

## Newly elected lawmakers should take PM's advice

*Be humble and stand by the people*

THE PM's cautionary advice to the newly elected lawmakers not to misuse their position is certainly a sobering directive for her future cabinet and gives hope for the ordinary people. She has asked them to be humble, to not consider themselves to be too powerful and to work sincerely. She has also warned against corruption and reminded the MPs that a third term victory obliges them even more to live up to the expectations of people who have voted for them. More importantly, she told her colleagues that the new government would have to work for all citizens, not only those who voted for "boat".

The carefully worded speech of the third time elected PM alludes, no doubt, to excesses that often come with excessive power. During the last term of the AL there have been allegations of such abuses of power and it is a positive beginning of the PM's new term that she has made before the new cabinet is formed.

We are in unison with the PM's observation that the ruling party's main challenge is to fulfil the pledges in their election manifesto. These pledges include a "zero tolerance for corruption" (which includes strengthening the Anti-Corruption Commission and Human Rights Commission), safer roads and a disciplined transport sector, expanding modern urban amenities to rural areas, ensuring employment for young people, developing a skilled and service-oriented public administration and people-friendly law enforcement agencies.

We cannot but help view such pledges with a little wariness considering the ground realities during the ruling party's last term. Corruption in fact has been the biggest impediment to development and unless the new government clamps down on its various manifestations in major sectors, it will not be able to keep its promise of unhindered development, a central point of the ruling party's election campaign. Violation of human rights, too, have been a major issue in the ruling party's last term and the government must make sure that such violations do not take place anymore.

We hope that the newly elected government will heed the PM's advice by exercising humility and restraint, by strengthening public institutions so that development and democratic values will progress hand in hand.

## Workers' safety must come first

*Enforce the laws*

IT is disturbing to learn that despite our repeated calls to the authorities to ensure safety of our workers at workplaces, no substantial steps have been taken so far to stop or even reduce the number of deaths in workplaces. Instead, the number has actually increased. According to a recent survey, 592 workers were killed in 484 workplace accidents across the country in 2018, whereas in 2017, the number of deaths was 437. This rise in number should be a cause for concern.

According to the SRS (Safety and Rights Society), the two sectors with most of the deaths are the construction and transport sectors, as 184 workers were killed in construction sites while 170 were killed in the transport sector last year. Other reasons of deaths included electrocution, hill collapse, inhaling of poisonous gas, etc.

What is surprising is that while we talk about the issue of road safety, we often forget to mention the safety of our transport workers who are most vulnerable to road accidents. Thus the issue of transport workers' safety must be taken seriously.

This daily has regularly been publishing news and photos depicting the hazardous conditions in which our workers have to work. But the authorities seem to be turning a blind eye to the issue. What is most unfortunate is that most of these deaths can be prevented only by ensuring that the workers use the necessary safety gear during work. The government needs to be strict in enforcing the existing laws regarding workers' safety to stop such accidents. In addition, the employers must be held accountable for these unexpected deaths, as workers' safety must come first.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Demand justice for rape victims

Setting the credibility and transparency issues of the recent elections aside, one incident that occurred in relation to it which is completely unacceptable was the rape of a woman who is also the mother of four children.

According to reports, the woman was gang-raped simply for exercising her right to vote. Despite intimidation by some goons, she voted for who she had wanted to. For those hooligans, the fact that a woman had refused to obey their order and stand her ground was apparently too humiliating.

After initial hesitance, the police have arrested all of the accused following a massive outcry from the people on social media. While that is good news, let us not forget that the accused in the Raintree Hotel rape case are currently out on bail and are roaming freely. We don't really know how much time it will take for justice to be delivered for the victims. Therefore, all of us should continue demanding justice for those who are victims of one of the worst crimes that could possibly be committed.

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asset and helps in ensuring enhanced productivity, adoption of new technology, global competitiveness, increased income and reduction of poverty. The East Asian countries achieved a higher growth path with adequate investment in skills development.

In Bangladesh, skills development is required in both formal and informal sectors for additional employment generation and on-the-job capacity building. In 2017, 86 percent of the total employed population aged 15 and above was in the informal sector as per the Labour Force Survey 2017, and this is why enough emphasis should be placed to build skills of those working in the informal sector in addition to those in the formal sector.

There are various actors in the field of skills development including those who deliver training for potential migrant workers. Technical and vocational training are provided by over 13,000 training centres in the public and private sectors and 1.3 million people received training on 87 trades in the country in 2017. This is, however, not enough to enhance the skills of existing and potential workforce in the country.

There are certain weaknesses in the skills development area such as lack of data, training programmes not matched with market needs, especially in the overseas markets, training courses not recognised internationally, quality of training varying greatly between providers, absence of standardisation of similar courses, etc. Poor skills training leads to low wages both locally and internationally. Many courses do not cater to the special needs of women and people with disabilities. Those trained in many cases do not get employment opportunities in the relevant field.

The Skills Development Policy, 2011 highlights the importance of a coordinated effort to contribute to attaining the country's middle-income status by 2021. The policy is intended to reach all relevant age groups with internationally comparable skills for both male and female population, disabled and socially excluded, workers in both small and medium-sized enterprises, and ensure resource

availability based on type of skill requirement both domestically and internationally.

Bangladesh depends substantially on remittances received from its workers in many countries of the world, to meet its foreign exchange needs. It is extremely important to focus on skills requirements in these countries to improve foreign exchange earnings which is not growing at an expected rate. The Bangladeshi migrant workers' average annual per capita income is about USD 1,000 compared to USD 2,000 for India and Pakistan and USD 3,000 for Sri Lanka because 80 percent of our migrant workers are untrained. This shows a huge



difference within the South Asian region which needs to be addressed through skills development of our people.

Several important trades that require skills development in Bangladesh are, for example, plumbing, welding, carpentry, TV and fridge repairing, wood carving, lacquer polishing, nursing, tourism, food processing, mobile phone servicing, electrical house wiring, glass and mirror fitting, masonry works, car and motor cycle servicing, tailoring and dress making, tiles fitting and steel furniture fabrication. Locally, vocational skills are required for diversification of export-

based industries and internationally, for increasing wage levels of migrant workers. Skill enhancement in several international languages especially English and Arabic but also Spanish and French, are badly needed. In a globalised world, language skills can open up many avenues in international job markets for our people. Similarly, computer skills can enhance earnings through on-line job creation.

Despite the country's high growth rate of around 6 percent for many years and making remarkable progress in a number of human development indicators, we do not have a fully skilled workforce. There is also a mismatch between the demand and supply of skills and quality issues in

and also many who are aspiring to change their jobs and move to high-paid jobs. The labour force of the country is growing at a rate of 1.3 million per year about half of whom are women. To achieve a better workforce, there is no alternative to building higher skills of the people.

Continuous job creation should be the foremost priority of the policy-makers to alleviate poverty by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goal 8 requires us to achieve full and productive employment, and decent work, for all women and men by 2030. For this, along with increasing the vocational training opportunities, formal education in colleges and

## Did colourism always exist in the Indian subcontinent?

MUHAMMAD RAKIBUL ISLAM

WHEN talking about discrimination, usually the topic that is widely discussed and studied is racism or the practice of discrimination of people based on race. In the Indian subcontinent what is more widely popularised as a major socio-cultural practice and has profound implications, yet less talked about and even less studied is the topic of colourism.

Colourism, says Wikipedia is "a form of prejudice or discrimination in which people are treated differently based on the social meanings attached to skin colour." This is very true in the case of the subcontinent and more often faced by women than men—which again requires a completely different study and would involve seeing things through the glasses of gender-based discrimination.

However, ideas like the fairer a woman is, the more "beautiful" she is or the more "marriageable" she is are two common examples of the practice of colourism. It would require writing another article to explain why colourism is in simple terms, bad and should be abolished as a practice. For this article, I am strictly adhering to the study of how colourism came to be in the Indian subcontinent.

So did colourism exist in ancient times in the Indian subcontinent? When and how was colourism introduced and initiated as a socio-cultural practice?

The Indian subcontinent has people with distinct features based on their geographical location. People up North generally have fairer skin and people down South generally have darker skin with a wide spectrum falling in the middle as we progress geographically from North to South. This difference can be attributed to the mixture of the immigrant Aryan population with the ancient tribes of the Indus valley civilisation up North and the Dravidian population flourishing down South. However, even with the existence of this

difference in the skin colour of people, the idea of colourism did not exist and in fact, people of different skin colour were equally celebrated.

In the ancient texts of Mahabharata and the Vedas, there are both dark-skinned heroes and deities as are light skinned ones and are celebrated regardless of their skin colour. This goes to show that both dark and light skin colour were celebrated, and both considered beautiful in their own regard. Prejudice simply did not exist back then on the basis of colour.

There are recorded instances of the lighter skinned Aryan population fighting against their darker skinned subcontinental counterparts, which some historians have dictated to be

Portuguese and of course, the British. The Muslim rule of India consisted of several Muslim dynasties ruling over the Delhi Sultanate and later by the stronghold of the Mughal empire. During Mughal rule, Emperor Akbar was the first to make a thoughtful effort to unite the subcontinent. During the years of Muslim rule, there are no accounted instances of ruling based on the preconception of skin tone. However, the subcontinent did then come under the rule of Mughals, people of Persian and Arabic heritage having a fairer skin tone than the average person of the subcontinent. The system got formed of fairer skin people to rule over the subcontinent, but it was not institutionalised or



events of prejudice based on colour. However, in reality, it was a fight to control territory, harness wealth, cultivate crops and graze cattle—basic cases of a population wanting to survive not a fight based on race or colour.

Things were good in the case of colourism back then but soon enter the long reign of Muslim invaders, predominantly the Mughals, the

politicised.

Finally, came the age of British colonial rule. This brings forward the first accounts of discrimination based on colour and the system of colour-based oppression becoming institutionalised. The British, who had fair skin, began preaching their idea of being superior and more intelligent as a race and hence meant to rule over inferior humans all of

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whom basically had darker skin colour. They built certain restaurants, clubs and institutions that prohibited entrance to dark-skinned individuals. During their rule, when it came to employment, they gave more preference to lighter skin individuals. They also provided them with more power and made alliances with them.

Public ridicule of darker skinned individuals and the institutionalisation of the idea that the lighter the skin more superior brought into the socio-cultural environment of the subcontinent, the basis of colourism. Hundreds of years of being ruled by lighter skinned individuals with the Muslim rule of India, other Europeans like the Portuguese and finally the British (with them institutionalising the idea), unknowingly or unwillingly, people began the association of fairer skin tone with greater social superiority. Even years after independence from the British, partition of India and independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan, the idea of colourism still remains deeply rooted systematically in our cultures throughout the subcontinent.

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