

No silver lining for street kids

Take measures to reduce their vulnerabilities

IF Bangladesh's fast-growing economy is a "mystery" to the rest of the world, as we are told, perhaps no less mysterious is how the fruits of this economy have bypassed a large segment of its population—the poor and the underprivileged—who continue to form the crux of our enduring "development paradox". A report by *The Daily Star* on Wednesday brought renewed attention to the plight of one of these groups: street kids. These children, who are believed to be in their millions, spread out across all major cities, live a dangerous life and are subject to various forms of abuse and exploitation. Our report mentions a study by an NGO that says that 75 percent of the children are involved in child labour. Besides the often hazardous work that they're forced to do by nefarious gangs, they are subjected to early marriage, sexual harassment, drug abuse and so on. Often organisations working to provide basic schooling to them have found that these children are not allowed to go to school by the gangsters who control them.

Evidently, Bangladesh has yet to reach a point where it can ensure decent living for all citizens. A myriad of factors is responsible for the homelessness of these children and their parents, and needs longer term plans to address. But safety has nothing to do with one's standard of living—nor is it a difficult target to achieve for a well-meaning administration. The problem with how these children live is that their vulnerabilities are exploited almost as a matter of routine, because of a lack of protective measures and the indifference of institutions and individuals responsible for their safety which of course include law enforcement agencies. This can be understood from the fact that there has been no national survey on these children yet, which could be a starting point for their proper rehabilitation. The women and children affairs ministry and the social welfare ministry, which are primarily responsible for these children, must make it a priority that no exploitation of any kind takes place against them. They must also take all measures necessary for their proper upbringing which includes their right to live in a safe environment and the right to education.

Crack down on syndicate manipulating airfares

Artificial monopoly of tickets can adversely impact migrant workers

THE World Bank's latest Migration and Development brief puts Bangladesh as the third-largest earner of foreign remittance from expatriate workers in South Asia with USD 15.5 billion in 2018. This is definitely good news because it is helping alleviate our foreign exchange crisis. The remittance basket could be helped further if the problems of recruitment malpractices could be tackled. Unfortunately for Bangladeshi expatriates, the situation has turned dire with the doubling of airfare in recent weeks and the suspension of a number of airlines' flights from Bangladesh. Recruiting agencies have gone on record to state that the one-way airfare for Saudi Arabia jumped from Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000, which is more than an increase of 100 percent.

Recent newspaper reports have highlighted the price manipulation being done deliberately by some airways personnel, who are obviously reaping a windfall in profits in light of the fact that a number of airlines have wound up their business in the country. However, this has already put a dampening effect on international travel, particularly for economic migrants. The claim by recruiting agencies that travel agencies are hiking fares abnormally is something that needs to be looked into seriously by authorities. With some five to six million expatriate workers headed primarily to the Middle East, any artificial monopoly of tickets created will significantly increase the cost for migrant workers to go for overseas jobs and that will have serious consequences for remittances. It is time to investigate those involved in the ticket racket and resolve this matter as soon as possible.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Better waste management needed

Waste management is one of the most neglected problems we have in Dhaka city. The two city corporations responsible for waste management are doing a terrible job of maintaining Dhaka's cleanliness.

After collecting waste from houses, they often dump that waste on the roadside in open dustbins. It is then loaded onto trucks and disposed of at landfills. The process is very archaic and tedious. And people are often exposed to waste dumped along roads for a long time.

The negative health impact of this is barely considered. It is time for our city corporations to consider using Circulatory Dust Vans to address this issue. A Circulatory Dust Van is a smart, dynamic and compacted van which has two chambers, one is for septic substances and the other for non-septic substances. These small vehicles have portable cover like polythene, so there will be less chance for people and the environment to get exposed to the toxins that the waste contains.

The advantage here is that no fixed dustbins will be needed and there will be no or less negative impact on human health.

Md Rashedul Hasan Chowdhury & Md Rakib Hasan
Department of Environmental Science
Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)

Dhaka University: Challenges for the future



Dhaka: Making, Unmaking, and Remaking" in 2016. The editors hoped, "If a generation of people were involved in making the university and, sadly, another generation in unmaking it, then surely there is hope that yet another generation can engage themselves in remaking the university."

Also in 2016, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) released its report on faculty faculty recruitment practices in public higher education institutions (HEIs) only to be dismissed outright by both the University Grants Commission and Association of Universities of Bangladesh. Those at the helm of the HEIs are either unwilling or unequipped to interpret data and take corrective actions. In the last 24 months, we have seen news headlines such as "57 DU Law Students Fined for Plagiarism" (*The Daily Star*, October 2016); "Stealing PhD Thesis, Dhaka University Suspend Teacher" (*Daily Sun*, December 2016); and "Plagiarism a Result of Shady Recruitment at Dhaka University" (*Dhaka Tribune*, October 2017). These headlines are in sharp contrast with what was envisioned in 1921 by Sir Hartog, DU's first VC.

Perhaps, it would do well to look at the hiring process of Professor SN Bose. He was a reader at DU in 1926 when professorship of physics became available. Bose had authored work with Albert Einstein which provided the foundation for what came to be known as Bose-Einstein statistics. He had also authored five other peer-reviewed works. He applied for this position but so did DM Bose. SN Bose's reference was Albert Einstein himself. The external reviewer for this appointment was Arnold Sommerfeld, the world's leading expert of atomic spectra. Based on his review of requirements, DU offered professorship to DM Bose. Only after DM Bose turned down the offer was it then offered to SN Bose. A lot has changed since then including the initiation of the DU Ordinance 1973. During the eight-year tenure of the immediate former vice chancellor, at least 78 of 907 recruited faculty members did not meet the minimum qualifications. Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury is noted to have surmised: "The university has become an educated people's slum" (*Dhaka Tribune*, October 2017).

DU Ordinance 1973 in effect replaced meritocracy with what turned out to be democracy of mediocrity. From then on, this Ordinance has been manipulated in hiring vice chancellors, deans, and heads—in some cases compromising quality vital to higher education and contributing to conflicts. The issuance of the Ordinance was followed by the assassination of seven students in 1974. By 2014, another 67 would be killed in political conflicts in DU and another 73

in other HEIs.

The standing of universities is determined by how they are ranked for its faculty prowess, as measured by both quality and quantity of knowledge generated by them. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) global rankings take into account six metrics: academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty-student ratio, citations/faculty, international faculty ratio, and international student ratio. DU was ranked 365th by QS in 2005 and since then it's been declining. It was ranked between 550th and 600th in 2010, 601+ in 2012, 701+ in 2014, and now between 701st and 750th. Webometrics, on the other hand, ranks over 20,000 global HEIs in terms of impact of their web content. According to Webometrics, DU was ranked 3,627th in 2011 while BUET ranked 2,108th. And

Pakistan were ahead of Bangladeshi HEIs. A non-HEI—the Centre for Health and Population Research (CHPR)—not bound by the Ordinance, is amongst the top 38 percent of global institutions. In comparison, 60 in India and two in Pakistan are non-university entities. Organisations such as Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, Bangladesh Council of Science and Industrial Research, and others seem to have been afflicted with the very malaise that is harming DU and other HEIs.

One of the consequences of the 1973 Ordinance is an explosion of low-quality journals that are used to aid faculty promotions. DU happens to lead the pack. Publications in these journals, a large fraction of which is suspected to be plagiarised, give an impression that these

top quartile of journals. India with 1,302,605 citable documents in 1996-2016 and H-index of 478 ranked 9th in the world. Pakistan with 109,760 citable documents and H-index of 197 ranked 46th while Bangladesh with 35,538 citable documents and H-index of 154 ranked 61st. Bangla JOL journals did not contribute much as far as impact is concerned.

The hiring process and retention of faculty members often guarantee the maintenance of political control over the institutions. Many of these journals are meant to help faculty members get promotions, even if it's by publishing work later found not to be original.

The credit for confronting plagiarism in Bangladesh goes to the International Conference on Computer and Information Technology (ICCIT), the



now, there are two institutions ahead of DU. Eight private universities are now in the top 20 HEIs from Bangladesh indicating that private HEIs are a force to be reckoned with.

Scimago Institutions Rankings (SIR) provides one of the most exhaustive measures of HEIs. In 2011, it ranked 3,042 entities. By 2017, SIR ranked 5,250. Although Bangladesh has 135+ universities, only eight met the minimum number of publications required (at least 100 in SCOPUS database during the last year) to be included in the SIR Report. SIR uses three indicators: research performance, innovation outputs and societal impact. The research performance in turn includes: number of articles, normalised impact (ratio of average impact compared to world average), leadership excellence, total number of authors, scientific leadership (number of corresponding authors from the institution), international collaboration, quality, and excellence.

During 2005-2009, 58 in India and eight in Pakistan were ahead of DU. In 2013-2017, 199 in India and 19 in

authors are engaged in research. In 2011, DU produced six journals. By 2018, the number grew to 13. In 2011, Bangladesh Journals Online (Bangla JOL) included 73 journals of which only eight could make it amongst the top 18,854 global journals. Bangla JOL listing now includes 142.

The department once chaired by Bose has branched out into three divisions. Their 41-member faculty, in 2014-2015, published 12 citable works and nine non-citable works. This implies a yearly rate of 0.293 citable article per faculty, i.e. it takes 3.41 years for a faculty member to produce one citable article.

The quality of a journal and its articles is measured by the number of researchers who use them for research purposes. Each journal is measured in terms of both SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) and H-index (based on the set of the researcher's most cited papers and the number of citations that he/she has received in other publications). In 2018, 15 journals from Bangladesh were included in 28,606 global journals. Of these, only the *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition* (associated with CHPR) was within the

longest running conference in Bangladesh. ICCIT typically attracts 369 submissions and has an acceptance rate of 37.49 percent. Beginning in 2003, ICCIT introduced manual plagiarism check and since 2006 has been using software to detect plagiarism. A few HEIs have been taking action against plagiarists. In recent years, we have seen some awareness about plagiarism among universities, and ethics education initiatives pushed by the Center for Ethics Education, a joint venture of Dhaka Ahsania Mission and North American Bangladeshi Islamic Community. These efforts can have a long-lasting impact in Bangladesh.

In support of "recovering, reimagining, and rebuilding" the HEIs, grassroots efforts have begun to take shape. To sustain their remaking trajectory, Bangladesh will need to deal head-on with DU Ordinance 1973, eliminate low quality in-house journals and appoint, retain, and promote talent on the basis of high-impact works.

Mohammad A Karim is Executive Vice Chancellor, Provost, and Chief Operating Officer of the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, USA.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Trump's most worrisome legacy



border, notoriously housing young children in wire cages. But Nielsen's departure is not likely to bring any improvement, as President Donald Trump wants to replace her with someone who will carry out his anti-immigrant policies even more ruthlessly.

Trump's immigration policies are appalling in almost every aspect. And yet, they may not be the worst feature of his administration. Indeed, identifying its foulest aspects has become a popular American parlour game. Yes, he has called immigrants criminals, rapists, and animals. But what about his deep misogyny or his boundless vulgarity and cruelty? Or his winking support of white supremacists? Or his withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, the Iran nuclear deal, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty? And, of course, there is his war on the environment, on healthcare, and on the rules-based international system.

This morbid game never ends, of course, because new contenders for the title emerge almost daily. Trump is a disrupting personality, and after he's gone, we may well reflect on how such a deranged and morally challenged person could have been elected president of the world's most powerful country in the first place.

But what concerns me most is Trump's disruption of the institutions that are necessary for the functioning of society. Trump's "MAGA" (Make America Great Again) agenda is, of course, not about

restoring the moral leadership of the United States. It embodies and celebrates unbridled selfishness and self-absorption. MAGA is about *economics*. But that forces us to ask: What is the basis of America's wealth?

Adam Smith tried to provide an answer in his classic 1776 book *The Wealth of Nations*. For centuries, Smith noted, standards of living had been stagnant; then, toward the end of the eighteenth century, incomes start to soar. Why?

Smith himself was a leading light of the great intellectual movement known as the Scottish Enlightenment. The questioning of established authority that followed the earlier Reformation in Europe forced



society to ask: How do we know the truth? How can we learn about the world around us? And how can and should we organise our society?

From the search for answers to these questions arose a new epistemology, based on the empiricism and scepticism of science, which came to prevail over the forces of religion, tradition, and superstition. Over time, universities and other research institutions were established to help us judge truth and discover the nature of our world. Much of what we take for granted today—from electricity, transistors, and computers to lasers,

modern medicine, and smartphones—is the result of this new disposition, undergirded by basic scientific research (most of it financed by government).

The absence of royal or ecclesiastical authority to dictate how society should be organised to ensure that things worked out well, or as well as they could, meant that society had to figure it out for itself. But devising the institutions that would ensure society's wellbeing was a more complicated matter than discovering the truths of nature. In general, one couldn't conduct controlled experiments.

A close study of past experience could, however, be informative. One had to rely

learning, and adaptation, however, requires a commitment to ascertaining the truth. Americans owe much of their economic success to a rich set of truth-telling, truth-discovering, and truth-verifying institutions. Central among them are freedom of expression and independent media. Like all people, journalists are fallible; but, as part of a robust system of checks and balances on those in positions of power, they have traditionally provided an essential public good.

Since Smith's day, it has been shown that a nation's wealth depends on the creativity and productivity of its people, which can be advanced only by embracing the spirit of scientific discovery and technological innovation. And it depends on steady improvements in social, political, and economic organisation, discovered through reasoned public discourse.

The attack by Trump and his administration on every one of the pillars of American society—and his especially aggressive vilification of the country's truth-seeking institutions—jeopardises its continued prosperity and very ability to function as a democracy. Nor do there appear to be checks on corporate giants' efforts to capture the institutions—the courts, legislatures, regulatory agencies, and major media outlets—that are supposed to prevent them from exploiting workers and consumers. A dystopia previously imagined only by science fiction writers is emerging before our eyes. It should give us chills to think of who "wins" in this world, and who or what we might become, just in the struggle to survive.

Joseph E Stiglitz is University Professor at Columbia University and the 2001 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economics. His new book, *People, Power, and Profits: Progressive Capitalism for an Age of Discontent*, will be published this month by WW Norton and Allen Lane.
Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2019.
www.project-syndicate.org
(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

The attack by Mr Trump and his administration on every one of the pillars of American society jeopardises its ability to function as a democracy.

PHOTO: REUTERS/YURI GRIPAS