

Untreated industrial effluents spell doom

Make effluent treatment plants mandatory for textile industry

A recent study by Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology (BUET) paints a gloomy picture of the state of water bodies in the country. Unless steps are taken today, it is estimated that the textile industry will be dumping 20,300 crore litres of untreated wastewater into the country's water bodies every year from 2021. The industrial discharge into rivers and wetlands will also seep through the ground and adversely affect underground water tables.

In and around Dhaka, thousands of textile mills are pumping out untreated wastewater that has been used for washing and dyeing fabrics. Dhaka city's water supply has already paid a very heavy price over the last two decades since Hazaribagh tannery industry was allowed to operate in the heart of the city. Now, we are faced with a problem that is of a much greater magnitude since there are thousands of textile factories. Wastewater generation will only increase as Bangladesh gears up to reach USD 50 billion in exports a year by 2021.

Although we have laws like the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997 that made effluent treatment plants (ETPs) mandatory for factories, these rules have never been seriously implemented. Although ETPs are installed in about 70 percent of factories, a large number of these factories do not use them. Smaller factories, on the other hand, have never installed ETPs to begin with. Factory owners mostly cite the high cost of running chemical-based ETPs for not using them; but our question is: why is the government failing to do its job as the regulator? Why, knowing full well the cost to the environment and public health, doesn't the government implement rules that will make it extremely costly for errant factories to dump untreated effluents into waterways? We cannot afford the large-scale destruction of the environment so that industries can go on producing their goods. A balance has to be struck between profits and safeguarding the environment and that responsibility falls squarely on the authorities concerned and they must implement existing laws.

His CBA status gave him undue privilege

Misuse of public office facilities must end

THE story of a class III employee of Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) using an SUV he was not entitled to for 10 years, is quite surprising. It is hard to believe that such misuse of a government office car could go on for 10 long years without his supervisors knowing. And if they did know about it, why would they allow him to continue for so long?

According to the news report that revealed such abuse of power, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) found out about this during a drive conducted after receiving a complaint about the stenographer who is also the general secretary of PDB's collective bargaining agent (CBA). The graft watchdog also calculated that around Tk 1 crore of public money had been wasted because of this misuse. It includes expenses for fuel and driver's salary.

What is puzzling is that this complaint has come after so many years of such blatant misuse of office facilities. Did no one in the office find it necessary to report such misconduct to the higher authorities? It seems holding a post in the CBA has given this employee undue privilege; in fact he has continued using the office vehicle one year after his retirement.

What is more concerning is that this is most likely not a one-off case and there may be other such instances where employees of government offices who hold CBA posts use office cars and other facilities that they are not entitled to. The ACC should investigate other public offices and make sure that such blatant misuse of public funds is eliminated.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A viable alternative to polythene bags?

As we know, the use of polythene, a non-biodegradable item and the most common plastic, has become widespread around the world—to the point that it is now one of the biggest threats to our environment. Discarding polythene in the soil amounts to leaving this toxic material there forever. Yet, although this is common knowledge, the use of polythene continues for various reasons and the market is saturated with polythene products.

The government has declared that people will soon have an alternative. Biodegradable polymer bags made from jute, or golden bags, will be released in the market. These golden bags will help brand Bangladesh internationally, and they are environment-friendly. There are also considerations for the private sector to eventually manufacture and market these bags. In appearance, the bags resemble polythene bags already available in the market, but are stronger and more durable. Made of jute cellulose, these poly bags decompose and mix with the soil faster. They are being seen as an excellent alternative to the existing polythene bags. It is clear that with government patronage, the private sector too will come on board and help make this initiative successful. This will certainly be a step forward for our environment.

Zubair Khaled Huq, by email

The power of the youth

They can help establish good governance and rule of law, and arrest the backslide in our moral and social values

AHMED A AZAD

THE year 1991 is a significant one in our history. By the beginning of that year, General Ershad had been forced out of office and it is in 1991 that parliamentary democracy was formally restored. The collapse of the USSR, a staunch ally of Bangladesh during the Liberation War, was a setback for progressive politics in the country and elsewhere, and it also facilitated global economic domination by predatory capitalism which has seen 99 percent of the world's resources being concentrated in the hands of one percent of the world's richest.

Bangladesh has also not been immune to this development, where ideology and liberation values have flown out of the window and have been replaced by pervasive greed-driven corruption made possible by a quest for rapid economic growth at any cost. Since 1991 the two parties that have ruled Bangladesh by turns have fought bitterly to retain or regain power by any means, as victory assures a ride on the "grave train" while defeat results in deprivation and persecution. Parliament is dominated by the rich and the powerful as politics is viewed by some as the best business for wealth accumulation.

Last month it was reported that Bangladesh ranks third among the world's top countries with the fastest millionaire population growth; and the country has the world's third highest income disparity between the richest and the 20 million extreme poor. This is attributed to gross financial irregularities and flight of capital. AL's stand on "zero tolerance against corruption" will be supported by everyone, but for it to be effective and credible, the search for culprits must start with people closest to power and previous perpetrators must not be spared.

AL won the 11th parliamentary election with an astounding majority of seats and votes amidst allegations of massive vote-rigging and intimidation. The AL government is set to rule for the next five years and preside over celebrations of Bangabandhu's 100th birth anniversary and the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence.

With its extraordinary majority in parliament, AL can pass and enact any law and, if it so wishes, use this special power to bring about much-needed political and electoral reforms and strengthen good governance and rule of law. The honourable PM could show statesmanship by extending an invitation to learned citizens and experts representing different sections of society, and pro-liberation political parties, to a national dialogue with an agreed agenda that could include discussions on issues such as an election-time government acceptable to all; a law for formation of a truly independent and powerful Election Commission (EC); funding and conduct of election campaigns by EC; election of MPs through proportional representation; delineation of respective responsibilities of MPs and upazila chairmen; and decentralisation of central government entities, regional development and strengthening of local governments. Recommendations from such a national dialogue would help to bridge the chasms that now divide the nation which would be an appropriate 50th anniversary present to the citizens of Bangladesh.

Besides loss of ideology and liberation principles there has also been rapid erosion of moral and social

values as seen by the increase in violence against women and children. The task of arresting this slide and upholding the essence of *muktijuddher chetona* could fall on the shoulders of the new generation of youth who, unlike the preceding one, have been fortunate to learn about all aspects of the Liberation War and are more likely to keep alive the dreams of Bangabandhu, and of those who took up arms in his name to establish a just and equal society based on four fundamental principles.

As a generation that is better educated, tech-savvy and politically and socially conscious, they could be inclined to take up the cause of the voiceless common man and raise their own voices against corruption and economic exploitation, and for equality, good governance and protection of the environment. If their elders are unable or unwilling to take necessary remedial measures, and if public aspirations are not

support communications and regional growth. However, sustainable growth higher than 10 percent of GDP required for meeting the SDGs and for transition to the next stages of economic development is only possible by providing youth with the appropriate education, skills and full employment. Highest priority must be given to technical and vocational training, and to producing highly trained teachers for all levels of education. There is a big disconnect between the skills and professionals being produced in our universities and colleges and what is required by employers, leading to high unemployment of local graduates and unnecessary hiring of foreigners. Appropriate courses and curricula need to be designed based on the types and numbers of graduates and professionals required to meet present to long-term needs. International competitiveness is critically dependent on



met or suppressed, then they will come to the fore and accomplish the needful as they have done time and again in the past. Those movements were led by Ducsu and other student bodies till 1990. So, people are eagerly looking forward to a free and fair Ducsu election for the emergence of fresh leadership to guide and support the aspirations of students and the youth. Without representative student body elections, spontaneous protest movements, such as the Gonojagoron Moncho and the recent quota and safe road movements, could erupt at any time and may not be that easily contained in future.

The impressive and prolonged 7 percent GDP growth has relied largely on cheap labour provided by young women and men working in agriculture and RMG sectors, and by unskilled expatriate workers. The GDP growth could be further bolstered by good governance and corruption-free infrastructure developments that

postgraduate research and innovation, academia-industry partnerships, and involvement of NRB scientists and experts in research capacity development. If Bangladesh is to benefit fully from its fortunate youth population dividend to meet its stated socio-economic goals, then current inadequate budget allocations need to be increased to the recommended 6-8 percent of GDP for education and training, and at least two percent of GDP for R&D, research and innovation.

Guided and motivated by the founding principles and empowered by quality and need-based education and training, the young generation could provide the leadership in establishing economic prosperity and social justice in parallel, and hopefully put Bangladesh back on the intended path of the Liberation War.

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Lounge #2: A Narrative of Pride



magical surprise or rapid development, but one thing was for sure: it was a land that told and sold stories well.

I had come to Samsun, a city in the north coast of Turkey and major Black Sea port. The mission was to see two factories which had offered joint collaboration on two areas: production of readymade garments and transportation of the same in much shorter lead time, and design capabilities.

Turkey boasts an ever-growing FDI figure of USD 7 billion (from January to August 2018), the head of the Presidential Investment Office Arda Ermut had declared a few months back. The reality is Turkey has seen a 22 percent year-on-year decline in FDI. The reality is inflation is more than 25 percent. My personal reality is that a Turkish businessman accompanying me was sharing the saddest stories of his nation and was pointing out that nation-building was no more the goal and that reality was a constructed plane suiting the fancy of the ruler. We spoke on and, finally, when we had finished the factory tours and had reached the airport in Samsun, we cracked up looking at the identical coffee shops at both ends of the airport. One was selling coffee, the other drinks. Both the shops were deserted though. Then, almost immediately, we were being called to Lounge #2. One would automatically assume that there would be more than one lounge to name the other lounges sequentially. There wasn't any other lounge. And that itself was called "Lounge #2". At the corner, there was another board saying "International Departure". My Turkish colleague then told me that there were currently no flights flying out of the

airport bound for international skies. On that note, he shared that many were engaged in a new level of national promotion.

Right after I boarded my flight back to Istanbul, as luck would have it, a half-page report in the centre spread was about a "Bengali artist" delving into Third World Internationalism. It was a huge coverage of our own historian Naem Mohaiemen's exhibition of films, installations and essays, which shed light on Bangladesh's complicated post-colonial journey in three phases—from

in Bangladesh is closely matched by Maldives, which has helped in reducing extreme poverty in the region. True, the region faces 26.6 percent multidimensional poverty, but extreme poverty is around 11.9 percent, and, importantly, the most positive story is about the poor living at SAR poverty trend of USD 1.90 a day is at its lowest now. And in all of this, Bangladesh has had a terrific contribution which we can be proud of, and Bangladesh's contribution to the regional scenario has been phenomenal.

GDP growth recorded at 7.86 percent (compared to a pre-1971 figure of 5.6 percent) in the last fiscal, by virtue of which Bangladesh today has the 42nd position in GDP ranking.

By 2041, Bangladesh aims to produce 82 gigawatts of electricity, attain 10 percent GDP growth, is going to be hungry enough to attract FDI worth USD 216 billion, and is also aiming to become the 23rd biggest economy in the world...

The best news is that the current path that Bangladesh is on is not one of isolation, but one of collaboration. While the world is moving away from interdependence to independence and ultra-nationalistic urges have triumphed over integration, the story of convergence and collaboration is still a valid discourse in Bangladesh.

And yet, in spite of being happily drenched in the stories of success and aspirations, we sell ourselves so short...

We are paid less, just because we can't negotiate; we are so busy firefighting that we can't see tomorrow and hence fail to set visions; we are hungry for our gains and hence we can only compete and not converge.

But this is not the time to whisper; this is the time to hold a megaphone in hand, so that the world gets to hear the story of Bangladesh's development surprise. In spite of most western nations practising ultra-nationalistic, populist rhetoric, in spite of the general universal inhumanity being preached all over the world, we, at our end, stand proud as the provider of a safe haven for over a million Rohingyas.

Bangladesh can't be shamed anymore. For every critique, a counter-narrative of high achievement must surface. We have millions of stories to flaunt and not too many to shy away from. Now is the time to bask in our glory and spread the word. Let the search for the best never defeat the better. Meanwhile, the national narrative of pride must set in at all levels. There is no other alternative for us, but to be the best and the biggest storytellers of our current times.

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Bangladesh has come a long way in attaining food security and poverty reduction.

1905, 1947 and 1971. *The Daily Sabah*, towards the end of the review, had called him "a prolific artist."

That soothed my senses. That story was all ours. And that story was true.

My point today is all about taking pride in who we are, what we are, and where we are.

A quick look at the regional scenario... the overall poverty picture has changed due to the growth of Bangladesh.

The South Asia Economic Focus report of fall 2018 reveals that real GDP growth

Bangladesh's success in the energy sector is certainly popular discourse in any regional meet. Today, we are a proud nation with 127 power plants producing 20,885 MW of electricity and catering to 3.22 crore consumers, out of which 10,925 MW are supplied by the private sector while import figure stands at 1,050 MW.

The fact is that our GDP per capita rose to USD 1,751 (against a pre-1971 figure of USD 138.2), total GDP reached USD 286.82 billion (as opposed to a pre-1971 figure of USD 4.3 billion), and