

Nearly 20 million people lifted from poverty

A great deal has been done but challenges remain

WE are heartened to learn from the 2019 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) that Bangladesh lifted some 19.3 million people out of poverty over the decade between 2004 and 2014. The government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina deserves kudos for tackling the poverty issue head-on. The MPI index is far more comprehensive than a simple poverty index and, as such, our achievement is that much more noteworthy. The index was developed in 2010 by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative at the University of Oxford and the Human Development Report Office of the UNDP. The latest index covered 101 countries (31 low-income, 68 middle-income and two high-income) and is based on 10 indicators ranging from nutrition, child mortality, school attendance, cooking fuel, sanitation, electricity, etc. It is a broad-spectrum analysis to determine the various aspects of poverty, which is termed as multidimensional poor and this year's focus was on South Asia.

What is encouraging is that Bangladesh is one of 10 countries that have made significant progress in achieving "SDG-1: No poverty", being one of the countries to achieve "the fastest absolute reductions in MPI value". The MPI index provides a roadmap for policymakers in a manner that no other index can, since it takes into account multifarious indicators to gauge the reasons for poverty that exist in countries like Bangladesh.

However, while we may feel rightly proud of the achievement, we feel there is considerable distance to go till we say goodbye to poverty altogether. As the figure stands, the number of people below the poverty line has reduced by nearly 20 million—from 2004 to 2014. About 74 million people, out of a population of about 154 million till 2014, were living below the poverty line. All the efforts of the government should be geared to get these people out of the poverty line eliminating the poverty trap. That is the main challenge of the government.

Killing continues at the border

India must bring down number of casualties to zero

THE home minister's disclosure in parliament that 294 Bangladeshi nationals have been killed by India's Border Security Force (BSF) on the Bangladesh-India border in the last 10 years sums up the outcome of a decade's worth of talks and initiatives by officials from both nations. While the estimate paints a disturbing picture of our border security, the declining trend in border casualties leaves room for optimism. The latest disclosure, however, comes after a joint meeting in June in which the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) expressed "grave" concern about the border killings, which the BSF chief sought to play down as "unfortunate deaths". Clearly, both sides have yet to see eye to eye on the gravity of the issue. This is not desirable given the state of bilateral relationship between the two countries. Securing the border is in the interest of both India and Bangladesh that share a 4,053km-long border between them. India has previously agreed to bring down cross-border casualties—which involve a disproportionately higher number of Bangladeshi victims as opposed to negligible Indian numbers—to zero level. One way of ensuring safety at the border is for the BSF to use non-lethal force, which it had agree to do, to deter people trying to cross the border illegally. It calls for complete restraint on the Indian side. Bangladesh can play its part by ensuring greater vigilance and monitoring, especially in "sensitive" border areas, to prevent activities such as smuggling and trafficking. India, however, must exercise caution when it comes to using force and should instead focus on other means of border control. The border between Bangladesh and India has already earned notoriety for the human cost of illegal crossing which is unbecoming of two friendly nations. So both sides should strive to rectify that image.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Monsoon cripples Rohingya camps

Most of the makeshift Rohingya camps are built either on the hilltops or alongside the hillslope areas. With the Bay of Bengal right around the corner and the commencement of the monsoon season in the country, things are looking more dismal than usual. Cox's Bazar is an area with high rain density. Landslide and torrential downpour in the hillslope areas mean it gets very risky for the locals. The plight of the Rohingya refugees during the last two rainy seasons knew no bounds, as was shown by the media. They had suffered a lot during the torrential downpour and with the arrival of monsoon; it seems their sufferings have started again. There is also a serious threat of contagious water-related diseases in this rainy season within the Rohingyas camps. The government has already moved many of the makeshift camps, but it is not sufficient as per the requirements, and has not ended the monsoon sufferings fully. Bangladesh has already earned a reputation across the world for sheltering the Rohingya community. They should now pay heed to the wellbeing of these refugees and shift the campsites to a more suitable place so that this monsoon downpour can't cause havoc for them. The international organisations should also come forward to assist in this effort.

Md Zillur Rahaman, By email

Is it time for a water tax in the apparel sector?



IMAGINE if you had in your hands an extremely precious resource. While you have lots of this resource, you only have a finite amount—it won't last forever. But you decide to give away this resource and keep giving it away. You give it away even when you know that the people using it might not always be using it efficiently and taking care of it. And when you know that you are getting short of this resource, rather than rationing it, you simply carry on giving. It doesn't make sense, does it?

And yet, this is how Bangladesh (and the world generally) appears to view water at times. Water is the world's most precious resource, literally our lifeblood. Yet it's strange how much we take it for granted and, in many cases, are so wasteful of it.

Water, as most readers will be aware, is also of critical importance in textile production. Growing cotton uses lots of water. Textile and leather processing uses huge amounts of water. In fact, at pretty much every step of the textile supply chain, we see water being used in abundance.

To offer one example, a staggering 5,196 litres of water are used in the lifecycle of a pair of jeans, according to the most comprehensive study of its kind which measured water consumption from cotton cultivation to the end consumer. The project, led by Brazilian business Vicunha, analysed the type of water used and divided it into different stages of the production lifecycle.

Consider that figure—5,196 litres! For a pair of jeans which, in many cases, will retail for less than 30 euros! Why is this precious resource of nature being so seriously undervalued?

Not only is water being undervalued, it is also being misused. Many factories take water from nature and pollute it. They add chemicals during wet processing and, in many cases, water is discarded back into the environment without being cleaned. By that, I mean, without being placed in an effluent treatment process using modern technology, which, in many cases, can remove the vast majority of impurities from water. Instead, water is often spewed out untreated by factories where it pollutes the local environment, often having a drastic impact on local farming and the water of local communities. There are countless examples of this globally.

The strange thing is, our readymade garment industry, which uses vast amounts of water, does not pay for this most precious of resources. Bangladesh is not alone on this issue, and in many ways there are justifications for providing one of our most important industries with this resource, without which it would not be able to operate.

However, whether we like it or not, sooner or later, somebody along the



Many factories take water from nature and pollute it. They add chemicals during wet processing and, in many cases, water is discarded back into the environment without being cleaned.

PHOTO: STAR

supply chain needs to begin paying a premium for water to reflect the fact that it is precious—and finite.

To offer some industry context, the textile industry in Bangladesh is one of the main contributors to the country's water scarcity challenges. Most textile mills in Dhaka are completely dependent upon un-metered and un-priced self-supply groundwater from boreholes.

Some existing environmental performance challenges in the textile sector are: (i) average factory water consumption is much higher than global benchmarks; (ii) heavily polluting effluent discharge; (iii) potential water supply deficit in dry seasons; and (iv) increase in waste water generation with further growth.

Estimates suggest that groundwater in Dhaka is depleting by 2-3 metres per year, and soon there will be no water in the aquifer. What then?

There are many estimates on the use of water to produce clothing. Some suggest that textile mills use 250-300 litres of water per kg of fabric in Bangladesh, whereas global best practice is said to be around 50 litres per kg or less.

Thankfully, these figures are falling in many cases, and we are seeing huge progress by the industry as a whole to cut down on water use. In some cases, this is being led by the supply chain. Many factories have invested in water-saving technologies in recent years which, while costly (think hundreds of thousands of US dollars in some cases), does have a very quick return on investment. For factories that can afford the initial outlay, the latest and most up-to-date water-saving and recycling technology is an absolute imperative.

Another positive change is being driven by brands. A number of apparel

brands have introduced lines in the past 18 months that have been dyed using techniques which dramatically cut down on water use. In the denim industry, we are seeing huge strides being taken to reduce water use, and technological development in this area is moving at a rapid pace of knots.

While all positive, none of this changes the fact that garment production remains an extremely "thirsty" industry and, certainly, the brand initiatives which have been introduced are still very niche.

There is also a broader picture here. It is widely accepted that the impacts of climate change will be felt mainly through the water cycle, with consequences that could be large and uneven across the globe. Bangladesh is one of a number of countries that are likely to be particularly impacted.

The World Bank has pointed out that water-related climate risks cascade through food, energy, urban, and environmental systems. Increasing populations, rising incomes, and expanding cities mean that the demand for water will continue to rise exponentially, while supply becomes more erratic—as evidenced, for instance, by the droughts we have seen in the year in countries such as India and Australia.

The point being made in all of this is that as an industry, textile needs to begin placing a much higher price on water. Textile manufacturers pay for dyes and chemicals, for instance, so why does water have to be free?

While not necessarily advocating for water to be charged here, there is a strong argument that the value of water somehow needs to be better reflected in the price of clothing. Some factories are using water-saving technologies at present, which is great. But in actual fact,

they all need to be using it. Likewise, some clothing is dyed using water-saving techniques, but the whole industry needs to move towards such techniques. And I am not talking in 10 years' time, I mean now. If the technology is there, why aren't we all using it?

Well, the reason is that there is not always enough money along the supply chain to fund it, which means many factories operate inefficiently, and huge amounts of water are wasted.

Here's a novel idea: how about a water tax on the end price of clothing? Every garment sold around the world could have a small addition to its price to reflect water use in the production process. This would need to be only a tiny amount, with the taxation passed along the supply chain to be used for the most up-to-date and sophisticated water-saving technologies currently in the market. This tax could be calculated as the cost for cleaning the water in order to make it reusable.

Or how about the government of Bangladesh, with many other governments globally, begins charging industry for water? Such an approach might well radically alter the way businesses view the resource of water and encourage them to introduce the latest water-saving technologies and techniques.

It sounds far-fetched, doesn't it? A water tax—surely that will never happen, people might say.

The same people are probably saying the world will never run out of freshwater. Yet such a day might come far sooner than we think.

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Let's protect our tourist destinations before it's too late!



THE news on the possibility of the Sunderbans getting into the list of endangered heritage sites really struck me. As if bringing the Royal Bengal on the brink of extinction wasn't enough, today the largest mangrove forest in the world is under threat. It is out of deep concern that I ask myself, "what have we done to our motherland?" We have not only misused our resources all these years but are now attempting to erase landmarks from the world map. The only few tourist destinations that we have are falling prey to our greed. Our selfish minds are blind to the damage we have caused to our country.

The World Bank thinks Bangladesh is the least "touristy" destination in the world. It is not their fault since tourism is still an unexplored sector in the country. This makes travelling around Bangladesh still cheap since we are yet to get an annual visitor trend. What we fail to realise is that tourism can contribute a lot in the development of any country. Those who have understood it, for example our neighbours, have made full utilisation of whatever they have. Tourists from all over the world visit these places to learn about the culture, food and make memories. The host country has everything to offer to them, even a souvenir that they can take back. However in our country, we lack the very basic etiquette of keeping these spots clean.

The "Beautiful Bangladesh" ad campaign by the Bangladesh Parjatan



A large section of the roadside along Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway, which offers a scenic landscape on the way to the world's longest sea beach, has been turned into a dumpsite by Patiya municipality authorities.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Corporation might have attracted a few, but coming here gave them a rather different picture. Littering, urinating, writing on the walls of ancient monuments and palaces, spitting, etc., are commonplace at our tourist spots. Let's take Cox's Bazar beach as an example. Thinking of it reminds me of heaps of trash lying here and there, plastic bags on the water and overcrowding. But this is not what a beach is supposed to give an impression of. Consider a Mughal Empire ruin in Dhaka, the Lalbagh Fort. On the walls of the entrance, people leave romantic messages, mostly with

initials of their names, like "M+S", "Call me 01xxxxx". The front-yard of Ahsan Manzil is always filled with peanut shells and paper bags. The condition of the Zamindar's palaces are better not to be told because it is heartbreaking. Being a frequent traveller, I have been to many tourist spots around Bangladesh. Cheap travels mean more locals flocking to these places. While in Sajek Valley, I found trash on the beautiful road built by the Army. People go on the hilltop and leave chips packets and cigarette butts. I have seen Lalakhal, Sylhet being polluted with plastic bottles and engine

fuel. Trekkers leave their clothes on the Risang Waterfalls in Khagrachhari. Go to Hatirjheel, you can smell the stench of the water from far away. Forget the foreigners, all of these are done by us. When we travel in our own country, we somehow feel we are entitled to use the place anyway we want! What image of the country are we going to present in front of foreign travellers who wish to ever visit us? We have reached rock bottom in offering them anything presentable.

It is time we said, enough is enough. I say, impose a strict rule so that those who abuse tourist destinations limit their deeds to their own homes. Not getting any prohibition over the years has made us habituated to wrongdoings. Littering is wrong as it is, but grave if done in landmark places. Article 21 of our Constitution confers the duty upon every citizen to maintain discipline and to protect public property. Hence, throwing your trash here and there may be considered a violation of the Constitution itself. But it is unfortunate that none of us work to uphold the sanctity of it.

A specific law, namely a "Tourist Destination Protection Act" is the demand of time. A law like this would create liability, strict fine and imprisonment of long terms. The Tourism Developers Association of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation must work hand in hand with the government to develop such a law. World Tourism Day will come and go, but the work of protecting our assets is an everyday responsibility. If we don't act now, that day is not far away when the only landmark that will represent Bangladesh is a trash mountain.

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