

Is the NHRC fulfilling its mandate?

Rules still not finalised after 10 years!

WE are surprised to learn from a report in this daily that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has not been able to quite live up to its mandate, which is to protect the human rights of the people. Legal experts and rights activists believe that the Commission has the power to ensure justice and even compensation for victims. If that is so, then what is holding the NHRC back?

For one thing, while it runs under the NHRC Act 2009, the Commission has not been able to finalise the set of rules that would determine how the body will mediate or investigate complaints of human rights violations. Without a well-defined legal procedure, the Commission does not know specifically how to record, investigate a complaint or what recommendations to give to the concerned authorities. While the act empowers the Commission to ask for reports from government agencies against which complaints have been made, it does not specify the timeframe within which the agencies are required to provide those documents. Thus a set of rules is needed to complement the Act in order to ensure justice for victims. The question is: why, even after 10 years, have these rules not been finalised? Our report says that the law ministry vetted the drafts of the rules in 2016 and has advised the Commission to finalise them if they serve its purpose.

One wonders why the Commission, which is supposed to work on behalf of the victims of human rights violations, has chosen to remain uninvolved. Many victims who could have received some form of justice are/ have been deprived of that because the Commission has not taken up their cases in the way that it should have. It is high time that the NHRC finalised the rules so that it can perform its mandated task properly.

City roads clogged up by illegal parking

Where are the parking spaces?

EXPERTS have suggested that relevant authorities need to coordinate their efforts to tackle the chaotic manner in which cars are parked on major and minor thoroughways in the city—causing unimaginable gridlock and hassle to pedestrians. Both urban and transport experts have also pointed out that unless city planners make the effort to put in place authorised parking spaces, efforts to tackle this ever-growing problem will not be successful.

It is not merely a case of lack of enforcement because the police has been very active in filing cases against illegal parking (about 150,000 cases filed every month) in the city and no amount of fining will make the problem go away. We have hundreds of thousands of motorised and non-motorised vehicles plying the city's roads and there aren't enough designated parking spaces, although DMP says it has designated 50 or so such spots in the city. When we contend with the fact that most of the parking spaces in commercial buildings, including offices and shopping malls, are either insufficient or non-existent, one can begin to comprehend the gravity of the situation.

But help, we are told, is on the way. The DMP is thinking of introducing a digital parking service that can be made available on smartphones. While the DMP is thinking about it, such applications are already available to android users, but the thought is a step in the right direction. There is also the matter of raising awareness and publicising the availability of such services. However, there is no denying the fact that the two city corporations need to do a lot more to build new multi-storeyed parking spaces in the city. We had previously heard a lot of talk from authorities that parking spaces in buildings would be freed up but that drive seems to have petered out. Dhaka needs concrete solutions and not promises if this menace is to be tackled because the number of vehicles will keep rising every year.

How far is Bangladesh from achieving self-sufficiency in the dairy industry?

MOHAMMAD MOHI UDDIN

THE Bangladesh government has a strong focus on the development of the dairy sector for the latter to achieve self-sufficiency by increasing milk production with acceptable quality. The recently approved Livestock and Dairy Development Project (LDDP) could be seen as a strong reflection of the government's attempt to develop the sector. The Department of Livestock Services (DLS) has been implementing this mega project. The current DLS has highly efficient personnel who are working hard to develop the dairy sector but the DLS needs authentic information and cooperation from all stakeholders of the dairy value chain. Keeping this in mind, the recent developments in relation to tariff increase by a segment of the dairy farmers and their activities (demonstration in the streets) are the key concerns for the dairy sector at present.

According to DLS (2018), Bangladesh produces 9.4 million tonnes of milk (against the requirement of 15.04 million tonnes) in a year and according to International Farm Comparison Network (IFCN), total milk production in Bangladesh stands at 8.08 million tonnes. This implies that Bangladesh produces only 63 percent of the total requirement (while as per IFCN it is 54 percent). As per BBS (2018), Bangladesh imports 0.11 million tonnes of milk.

So, how far is Bangladesh from achieving self-sufficiency? If we take into account the outlook for 2030, Bangladesh needs additional six million tonnes of milk. With the current deficit of six million tonnes and additional requirement of six million tonnes, in the next 12 years, Bangladesh needs to produce 12 million tonnes of milk. With the current rate of production, will Bangladesh be able to produce an additional one million tonne per year? The lack of land availability, limited feed and fodder, and lower milk production efficiency are key constraints for increasing milk production. Achieving self-sufficiency would be quite challenging for Bangladesh unless we take a holistic approach to increase milk production.

Recently, several news outlets published news regarding increasing dairy tariff which seemed to be their sole concern. However, tariff-related activities were not linked with the real developments. There is a controversy surrounding the dairy chain—whether tariff reduction or tariff increase is an effective way to develop the dairy sector.

Tariff reduction is associated with increasing overall national welfare and consumer benefits, and decreased farm incomes of small-scale household farms. The current skimmed milk powder import tariff is 25 percent. In the proposed budget for FY2019-2020, it has remained about the same but farmers are demanding a tariff increase to 50 percent. They believe that it would be a safeguard

for dairy farmers.

But in reality, if we want to increase dairy farmers' income, decreasing the cost of milk production would be a more effective method. Bangladesh dairy farmers get a milk price that is 37 percent higher compared to the global average, and even then, small-scale farmers are barely profiting as their cost of milk production is relatively high. Thus the only means to decrease the cost of milk production is to increase production management efficiency instead of relying on increase of milk price or tariff. Increasing the tariff might be good for the farmers but it will not solve the issues of decreasing costs and improving the quality of milk. On the other hand, increasing the tariff will have strong negative effects on consumers and will prevent access to affordable nutrition for the poor and lower-income people.

processors. They have no option but to take into consideration the real interests of the consumers if the dairy sector is to survive.

Recently, a study was conducted to find out whether an increase or decrease in tariff will have an effect on dairy sector competitiveness. The study showed clearly that decreasing tariff by 10 percent can cause a loss to the small-scale (household) farmers (loss of Tk 924 crore per year) but will not affect medium- (family farm) and large-scale farmers (business farms). On the other hand, with a 10 percent tariff, consumers, and the country as a whole, will be greatly benefited (gain of Tk 12,887 crore per year) and it will also lead to an increase in the consumption of milk. Currently, milk consumption is decreasing for which the main barrier is high liquid milk price and low quality of liquid milk. Consumers are losing trust in liquid milk.

as consumer satisfaction is concerned. The processors, therefore, have to create a link between farmers and consumers. Researchers and the academia have a responsibility to define the strategies for the government so that the government can take the necessary steps to develop the dairy sector. The government is the main body through which all kinds of development activities will take place. Keeping this in mind, the Integrated Dairy Research Network (IDRN) was established in the Department of Animal Nutrition in Bangladesh Agricultural University last year in collaboration with International Farm Comparison Network (IFCN), Germany. The IDRN is working to bring all key dairy stakeholders in a single platform so that decisions related to the development of the dairy sector can be made on a consensus basis.

Thus, it is quite clear that only



SOURCE: WWW.JUSTDIAL.COM

While consumer interests are a central concern in the developed world, the recent developments in Bangladesh during pre- and post-budget point to some issues that could work against consumer interests. Consumers in Bangladesh are a silent decision-maker. Due to increasing liquid milk price along with the prevalence of low-quality milk, reduction in milk consumption is a real possibility. At the 20th International Farm Comparison Network (IFCN) dairy conference that was held in Berlin from June 15-19, 2019, 85 dairy researchers were present from 48 countries including EU, US, Latin America, Oceania, Africa and Asia. It was emphasised that due to quality issues and high milk price, consumers are now moving toward "alternative milk and milk products". This will have strong implications for dairy farmers and

International dairy companies and dairy importers must focus on the development of the local dairy sector on the one hand and on the other, the government has to ensure fair business growth. At the same time, the government's first priority should be to preserve local interests.

In order to develop the country's dairy sector, it is necessary for all stakeholders to work together. Each and everyone is vital to the process and has to play a specific role to contribute to the sector's progress. The farmers have a responsibility to increase efficiency, reduce costs of milk production and take the necessary steps to avoid adulteration of milk. The processors must too play a role in not only collecting milk but also paying a price that is justified. Above all, the quality of milk is what it comes down to as far

emphasising upon milk tariff reduction is not an effective way to develop the dairy sector. The government has to ensure that all stakeholders live up to their responsibilities. Increasing the tariff may provide benefits to a certain segment of farmers but there is a real risk that the country may face a lack of investment and nutritional security may also be under threat. As a result, consumers' welfare will be ignored. Achieving self-sufficiency can only be possible when and if all the stakeholders work together and respect each other's position in the dairy value chain and work towards a common goal.

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Digital disruptors: Let's not get left behind



SABIR RAHMAN KHAN

country, Bangladesh has the potential of realising economic gains as the disruptive-technology-backed Fourth Industrial Revolution takes over.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) claimed that about 800 million people worldwide could lose their jobs by 2030, while approximately 5.7 million unskilled Bangladeshis could be sacked from their jobs abroad and at home due to a lack of technological skills. For instance, in 2013, the RMG sector employed about 4.4 million workers in Bangladesh, a figure that dropped significantly to about 3.5 million by 2018.

Emerging disruptive technologies are advancing at an unprecedented speed, changing the world as they erase the boundaries among the economic, social, business and political spheres. Artificial intelligence, blockchain, IoT, Big Data, and precision medicine are just a handful of the technologies entailing digital transformation, putting enormous pressure on businesses and society at large (McKinsey Global Institute, 2013). To maximise the potential gains in productivity brought about by the new technologies, industries and societies must move from critical understanding to critical readiness to adopt the disruptive technologies across sectors and through relevant supply and value chains (BD4IR, 2019).

Nowadays, technology can decide whether an enterprise will survive or fail. Much of the world's economy is now moving towards dot.com businesses like eBay, Amazon, Uber, Alibaba, etc. A digital enterprise can exploit the blessings of ICT and thereby produce the products and services desired by consumers. Moreover, entering the digital economy has become a survival decision for entrepreneurs since upgrading the traditional rule-of-thumb-based organisations with automation can now

resolve myriad problems.

Coming to Bangladesh, we need to jumpstart the development and application of digital enterprise tools and knowledge to further the sustainable development of trade and business in line with our upcoming five-year plans, Delta Plan 2100 and other national and sectoral priorities. Indeed, it is a pleasure to witness Bangladesh playing an active role in a number of World Economic Forum activities relevant to digital transformation.

It is inarguably a truth that the future of digital transformation in Bangladesh is exceptionally bright in the sense of growth prospects, further enhanced by the government's initiative of creating a Digital Bangladesh by 2021. Notably, in 2018, the fiscal budget for IT development alone was

129th out of 138 countries on WEF's IP Protection Index.

However, there is always a light at the end of a tunnel as evident by leading global IT service providers like Wipro, IBM, TCS, NTT Data, Infosys, and WPP have entered our market through delivery centre set-ups and joint ventures with local companies (LightCastle Partners, 2019). Once we fully reap the merits of digital transformation, we are likely to see greater growth due to favourable government policies and foreign investments.

The emergence of globalisation and integration of regional economic growth have introduced new challenges as well as new opportunities for SME development in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, Bangladesh has failed to develop technology-oriented



SOURCE: WHERESMYJETPACK.ME

above USD 980 million which shows a commitment to developing this sector.

Bangladesh has a sizeable young workforce and high-cost competitiveness (20-30 percent less than in India or Philippines) which is a major key value proposition for companies looking to outsource or offshore operations. Despite a large young workforce, government incentives, and cost competitiveness, issues of intellectual property, data privacy, skilled talent, and infrastructure remain significant challenges for scaling operations in the sector in Bangladesh (LightCastle Partners, 2019). Notably, Bangladesh currently ranks

employment sectors. For instance, despite some positive technological advances, Bangladesh is still lagging behind in the adoption of e-commerce in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). To combat this shortcoming, institutionalisation of B2B e-commerce in SMEs is essential. Otherwise, the common scenario of organisations' unwillingness to give access to corporate information to suppliers, stakeholders and customers will remain a serious impediment of B2B e-commerce.

Following the developed world, a digitisation index for enterprises can

be developed in Bangladesh based on parameters like ubiquity, affordability, reliability, speed, usability, skills, etc. Additionally, enterprises in Bangladesh should be well-versed in concepts behind automation, business intelligence reporting, decision support, workflow, management information system, enterprise resource planning, end-to-end process lifecycle, paperless office, cyber security, biometrics and other forms of technology-driven solutions.

The government is providing facilities to the ICT sector which are undoubtedly competitive compared to other regional peers. There is also 100 percent exemption on corporate tax till 2024, no restrictions on foreign ownership, dedicated facilities (IT parks), subsidised training programmes, and bodies like BIDA and LICIT facilitating investment process, 10 percent cash back on export revenue promoted by the government, and much more.

Change of mindset is one big challenge for the Bangladeshi enterprises when it comes to digital transformation. Businesses should be made aware of these facilities so that they can exploit the potential of digital transformation. It will give them bargaining power on issues such as creating further awareness on tax, VAT, customs duty, cash incentives; declaring more cash incentives; engaging local IT/ITES firms in mega projects; easy access to finance; additional funds for research and development, etc (Latifee, EH, 2018).

It is encouraging that different trade bodies are seen initiating interactive sessions on the ins and outs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) focusing on disruptive technologies where policymakers are sharing their valued insights. Furthermore, major trade bodies are putting forward proposals to concerned ministries to include 4IR issues and map the private sector's role in the 8th Five Year Plan.

Bearing in mind these positive steps, there is high hope that new insights and actionable recommendations for the government will continue to flow in to accelerate the adoption and diffusion of digital disruptors to supplement Bangladesh's growth journey.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Facing the challenges of the 4IR

The world economy is undergoing a paradigm shift with the evolution of advanced technologies such as industrial robot, artificial intelligence, 3D printing, internet of things (IoT), blockchain and data science.

Traditional jobs will eventually become obsolete and the demand for labour in high-skilled jobs is increasing. According to an Oxford Economics study, around 20 million manufacturing jobs are going to be replaced by robots by 2030. Besides, according to McKinsey, around 800 million people are going to lose their jobs due to the use of robotics and AI in the industrial sector.

This unprecedented growth in digitisation in business processes will not only threaten the livelihood of low-skilled people but will also further fuel inequality in society. Being a part of world economy, Bangladesh is now gradually experiencing the effects of the wave of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). But building an efficient labour force remains the biggest challenge for Bangladesh due to our technological incompetence.

Our backdated education system needs to go through a reformation so that enough awareness is created about the global skills in demand and so that our labour force is trained to excel in IT and interpersonal skills. Only then will we be adequately equipped to face the effects of the 4IR.

Md Parvez Alam, by email