

## Alarming suicide rate at public universities

### Greater attention to mental health issues needed

**I**N an alarming development reported by *The Daily Star* on Wednesday, the suicide rate at public universities has shown a dramatic upward trend, with a reported case of 19 deaths in five universities last year. This is over three times as high as the 2017 rate—a growth trend that bears disturbing similarities to the national suicide figure. The question is, why are a growing number of students succumbing to self-destructive temptations? Clearly, there is still a tendency to undermine mental health. The rise in suicides among students, while a national health issue, goes to show how unprepared public universities are in dealing with such incidents.

Most of the public universities in the country have mental healthcare cells but few are effective. For students, however, besides the well-known reasons for suicide including academic stress, often a suicidal tendency may emanate from feelings of helplessness resulting from how they think they were treated by their teachers and university officials. Some recent cases have proved this although the authorities are still in denial. We need to understand that addressing an issue as complicated as suicide requires an open mind and a comprehensive approach which will require universities to not only invest heavily in mental health, to ensure proper and timely counselling for the vulnerable students, but also address hitherto-unaddressed factors such as how students in general are dealt with. This is also true for other academic institutions, public or private, which should have the same approach to mental health issues.

More importantly, as part of its national suicide prevention mechanisms, the government should devise policies that will make it imperative for all universities, colleges and schools to give mental health its due importance.

## Innocent workers must not be victimised

### Cases filed against 'unnamed' garment workers

**I**N the aftermath of the violent protests that engulfed the garment factories in Ashulia and Savar industrial zones, the police have filed cases against 215 individuals and a further 1,000 unnamed garment workers on charges of vandalism and looting and reportedly more than 800 workers have been laid off. While we fully endorse that those involved in damaging and looting of property during the labour unrest are held to account, it is also our position that workers shouldn't be randomly sacked or suspended from jobs without adequate proof and going through the proper process.

The government has revised the wage board and we have been assured that the new wage board will be followed from now on. It is imperative that calm and order is restored in the RMG industrial parks in the country because work stoppage is something neither the industry nor the workers can afford. At the end of the day, committing vandalism, destruction of property, arson and looting are unacceptable at any level no matter what the circumstances.

Garments workers in general need to understand that these factories are the hands that feed them and protecting them is in everybody's interest. The information gap regarding what is owed to whom under which pay grade is something that needs to be narrowed. Workers, factory owners and the country as a whole suffer when we cave in to our more primal instincts and resort to violence that leads to work stoppage and loss of business. The statement 'no work no pay' is a death sentence for any worker and whatever differences of opinion exist, workers need to shun this culture of violence and learn to bargain collectively over the table to get their dues.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Rohingyas belong to their homeland

The governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh seem to agree that forcibly displaced people from the Rakhine State of Myanmar, who are currently sheltered in refugee camps in Bangladesh, have to return to the land of origin sooner or later. For Bangladesh, it's obvious that nearly a million or so Rohingya refugees should go back to Rakhine State where they had lived for generations until recently.

On the other hand, by citing Rohingyas as being of Indo-Aryan race, Myanmar is clearly disowning them and refusing to acknowledge that they are native to Myanmar. Myanmar's central argument doesn't hold water and it is beyond unfortunate that over the years, they have promoted such hateful rhetoric against the Rohingya minority that today the entire society in Myanmar harbours resentment against them.

Jeyaraj Veluswamy, Kolkata



PHOTO: AFP

# Our expectations from the new leadership

### STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

**T**HE prime minister's call to party-men and supporters to remain calm and exercise restraint after assuming office for the third consecutive term strikes well with the ethos of a responsible democratic polity. It would not be naïve or asking for the impossible if citizens desire to see a transformative leadership in PM Sheikh Hasina in her new term in office.

The people are looking forward to a new direction, a new era, a new life. It can be the time for shaping and moulding a new society, for giving a new and clear orientation to the nation. It could also be the golden moment to start transforming our task-oriented society into a modern society. Such a modern Bangladesh has to be a land of opportunity and not opportunism.

In the wake of the huge victory, let us remind ourselves that in the sub-continental perspective, the people have risen to great heights when they have basked in the glow of noble kings or leaders; and significantly, regimes and kingdoms have been destroyed not by

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adversity but by abasement. The point to note is that corruption is the greatest solvent of public institutions; poverty poses a far smaller threat. The call of the day, therefore, is to provide moral leadership which the people are yearning and waiting for. People need to be served by vision and imagination.

There is no denying that a significant indicator of the resilience of a polity is the extent of its financial accountability and discipline. That being so, the

customers have none to effectively protect their interests. In such a lackadaisical state shady directors have a free rein to play with depositors' money. The need is to discipline the mega loan-defaulters and stop the indiscretion of the bank directors to sustain public confidence in banking system.

On the economic front, broadly speaking, Sheikh Hasina's government may consider to achieve the following four objectives:



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paramount need to remedy and punish the huge indiscretions committed in the banking sector brooks no further delay. If exhortations and persuasions do not produce results in disciplining the loan defaulters then the coercive powers of the State need to be resorted to. When civil laws are blatantly flouted by not-so-civil elements the long arm of the law has to be used to ensure fair play.

Let us remember that while the depositors are the real owners of the banks, in reality the hapless and helpless

- (i) to increase the gross national product and transmute the people's spirit of enterprise into national wealth;
- (ii) to create jobs and enlarge the availability of productive works;
- (iii) to regulate reasonably the distribution of income; and
- (iv) to revive public morality and reward integrity and industry.

The reality is that we have hardly an economic problem which would be beyond the capacity of a knowledgeable

organiser with an iron will. A strong leader with a huge mandate realises that development begins with people and not with goods. Such leaders can evoke the response from the people, without which governmental plans turn to ashes.

Can we hope that the inspirational leadership of Sheikh Hasina would be such that every class of citizens is motivated to put the nation above the party? Shall we aspire to see that money would be regarded as something to be earned rather than to be got or won? Simultaneously, must we not stop our society from disintegrating into factions and divisions?

Societal cohesiveness is critically important because in a country where all the groups function harmoniously, the results are fantastically gratifying—totally out of proportion to the inputs. Germany and Japan are examples of the synergistic effect of such harmonious cooperation.

We would do well to remember that the staying power of democracy varies from country to country. The timing of political breakdown depends upon the strengths of political institutions. Collapse may not overtake a country marked by economic failure where the political institutions have acquired durability through age and tradition.

Let us also remember that "Republics are created ... by the virtue, public spirit and intelligence of the citizens. They fall when the wise are banished from the public councils because they dare to be honest and the profligate are rewarded because they flatter the people in order to betray them". Citizens of Bangladesh wish and pray that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government will be limited not in responsibility but by the rule of law and by the discipline of the constitution.

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# A new learning paradigm

## Why educational institutions in Bangladesh should adopt the outcome-based approach to learning

### MM SHAHIDUL HASSAN

**I**N the beginning of the twentieth century, a growing number of educators, professionals and representatives of the business community in western countries began to realise the shortcomings of the traditional education (TE) system. The system cannot help learners effectively implement their knowledge in the real-world environments. Moreover, the TE model does not inspire learners to come up with their own ways of approaching and solving problems. As globalisation continues to shape national and international marketplaces, employers' needs are constantly changing. To help ensure a successful transition in students' careers, academic institutions in addition to imparting knowledge also need to focus on development of communication skills, entrepreneurship, innovation and creative systematic thinking in students. To develop a system that will be more appropriate in the present context, educationists and policymakers in Bangladesh need to spend time in understanding the advantages offered by the model implemented in some countries over traditional model.

The TE model gives students very little say in what they learn. The only way to gain knowledge is to follow a set curriculum in a set order. The curriculum design focuses on the transmission of discrete pieces of information and has not set any outcome goals. Teachers mainly focus on effective delivery of topics of courses and do not help students in developing the competencies and achieving mastery. They do not monitor academic progress of each student. Therefore, TE model is for mass consumption rather than individual needs, learning styles, and outcome goals. This trait suppresses the creative side of their personality and they never get to know their strengths.

Consequently, educators were looking for an alternative education model. Since that time the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) approach to teaching and learning has been receiving strong support at an international level and many universities in western countries have adopted OBE. Many countries in Asia have also implemented OBE substituting their old systems. OBE is a learning model (Spady, 1986) that organises curriculum content and learning activities around specific, demonstrable outcomes. Educators are embracing outcomes-based learning because it means that students are

coming out of the classroom with the skills they need for the real world.

In a traditional education system, actual achievement of a learner is not measured by the institution. Learners are given grades and rankings compared to each other. The highest-performing learners are given the highest grades and test scores, and the lowest performing learners are given low grades. The failure of some learners is accepted as a natural and unavoidable circumstance. On the contrary, OBE propositions every student can succeed by making learning meaningful, even though every student is not expected to perform at the exact same level—learning at the same pace

programme, that provide clear information—the knowledge, skills and essential qualities.

Learning outcomes help teachers to tell students more precisely what is expected of them, help teachers select the appropriate teaching strategy matched to the intended learning outcome, e.g. lecture, seminar, group work, tutorial, discussion, peer group presentation or laboratory class, help students to learn more effectively. Students know where they stand and the curriculum is made more open to them; it is made clear to students what they can hope to gain from following a particular course or lecture. Stakeholders such as teachers,



and in the same way as peers.

Sociologist William Spady and the originator of the OBE defines it as "a comprehensive approach to organising and operating an education system that is focused on and defined by the successful demonstrations of learning sought from each student". In the outcome-based approach, curriculum design of a programme begins with clearly defined student learning outcomes. Intended learning outcomes (ILOs) are statements of a learning achievement and are expressed in terms of what the student is expected to achieve on completion of the

students, parents and employers are involved in selecting learning outcomes of a programme. With a socio-constructivist base that makes allowances for stakeholder input, OBE is becoming a living educational model, adapting to new demands and needs.

There are two categories of outcomes. Students need to demonstrate some outcomes during their study. There are some outcomes called the exit outcomes. The drafting of exit outcomes is the most complex and difficult part of the implementation process and the most crucial to success. Educators need to understand the importance of involving

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all segments of the community in generating clearly defined outcomes, since these outcomes will ultimately reflect community values. The challenging task of developing performance-based indicators to gauge how well students will achieve essential outcomes is a critical step. Each course has 3-5 Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs). If a student fails to achieve any ILO or ILOs well, the instructor will give him/her time to achieve them before giving him/her any grade.

In Bangladesh about two million educated individuals enter the job market every year. Providing employment opportunities to such a huge population is a difficult task for the government as well as local private sectors. It is, therefore, imperative for institutions to mentor the youth for entrepreneurship, and also to develop high level skills and competencies for placing them in global job markets. The youth will create jobs for themselves and also make themselves more competitive in the global market.

Institutions in Bangladesh should think about adopting OBE for the improvement of the education system. However, there is a history of failure when it comes to implementing OBE in many countries. At the initial stage of implementation we will not change the existing grading and exam system but accept widely practised teaching methods. Curriculum of a programme will be designed targeting some predetermined objectives. Teachers will set questions to test whether students achieve CLOs and ILOs. However, the lack of expertise in the country may call for foreign OBE specialists to train our teachers and guide them on how to design curricula and for effective teaching and learning.

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