grid solar. One of the major challenges is the difficulty of acquiring land. As per the government rule, no agricultural land can be used for solar power project. Bangladesh is a densely populated fertile agricultural land and non-agricultural unused land is not easily available. A 100MW solar park for example would require about 300 acres of land. It is expected that the efficiency of the solar panel will increase in future through new technological advances thus requiring lesser area for generating per unit of



the proposed solar parks have generation capacity ranging from 5MW to 200MW and the cumulative power generation of all these installations would amount to 1070MW. Among these, only six companies have so far reached the final stage of negotiations by signing power purchase agreement (PPA) and implementation agreement with the government. According to the prevailing regulation, a company has to complete the construction and start power generation within one and a half years from signing the PPA and IA. Unfortunately, none of the companies could complete construction and start power generation till date although the deadlines have passed. From the above, it appears that the development of the on-

power. But until that happens, acquiring land will be a major problem for rapid expansion of on-grid solar in Bangladesh.

Another drawback in developing on grid solar in Bangladesh is lack of governmental incentive. The companies which are engaged in negotiations and implementation of solar park opine that solar industry in Bangladesh is still in an immature and infant stage and requires incentives from the local authorities. A major point in this is fixing the tariff of the produced power. Over the last few years the cost of solar power generation and therefore the tariff offered has moved progressively downward as seen in India and China for example. In India, solar power was offered a tariff of 19 cents (1k

15.80) per unit in 2010 and this has come down to 5 cents (Tk 4) in 2017. Nevertheless, how logical will it be to take the Indian experience directly to fix the tariff in Bangladesh at this moment may be questionable for a number of reasons.

Firstly there are abundant areas left barren in India which are comparatively easy to procure (both in cost and logistic considerations) for solar park developments, including large span of deserts. This is not so in Bangladesh. Also the facts that the average sun shine time is 5.5 to 6.5 hour per day in India compared to 4 to 4.5 hours per day in Bangladesh. Furthermore India has by now achieved a solar generation capacity of 20,000MW and thus boasts a well trained and qualified work force of its own. On the contrary, Bangladesh has to depend essentially on foreign experts for development of solar parks. All the above factors let India generate solar power at lesser cost than that of Bangladesh.

The organisations engaged in building solar power plants in Bangladesh opine that unless incentive in solar power tariff is given, their effort to develop solar industry would not be economically feasible. It appears that the companies consider 9 cent per unit tariff offered by the government too low a price to build a solar plant and make a profit. Ideally, the government negotiators should be good at offering tariff which is biased towards the people and not towards the companies. But solar power industry in Bangladesh is yet to stand on its feet and at this initial stage it needs incentive to grow to a reasonable strength. Tariff incentive is perhaps a vital area which makes a company decide its future in Bangladesh.

From the above discussion it appears that the rapid growth of renewable energy in power generation will change the world for better in not so distant future. The use of traditional fuels oil gas and coal will gradually decrease to be replaced by renewable solar winds etc till a time when the formers will find their place in history book. Bangladesh does not have an option to remain isolated when rest of the world embraces a future with smarter and cleaner renewable energy for their power. The challenges in developing renewables may be high, but it is the government which should extend its hand to help it grow in the initial stage.

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