

# Here, Now & Forever

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Derelict doctors

### Regime of impunity must end

THE Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has introduced a telephone hotline recently and has been getting calls about absentee doctors in district hospitals and health complexes. We are pleased to note that the ACC had sent teams to inspect 11 government hospitals and health complexes in eight districts (including Dhaka), and found that 92 out of 230 doctors were absent from their workplaces. The issue of doctors not being on station is old news. What is new is that the ACC has inspected government hospitals and health complexes and found out for itself that most allegations people have been lodging are true.

It is indeed sad that these medical practitioners take advantage of the culture of impunity that seems to have become normal in government service. We fully agree with the ACC that if doctors do not have the spirit to serve the people, they should leave the service. Yet, these doctors have been taking all the benefits without performing their duty, and, as the ACC team visits disclosed, 40 percent of doctors were absent from their places of duty, and instead indulging in private practice. This is corruption by any definition, and the absentee doctors must be held to account.

In this regard, we would call upon the ACC to address corruption in other areas also; in particular, the development projects, where alleged corruption is very rampant. Needless to say, corruption stifles our economic progress and must therefore be curbed. The ACC is there to be the eyes-and-ears of the government to combat the menace—a priority area laid out by the prime minister himself. As such, it should be equipped with appropriate powers if it is expected to produce results.

## Drawing pay and perks for doing nothing

### OSD for eight years!

WE are surprised to learn that a secretary of the railway division under the former communication ministry (now ministry of road transport and bridges), who was made OSD (Officer on Special Duty) in 2011, has gone on post-retirement leave with the same status. Going by our report on September 16, 2011, he (then an acting secretary) along with 18 self-confessed corrupt officers of the ministry were made OSD following a spree of media reports involving them with corruption. Although the person in question was made an OSD, the reason for this could not be known as nothing was mentioned in the office order. At that time, sources at the ministry claimed that he was not performing well. But strangely enough, he was promoted to the rank of secretary only a few months after he was made OSD.

What kind of a punishment is this when the said official is getting his salaries and other perks and privileges without performing any duty? And if he was made OSD as a punishment, why then was he promoted to the rank of a secretary? If someone is not fit to perform or if there is a genuine ground to punish a government official, shouldn't that be done following the proper procedures and as per the law? Also, how long can a government official continue as OSD?

According to our report, around 500 government officials now have OSD status who are just drawing perks and privileges doing nothing. There is a provision for OSD in the government's service rules according to which OSDs must play some specific roles and responsibilities, for particular duration. But unfortunately, making OSD has become a tool of punishment or sidelining an officer on political grounds.

It is time we questioned this practice and the serious lack of transparency in the whole process. It is a waste of public money to have so many officers on "special" duty.

KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

I laugh when the western media goes on a rant about us, the eastern democracy, the eastern economy and the eastern human rights condition. Once upon a time, in a decolonised space, many non-residents wanted to be interstitial, pledged to be citizens of the world, with occasional references of having a cup of *chai* here and listening to the briefest interludes of *sitar* there. But all that have changed. The once expected eastern defeatism does not fly anymore; and contrary to the position of "holier than thou", most western states are now prime examples of kakistocracy.

At a time like this, a *Guardian* report on the Spice Girls T-shirts bearing the "#IWannaBeASpiceGirl" message was, if not anything, but most distastefully spicy. The *Guardian* "investigation" finishes all the accusations almost in the first couple of paragraphs. It speaks about the workers in a particular factory being paid at 35p an hour, being verbally (thank God for not including the physical) abused, "forced" to work for 16 hours a day, and producing T-shirts for celebrities selling at UK pounds 19.40, donating 11.60 to Comic Relief's fund to help "champion equality for women." Here's the response:

*If corrections are to be made in specific and isolated cases, then that must be dealt with wisdom and with an intent to add value to the workforce. That cannot be done by random accusations.*

- 1) The article does not mention how much the factory was paid. Paying a factory USD 1.5-2.5 range T-shirts and claiming fame to ethical sourcing and random references to "living wage" must be stopped. The reason we can't pay our workers more is because we don't get a fair price.
- 2) The charity to which the money is being donated pledges equality for women. I can't but agree to the cause, specially because Bangladesh, according to the ILO report, has the lowest gender pay gap in the world.
- 3) Referring to "working in inhuman

set by industrial engineers and workers often find them hard to accept. But with time, most factories can explain that there is a clear relationship between wage and efficiency. Bangladesh, limping at a national average of 40 percent efficiency has a long way to go with other factories in the world sporting an easy 70 percent mark.

- 4) The over-generalisation of Bangladeshi factories having "gross violations of labour laws and human rights" in the report is unacceptable. Rather the brand position was appreciable, which



PHOTO: REUTERS

conditions" in one line and then saying that the factory has air conditioning in the factory floor is a serious contradiction.

- 4) The report, in utter bad taste, also mentions the factory being part-owned by a minister in Bangladesh's "authoritarian coalition" government. Seriously? Brexit happened because of a few politicians deluding the citizens, as a result of which United Kingdom is marathoning towards an economic collapse and here we are, ironically reading about a moral deficit in Bangladesh, which is growing at the fastest pace with a 7.86 percent growth target?
- 5) The report also refers to "impossible" targets being set for workers. In compliant factories, (Interstoff is certainly one of them), the targets are

promised to stay "committed to help this country and workers to improve their welfare." Thank you, brand.

In the report, the blatant tendency to draw hasty conclusions, and cater to popular appeal is clear. If wage is a concern, then fair price must be taken into the discourse; if abuse is an issue, then specific cases must be reviewed with an objective yardstick; if fingers are being pointed towards specific owners, then the target should not be political castigation, rather the general reputation of the particular owner, who has tirelessly contributed to the industry.

Margins in readymade garmenting are poor. This is not news. What is news is that we have more than three million female garment workers who have graduated from abject poverty to a position of economic empowerment, projection of

which is totally missing in the narrative. Besides, all must kindly remember that perception and isolated complaints cannot make news. Overall factory conditions must be studied in depth before filing such reports.

Stories of workers celebrating new year in their best clothes are seldom reported; tales of garment workers attending universities never make headlines; workers working and swinging their heads to music from the top charts are never photographed. What is repeatedly making the front page is the story of low wage and abuse.

Let us remind the world that contrary to their belief our workers are not subjected to dreadful working conditions; our workers fill our workspaces up with eagerness and enthusiasm.

Difficulties and complaints are common in any workplace. But that is addressable. What is not addressable is the continuous factory bashing that the many western media outfits constantly engage in. This way, the chances of these women working in the sector get undervalued. If corrections are to be made in specific and isolated cases, then that must be dealt with wisdom and with an intent to add value to the workforce. That cannot be done by random accusations. To us, our workers make us. To them, our businesses sustain their lives. Any attempt to diminish that sense of pride of ours, will never be able to dent our spirit or resolve. We will be who we are today.

I was speaking to a friend last night who was referring to expectant mothers rushing to America for their childbirth, with the hope of an American citizenship. Another friend, steeped in extreme Asian adulation, differed and proposed China instead, not knowing that China doesn't offer the same privilege and that the Chinese economy has just reported the slowest growth of 6.6 percent in the last three decades.

At that point, I stepped in and gently reminded them that all those citizenship-craving mothers will have to refund all their tickets, as there aren't any other feasible alternatives anymore. For the people of today and tomorrow, in spite of all the invectives, criticism and critique, the only address is Home ... for here, now and forever. No other land counts, no other promises prevail.

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## Aligning climate plans for a greater impact

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

BANGLADESH has a long tradition of national development planning under the aegis of the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning

Commission, through the seven Five Year Plans prepared since we became an independent country. Recently, there have been a number of additional types of planning which will need to be well-aligned if we wish to achieve our goal of becoming a climate-resilient country by 2030. Some of these require examination and we need to discuss ways to ensure their mutual alignment going forward.

The first and longest-term one is the recently approved Delta Plan that has a time horizon up to 2100. Only the Netherlands has drawn up such a long-term plan and Bangladesh is the second country in the world to do so. It is more of an aspirational evolution towards our future development rather than a detailed plan, as the normal five-year plans will still remain the overriding planning vehicle, with the next one being the 8th Five Year Plan (8FYP)—which will start from 2021 onwards.

The second vehicle is to the year 2041 which is a perspective plan that is supposed to earn Bangladesh the middle-income status over the next few decades. This will also need to be translated into five-year segments to feed into the 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th Five Year Plans to be implemented over that time period.

Then we have a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have a time horizon of 2030 to be achieved. These goals are global goals agreed at the level of the United Nations for all countries to implement at the national level, using common metrics to measure progress towards each of the 17 goals. In case of Bangladesh, all 17 SDGs have been mapped onto different lead ministries and support ministries for each goal by the Planning Commission. In addition, a high-powered monitoring unit has been set up at the prime minister's office to track progress by each ministry for each of the 17 SDGs.

In addition to these development-oriented goals, there is also a goal on disaster risk reduction under the global Sendai Framework which each country is

supposed to try to achieve disaster resilience by 2030. In case of Bangladesh, the lead for this is assigned to the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MDMR). There are also civil society and military allies and actors that are involved in the implementation of this plan.

Finally, there are two climate change related goals agreed globally under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change to be achieved by 2030. The first goal—which is about mitigation—is to reduce emissions of Greenhouse Gases that cause climate change so that global temperatures are kept below 1.5 Degrees Centigrade by achieving 100 percent reliance on renewable energy in every country by 2050. The second goal is to achieve transformational adaptation to the

emissions of Greenhouse Gases by 5 percent by 2030, and if we get additional funding and technology, then we can reduce them by up to 15 percent. Finally, we are about to develop the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) which every developing country has to prepare to chart its objective of becoming climate-resilient by 2030.

In addition to these plans and goals, there are also others in different sectors, such as health, energy, agriculture, and water development, which are being developed by the respective ministries and departments.

It is clear from the above discussion that there is a lot of potential overlaps and lack of synergies unless these are addressed from the very beginning to



Bangladesh should align its many different plans and goals related to climate change for a greater impact.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### What do employers want from fresh graduates?

The transition from one's formal education to the first job can be daunting. Quality universities help prepare students for this transition period through rigorous internship programmes, career fairs and career counselling. Others, however, do not.

Candidates almost always fail to impress the employers unless they have a comprehensive work history. Therefore, even CV writing is an area that needs substantial attention. Job posting websites, which allow their users to create automated CVs using pre-structured templates, are to blame for their utter indifference to the importance of creating a meticulous CV.

Some, for example, put down language skills related to "Arabic and Hindi" in their CV despite not having a passable skill to be used professionally. Most applicants list hobbies like "cricket" or "listening to music" in their CV. Most CVs contain basic grammatical errors. All these seriously hamper their chances.

A few select public universities, such as IBA of Dhaka University or BUET, and private universities such as North South University or Brac University properly equip their students to some extent, but a vast majority of students are left with a "cut & paste" syndrome. In many cases, most students do not go through apprenticeship, which would have helped them bridge the gap.

Instead of trying to overcome their shortcomings, many students only rely on references and lobbying. We can only hope that our educational system innovates itself in order to help students cope with demands of the time.

Ashikul Hoque, From Facebook Page

ensure that each plan is well-aligned and linked, where necessary, to the other relevant plan(s). Also, it is imperative that the Five Year Plans should be the main vehicles into which all the others will be mainstreamed, starting with 8FYP which we will have to start developing very soon.

There are three overarching ways in which we can ensure that such synergies and mainstreaming is effectively achieved over the coming decades.

The first is to ensure that all the plans are aligned with each other while the 8FYP is started and developed. This is the responsibility of each ministry to liaise with the General Economics Division in the Planning Commission to ensure that

one of the biggest differences between the past and the future of the country is the shift from public sources of investment to private sources and also for the private sector to implement most of the plans. Hence, the country will have to become better at ensuring a whole-of-society approach rather than just a whole-of-government one with regard to both the planning and implementation of all these tasks. Bangladesh would do well to ensure that we find synergies and alignments among all the different plans.

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