

Stop procuring rice from fake millers

Genuine millers and farmers are losing out

IN another blow to the interest of farmers and also honest millers, it has been discovered that nearly a third of registered millers in Lalmonirhat are not genuine. And yet, these fake millers are still selling rice to the government, robbing real millers and farmers of their share of the rice market at a time of great strife for the latter.

During an investigation by this newspaper, 17 out of at least 45 rice mills were found to be fake, while 10 were non-operational. And there are a number of examples of fake millers or millers who have shut down their operations but still sold rice to the government as recently as this year, when the government ran its rice procurement programme, apparently to help farmers.

What is happening is that the phony millers are either buying low-quality rice from the market or collecting rice from the government's aid programmes meant for the poor or those affected by one form of disaster or another, and selling it back to the government at a higher price. And the reason why they have been able to get away with it is because of corrupt officials who have been bribed into compliance or into silence by the inauthentic millers. Hence a number of non-existent rice mills remain registered with the government, even though they could have easily been exposed from a simple field visit by the upazila food controller which, according to rules, is mandatory.

The entire situation is detrimental for our food sector, which is one of the most important sectors for any country. Not only does this harm honest millers and, most importantly, the farmers, it could also prove problematic on a much bigger scale later on. That is why the authorities should root out corruption from this sector, with utmost urgency.

Mob lynching on suspicion!

This frenzied behaviour must stop

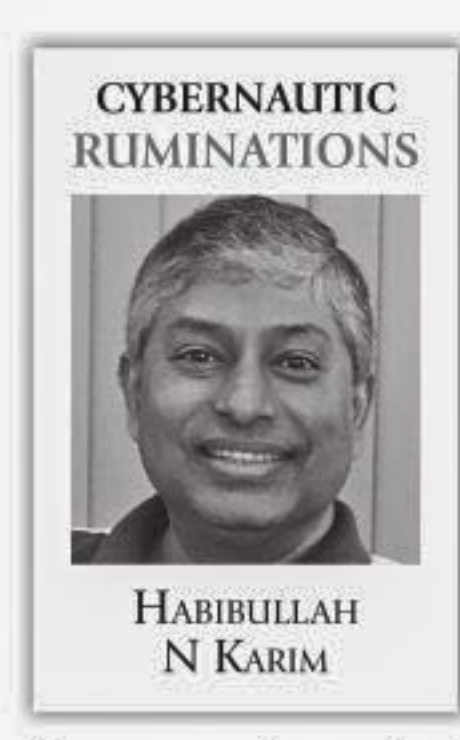
REPORTEDLY, five people have been beaten dead recently and 10 hurt including several policemen and four mentally challenged persons. Even a mother who had gone to a school to inquire about the admission process was beaten to death, suspected of being a child kidnapper. It is abhorrent and disgusting to see people falling victims of public lynching in several parts of the country over a period of several days. While there cannot be any scope or ground or justification for resorting to mob "justice", what makes it even worse is that in this instance, the victims were merely "suspected" of being child-snatchers.

The latest spate of mob attacks began after a rumour was spread recently that for the successful completion of the Padma Bridge, human sacrifice at the construction site is needed. And despite warnings by the authorities not to spread such rumours and to guard against such stories, even people seen to be doing only so much as talking to kids have become victims of lynching.

This, unfortunately, is a reflection of how gullible we are and how bigoted we have become to believe, even in this day and age, that human blood is propitious for any human endeavours to be successful, particularly a grandiose project of the kind of the Padma Bridge, and people are on the prowl to kidnap children. And that we must take law into our own hands and apply our mode of justice instead of handing the so-called suspects over to the law is incomprehensible.

We believe that the police should embark on doing more than issue warnings that these are illegal and criminal acts. In fact, they should go after and apprehend those that have indulged in violence and also the source of the rumour and bring them to justice. In this regard, we believe that the local leaders at the village level also have a responsibility to make people aware of the consequences of succumbing to rumours and falsehood. Such raving mad behaviour must be curbed.

What graduating out of LDC status means



CYBERNAUTIC RUMINATIONS
HABIBULLAH N KARIM

THE graduation process has been in the works for at least a couple of decades as the country steadied its economic direction and dug in deep with its market economy orientation since the early nineties. The consistent five-percent-plus economic growth over the last three decades combined with booming apparel exports and incremental development and strengthening of economic institutions such as Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission, Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, Competition Commission, Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection, and others have paved the way for Bangladesh to march ahead to the top of LDCs and steadily distance itself from other LDCs in terms of economic performance.

That Bangladesh would be classified as a middle-income country ridding itself of the stigma of being at the bottom of the economic performance band known as the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in course of time was inevitable. In fact, when Bangladesh was first grouped under the LDC category in the mid-seventies, it actually did not meet one of the principal criteria of being a LDC: its population size was much above the threshold set for LDCs. It is claimed by the cognoscenti that Bangladesh's inclusion was engineered by an eminent economist of the soil who happened to be working for the UN at the time.

The LDC privileges, the LDC stigmas
The LDC classification is a mixed bag. On the one hand, it accords us duty-free access to the richer economies of the world, concessional credits from the multilateral development institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and others, exemption from intellectual property rights enforcements for the time being and other economic benefits. On the other hand, the classification brings with it the dark stigma of the "Least Developed" label which subconsciously carries with it all sorts of denigrating ramifications that any citizen of the country travelling with the green passport around the world can attest to. Aside from inconveniences as a world traveller, the commercial implications of being a LDC are manifold. In trade negotiations there is this "hand-me-down" attitude making it difficult to trade as equals leading to lowest value addition in most of our exports; while-collar service exports are not taken seriously by potential overseas buyers who identify the country as a source of cheap unskilled labour, hardly the place to buy professional services from; the LDC classification combined with our large population size made

us the favourite punching bag of the international media when it comes to lack of civic amenities or sufferings from natural calamities.

Based on pure number of flooding incidents, Bangladesh would not even rank in the top 10 most flood-prone countries of the world but the scenes of flooding and destitute street beggars in Bangladesh making the rounds of BBC and CNN have created an impression that all of Bangladesh is submerged under water most of the year. I recall meeting the chief executive of a billion-dollar corporation in the US in the nineties who asked me in all seriousness whether I owned a boat as he thought that's the only way people in Bangladesh can move around. I was so aghast that I told him I did not but then again we really learn to swim very early! It took him several long seconds to realise the pun. But at the end of the day, when your trading partners take you as a "Least Developed"

Aside from an economic and governance disaster happening in the intervening period, nothing can deter Bangladesh's graduation to middle-income status in 2024. Several other LDC countries are also en route to similar status change by then.

Visionary proclamations in the ICT Policy 2009

The ICT policy adopted by the government in 2009 set the achievement goals based on economic development enabled by ICT and predicted graduation to middle-income country by 2021 and a developed economy by 2041. It is heartening to see the government aligning its overall development strategy in sync with the proclamations of the ICT Policy 2009 which was drafted by a working group headed by this author under the overall guidance of National Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury in 2008.

Losing the LDC privileges: the economic fallout



Achieving developing economy status would mean reduction in the informal economy as a share of GDP. PHOTO: STAR

hand-to-mouth survivor at the bottom of the economic pyramid, it is not a lot of fun to make deals. And deals are what make businesses thrive and businesses are what create wealth for the nation, and the more wealth the nation makes, the higher it moves up the economic performance scale.

So the bottom line is that while the LDC status gave us a concessional window into global markets and credits, it also held us back as if in a straitjacket of negative perceptions, making it extremely difficult for our businesses to move up the value chain and contribute more to the economic might of the nation.

The graduation to middle-income status

On a per-capita income basis, Bangladesh has crossed the lower band of the middle-income status as defined by the World Bank last year. Bangladesh has to maintain or exceed several other economic and social indicators over the next five years to be formally stripped of the LDC moniker.

The impact of the loss of LDC privileges has been softened by a three-year grace period from 2024 to 2027, during which time the country must prepare itself, if not done already, to negotiate bilateral trade protocols with our major trading partners; carry out institutional strengthening of the World Trade Organization Directorate in partnership with the major national trade associations; and enhance productivity of both manufacturing and services industries to face off global competition. The threat of intellectual property rights enforcement is another major concern that will have to be concertedly addressed by the pharmaceutical and software industries, among others, but the gradual benefits of local IPR will outweigh the impact of overseas IPR costs.

The seamy side of LDC privileges

At the receiving end of being an LDC are the prescriptive charity packages from multilateral development partners such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and others. These funding

agencies provide both outright grants and concessional loans that come with strings attached such as imposition of institutional reforms and development projects put together by international consultants that are detached from the ground realities and that most often turn out to be very expensive for the country.

There are numerous examples where a locally conceived development project worth a few crore taka taken over by such a development partner bloats in size to more than several hundred crores and ends up with a top-heavy project with no local inputs and gets shuttered as soon as the project ends. The nation is then left with a huge loan tab to repay over many years. Such project bloats are all too common when donor funds are involved. With LDC status removed, such concessional lending with donor-imposed unrealistic conditions should be gone and that cannot be fast enough.

Skills mismatch: An urgent issue affecting over a billion

TATYANA TEREITYEVA

FOR too long, HR experts around the world have been debating what to do about the pressing skills gap issue.

We are now at a stage where our HR profession needs to take the lead before this issue becomes a full-blown crisis.

About half of employers across the world are reporting difficulties in filling a variety of roles, with the fields of skilled trades and engineering high on the danger list.

The problems are not confined to entry-level roles by any means; the skills that many of us will have developed earlier in our careers can become obsolete a few years later. In highly technical roles, learned skills can have a lifespan of just two and a half years.

Some roles are already severely threatened. In barely a decade from now, futurologists predict that travel agents, cashiers, bank clerks, textile workers and taxi drivers are just some of the positions that may disappear altogether in many communities. On the other hand, almost two-thirds of children starting school today will work in roles that have not yet been invented.

OECD data shows around a third of the global labour force, over a billion people, had the wrong skills needed for their particular jobs. The estimated cost is an annual GDP loss of USD 5 trillion, bigger than the size of Germany's GDP.

As a knowledge-based company, the necessity to have constant access to the right STEM skills made us come up with a solution: a talent ecosystem that is



In barely a decade from now, the job roles of textile workers, travel agents, cashiers and bank clerks may disappear altogether in many communities. PHOTO: AFP

interconnected and ensures there is a constant supply of talent by nurturing skills as early as the kindergarten and developing those skills throughout school, university and during careers with the company.

However, as we and other emerging market corporations seek to become truly global players, such a talent ecosystem does not automatically ensure that we have the right type of culturally aware staff with an international mindset helping us expand effectively on a global scale. Against this background, we need a

global solution by which we share best practices on how to tackle the skills gap.

One solution could be a "human-centred" approach by which we, as HR professionals, ensure that nobody is left behind in the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

By human-centred we mean putting the individual first, tailoring talent and skills development to personal needs of students and employees.

For a human-centred talent development system to work, there should be a set of guiding principles or a framework in place adopted by

employers, governments and educational institutions as best practice.

Recently, together with our partners, we identified five such principles which could be summed up as follows: (i) Skills of the future (everyone should be equipped with future-proof basic skills including cognitive, social, cultural and digital); (ii) Self-sustainability (everyone has the right to follow a unique and individual career path during their entire professional development); (iii) Skills liquidity (information on job vacancies should be easily accessible around the world; employees hired only on skills and experience, regardless of education, gender, race, social status or physical health); (iv) Labour market transparency (labour mobility, flexible and remote "virtual" employment should be available to all, regardless of current place of residence); and (v) Diversity of values (the workplace and working conditions should support the professional and personal development of each employee, regardless of their values and beliefs).

Not a single company, not a single state, not even the largest one in the world can change the labour market culture on its own.

That is why we believe that such a framework of human-centred principles is a good starting point for bringing about change in the way we see talent and skills development in the workplace.

Let's start this change today before it's too late.

Tatyana Terentyeva is the chief HR officer of a Russian state corporation.

LETTERS
TO THE EDITOR

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Growing concern over dengue

Dengue fever is back again in full swing in the capital. According to the Directorate General of Health Services, 347 people were infected in two months in 2018, but this year, 1,864 people got infected between May and June and three patients have already died.

The densely populated metropolis of Dhaka, consisting of more than 18 million people, is the second least liveable city in the world. Cleanliness is not a priority when it comes to maintaining our communities. People frequently spit right and left on the streets, they urinate wherever they find suitable, construction materials are kept out in the open for months on end—all these are perfect breeding grounds for dengue mosquitoes.

Dhaka is growing in an unplanned manner—in every way possible. Last year, there was an outbreak of Chikungunya. This year it is dengue. Preventing dengue in Dhaka will require more fierce steps from the authorities. The city corporations and WHO have deemed the situation as "alarming" but not out of control. However, the growing number of those infected clearly suggests otherwise.

Md Zillur Rahaman, By email