

New anti-narcotics bill may be counterproductive

Abuse of the law is highly probable

WHILE we are all for endeavours to clamp down on the onslaught of drugs that have had devastating consequences for our youth, imposing a death penalty for carrying, producing, trading and using more than five grammes of yaba and more than 25 grammes of heroin and cocaine, seems to be disproportionate to the crime. The Narcotics Control Bill 2018, that has been placed in parliament and has provisions for death or life imprisonment for these acts, overlooks certain ground realities and this is where this law may prove to be counterproductive.

For one thing we have already seen that ongoing anti-narcotics drives have led to a huge number of deaths that cannot be justifiably explained. According to reports, most of those killed were small-time traders and if they had been involved in drug peddling, they were not part of the coterie of drug lords who rule this business. It has been reported that even an MP is involved in the drug trade. None of the anti-drug drives so far have caught the actual ringleaders (including the suppliers) of the drug trade. The new law will thus be applied to the small fish in this dangerous trade leaving out the actual culprits.

What is most worrisome is the possibility of abuse of this law to frame and repress individuals. There have been reports of corrupt law enforcers placing yaba tablets in the pockets or bags of those they have apprehended and then accusing them of being drug peddlers. And if the death penalty is imposed on them, that would be a gross miscarriage of justice.

The government must also make sure that the main suppliers of these drugs are brought to book. And if the supply is to be stopped so must the demand which means the government must address the issue of drug addiction by helping rehabilitate addicts.

We urge our parliamentarians to take cognisance of these realities and refrain from passing this bill with such harsh provisions.

Ethical leaders in banks are a must

Will regulators take note?

WE appreciate the candour with which a senior official of Bangladesh Bank (BB) spoke about the problems affecting our banking sector at a seminar organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) on October 22. While the problems have much to do with the lack of ethical leadership practices of banks' top management, precisely what steps are being taken to bring to heel the rampant corruption was not outlined. The whole country knows about non-performing loans (NPLs), loan scams and forgery, but it is good to know that the BB has pinpointed that ethical practices must constitute the guiding principles for a bank's leadership if good governance is to return to our banking sector.

The inability of banks' senior management to operate without interference from banks' boards results in violation of existing banking laws, regulations and constitutions. This must stop if the banks are to avoid the NPL trap. Again, while we fully agree with this statement, it is hardly a revelation and one must ask precisely what BB is going to do about the many malpractices that have engulfed the banking sector—both state-owned commercial and privately-owned banks.

A research study by BIBM tells us that as of June this year, banks' total NPLs stood at Tk 89,340 crore (or 10.41 percent of all loans). If we really want a change in this situation, we need to enable the central bank with real powers of oversight. Otherwise, the most BB officials can do is attend seminars and give advice on the do's-and-don'ts of a healthy banking system.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Saudi Arabia must be held to account

Saudi Arabia has finally admitted that Jamal Khashoggi, a dissident Saudi journalist critical of the Saudi regime and a columnist for *The Washington Post*, was killed inside its consulate in Istanbul, Turkey. However, the regime, unsurprisingly, distanced itself from the murder, saying it was done by rogue agents who acted beyond their responsibility and authority. It seems like our collective intelligence is being mocked.

CNN has published Turkish surveillance footage of a body double of Jamal Khashoggi who wore his clothes and a fake beard to "prove" that Khashoggi had left the consulate shortly after he entered, as Saudi's initial narrative went. The body double was reportedly a member of the hit squad suspected of carrying out the assassination. In this case, it looks like that the murder was premeditated—not an interrogation operation gone wrong.

The international community must hold the Saudi regime to account for this grisly murder of a dissident journalist—be it in the form of sanctions or something else.

Karim Abdullah, Dhaka



KNOT SO TRUE
Rubana Huq

WHEN Accord and Alliance came to town, the brands and retailers had offered assurance of business continuity and were paying for the audits and assessments.

Taking financial responsibility for factory remediation was, of course, the manufacturer's end of the bargain. In five years, out of Accord's initially inspected 1,620 factories, 420 had shut shop; for Alliance, out of the initial 829 factories, 173 closed business; National Action Plan, out of its first 1,549 factories, terminated 566. In total 1,159 factories have gone out of business. In response to growing demands of remediation, Bangladeshi manufacturers have either chosen to grow or quit. Those who have managed to stay afloat, in reality, have been able to afford expansion or consolidation.

Going forward, as new markets emerge, position of the brands and retailers is bound to shift. As new capacities are added, the pressure on prices for Bangladesh will also continue to grow. This phenomenon is not a unique prediction. Even with increased capacities, manufacturers will continue receiving orders with lesser margins and a lower FOB (Free on Board) price. After all, the world's a "fair" place and the "fairest," alternatively known as the most competitive, will win the game.

After five years, with the possibility of Accord coming to an end on November 30, 2018 and Alliance on December 31, brands are left wondering about the future of the readymade garment industry in Bangladesh with respect to compliance codes. Beyond their terms, Alliance is ready to leave, perhaps with a heavy heart as continuation of remediation remains, to most parties, relatively uncertain. As for Accord, a special ruling from the High Court specified that Accord would cease after November 30, 2018 and could only be extended for six more months. And hence, a Transition Accord was framed to ensure the smooth transition of work and responsibility to a new organisation called the Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC).

The RCC was set up in May 2017 to supervise and monitor the remediation of factories under the Bangladesh government's National Initiative. Out of the 809 National Initiative factories undergoing follow-up by Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), 107 are fully remediated. Till March 2018, more than

50 percent factories remediated more than 50 percent and 111 factories remediated more than 80 percent.

The number of factories under RCC headed by the Ministry of Labour may depend on the new factories being added to the National Initiative or as factories leave Accord and Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. RCC is set to contribute to building capacity of regulators and establish a coordinated approach to safety inspections. Ultimately, RCC hopes to offer a "one-stop-shop" service issuing factory building, fire, electrical and occupancy permits.

Since the industry is very familiar with the initial rules of engagement focusing on structural, fire and electrical integrity, all we need today is a private-sector-led structure to sustain all the improvement that has been made. What could the

representatives from the manufacturers, brands and labour sides. The entity would be registered in Bangladesh under the relevant Act. Laws of the land, with regard to compensation, closure, penalty, would prevail.

For the initial period of one year, it could be supported by signatory buyers, manufacturers and third-party organisations so that the costs related to remediation can be met and independent verification of the existing factories can continue. By the time it is set up, the vast majority of remediation and assessments will already have been completed. New factories entering the pool of suppliers could pay for their inspections based upon the square footage of their facility. After a year, the platform could become fully self-

to the safety inspector. The signatories to this Agreement would, however, need to agree to ensure that suppliers who participate fully in the inspection and remediation activities of this Agreement would not be penalised as a result of the transparency provisions of this Agreement. However, if a supplier consistently fails to abide by the rules of compliance engagement within a specified period of time, the signatories could then promptly implement a notice and warning process leading to the termination of the business relationship if these efforts do not succeed.

It has been more than five years since Rana Plaza collapsed. It has been five years since factories have consolidated and moved to newer locations. It has been five years since manufacturers have struggled to sustain and grow their



PHOTO: ANDREW BIRAJ/REUTERS

structure look like? For easy reference, let's call it Platform S (S for *shomman*, meaning "respect" in Bengali).

Firstly, manufacturers along with brands could form S by having a Steering Committee, which would have representation from BGMEA, labour rights groups, brands and an ombudsman. In the Steering Committee, neither the BGMEA nor the brands would have a veto or majority vote. All decisions could be taken on a consensual basis. In case of dispute or vote tag, judgment of an independent ombudsman would prevail, taking in consideration views of all parties. The Committee would overview cases, implementation, financial management and management operations, while a CTO could oversee the technical operations. A review panel could be in place, consisting of elected

financing and external contributions would be discontinued. Independent third-party auditors having prior audit and certification experience could be contracted to undertake all structural, fire and electrical audits. Signatory companies would require their supplier factories to respect the right of a worker to refuse work if he or she has reasonable justification to believe that the factory is unsafe, without suffering discrimination or loss of pay, including the right to refuse to enter or to remain inside the factory.

Meanwhile, the appointed CTO would establish a workers' complaint mechanism that would ensure that workers from factories supplying signatory companies can raise, in a timely fashion, concerns about health and safety risks, safely and confidentially,

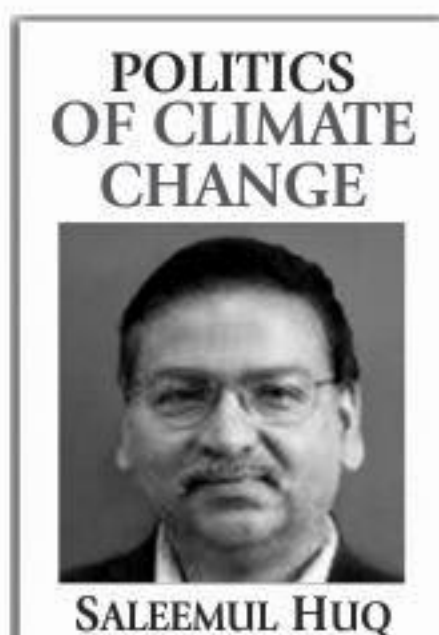
businesses. Five years is a long time for an industry to set its own standards.

If the industry is subjected to prescriptions from stakeholders from abroad, then the basic ability to reform ourselves will be in doubt. Irrespective of whether the Accord gets another six-month lifeline, irrespective of the RCC continuing to monitor the industry standards, the industry, on its own, needs to have a parallel platform. The best way forward would be a way to transition into a plan of self-monitoring initiated by the industry itself, which will be appropriate for the owners, workers, brands, unions and the rest.

This way, no trust will be lost and no well-meaning attempt of the suppliers, brands or the government, will be belittled.

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Challenges for the new Global Commission for Adaptation



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
Saleemul Huq

Bangladesh, and around twenty eminent individuals who will be the Commissioners, including Dr Musa, head of BRAC in Bangladesh.

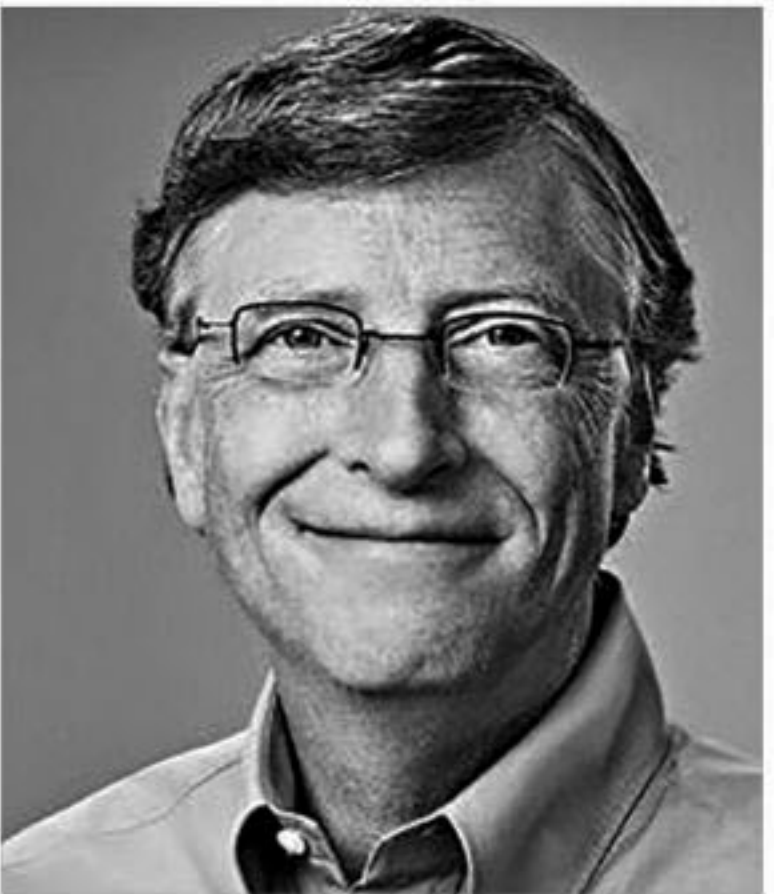
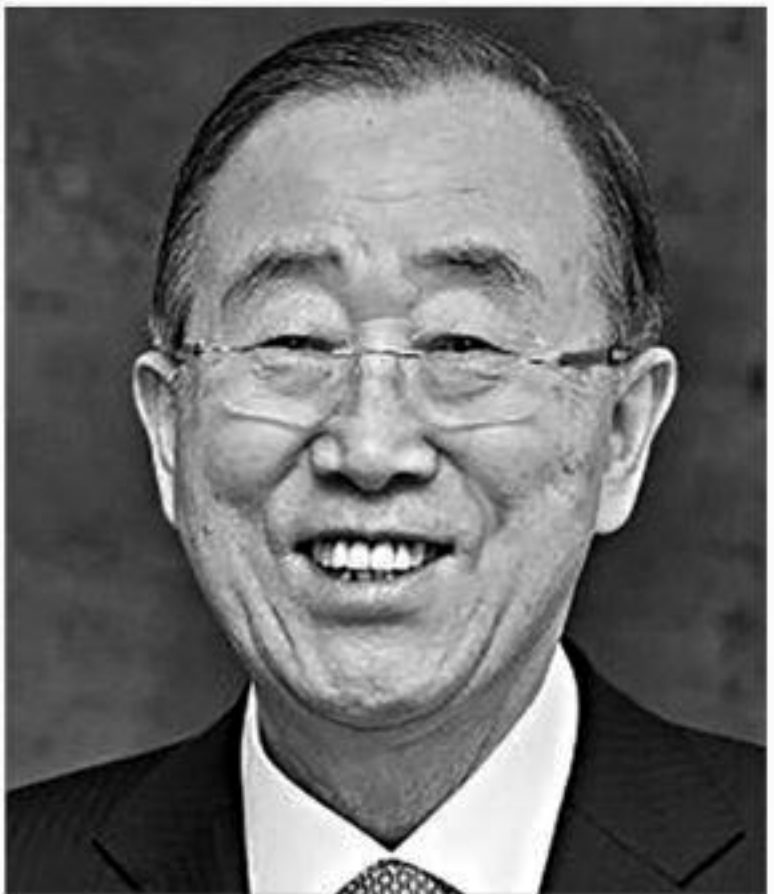
At the launch ceremony in the Hague, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave a pre-recorded video statement of support and the Bangladesh Minister for Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud was there to represent Bangladesh.

experts from around the world who will write background papers on different aspects of adaptation to climate change.

The Global Commissioners will also visit different countries for consultations and then produce their report and present it to the current Secretary General of the UN António Guterres at the Global Climate Summit in New York in September 2019. The Commission will then continue its work for another year to promote its recommendations around the world and particularly to donors, funders and investors to raise the amount of funding for adaptation actions around the world.

They have been invited to visit Bangladesh in January 2019 to take part in the 5th Annual Gobeshona Conference in Dhaka to observe the deliberations on climate change research into action in Bangladesh through the Gobeshona platform of over fifty universities and research institutes in Bangladesh working on climate change research over the past five years.

While the Commission will try to bring much needed attention and funding support to adaptation efforts in the poorer developing countries, it will at the same time also advise the developed countries on how to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, like the recent hurricanes Florence and Michael in the US and wildfires in Australia.



(L-R) CEO of the World Bank Kristalina Georgieva; Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; and business magnate Bill Gates.

Ban Ki-moon, in his opening statement, also praised Bangladesh as a role model for incorporating adaptation to climate change into national development planning and investments.

The Global Commission is supported by a Secretariat of the World Resources Institute (WRI) based in Washington DC and the Global Centre for Adaptation (GCA) in the Hague and also by a group of scientific

They will also participate in the 13th International Conference on Community Based Adaptation (CBA13) to be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in April 2019 in order to develop a stream of work on assisting the most vulnerable communities and countries own ongoing efforts at Adaptation.

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adaptation efforts in the poorer developing countries, it will at the same time also advise the developed countries on how to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, like the recent hurricanes Florence and Michael in the US and wildfires in Australia. The setting up of this Global Commission for Adaptation is very timely after the adoption of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on 1.5 Degrees that has highlighted the need for more action on mitigation to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. However, there is also a corresponding need to focus on adaptation to the impacts of climate change which are already now happening and affecting poorer and vulnerable communities the most. In particular there is a need to enhance the flow of global climate change funds for adaptation to the poorest countries.

If successful, the Global Commission on Adaptation should be able to raise the profile of adaptation to climate change, as needed in addition to mitigation, around the world and in particular raise the quantum of funding that is flowing towards supporting adaptation in the most vulnerable communities and countries around the world.

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