

## Implementation of the transport act

Remove all impediments to effective enforcement

THE authorities have put into effect the Road Transport Act-2018 on November 17 and already a number of problems have crept up. It seems that not all the ground realities that militate against its efficient and strict implementation have been taken into account.

Looking beyond the opposition from transport associations which have demanded repeal of some sections, there are more fundamental problems that need to be resolved before the police and mobile courts can start implementing the Act properly. The BRTA has issued 23 lakh driving licenses against some 42 lakh registered vehicles on the road. The new law states that license-less drivers will face six months in jail or fined Tk 50,000 (or both). There are some 10-12 lakh unregistered battery and engine-run three-wheelers operating nationwide.

Currently, BRTA issues around 6 lakh annual fitness clearance certificates a year. Unless both manpower and infrastructure are upgraded, it will take a few years simply to regularise paperwork for existing vehicles. Then there is the issue of some 4 lakh vehicles that have registration, but no fitness certificates. In a city that has hundreds of thousands of vehicles plying its streets, the Act does not allow for loading and unloading of goods, or even picking up and dropping off of passengers without falling foul of the provisions in the Act. Dhaka, moreover, does not have enough parking spaces. None of these factors were taken into consideration before implementing the law.

We are perplexed as to why there was no extensive long-term awareness campaign to make people aware of what the new law entails. We applaud the authorities for the law, but it will not be effective, and will be open to misuse, without the appropriate support mechanisms.

## Comply with the HC order

Keep our rivers pollution-free

WE commend the High Court for directing the Department of Environment (DoE) to shut 25 factories and two private hospitals on the bank of the Buriganga River which have been operating without environment clearance certificates. The HC also directed the authorities to clean up the river and remove all sources of pollution from there. It is most unfortunate that little action has been taken to prevent pollution in the Buriganga despite the fact that a writ petition was filed in 2010 in this regard and the court had ordered the government to take action regarding this.

Although the recent report prepared by the Wasa states that there are no sewerage lines connected to the Buriganga and that there is no pollution, the BIWTA report has found that several such lines are polluting the river. Presenting a false report to the HC is something that we do not expect from an MD of a responsible state agency such as Wasa.

Moreover, what we do not understand is, what the state agencies, including the National River Conservation Commission, have been doing to stop such illegal practices. It is not that the factories and other structures that have been polluting the Buriganga have sprung up in a day. Shouldn't the DoE have stopped the constructions before they had started? Also, why do the various agencies and authorities have to wait for orders from the court to do something that is a part of their mandated task?

We now hope that all the agencies concerned will abide by the HC directives and none of them will abdicate their duties when it comes to bringing back life to our rivers. All the illegal structures—not only those on the bank of Buriganga, but also those on the bank of Shitalakha and other rivers—that have been polluting our rivers should be removed without further delay.



MM SHAHIDUL HASSAN

IT is inarguable that education is important, as it opens the door to a better life for everyone. But when it comes to what higher education means for the economic growth of a country like Bangladesh, we cannot reach a conclusive decision. However, developed countries have made a shift from industrial to knowledge-based societies. They view the economy as culture, not just as financial and material capital, giving due consideration to the other dimensions as well. This concept of the knowledge-based economy, which is opposed to the conventional material-based capital one, has been implemented in those countries.

Education systems for the knowledge-driven economy reach larger segments of the population. These systems produce a workforce equipped with higher-level skills and creative quality, and foster lifelong learning for them. They acquire adaptation to the changing demands of the knowledge-based economy and promote international recognition of the credentials granted by the country's educational institutions.

Before making any structural transformation in the economic sectors in Bangladesh, we need to know how countries like China, India, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, and Chile have fostered their economic growth. Historically, the expansion of industrial activities, particularly manufacturing industries has been associated with rapid growth in economic development. There are also many service activities that are tradeable and many non-traditional natural-resource based products that provide the potential for high growth. It is noteworthy that rapid growth depends on how fast the rate is at which labour would move from low-

productive informal activities to high productive sectors. The expansion of non-traditional agriculture has played an important role in economic development in Chile (Ha-Joon Chang, 2002).

Therefore, the modernisation of traditional agriculture can be a significant source of productivity gain. India has benefited tremendously from exports of Information Technology and Business Processing Outsourcing services and Chile has successfully diversified from copper into advanced fisheries and fruit products. The software outsourcing

engineering and otherwise appropriating foreign knowledge), macroeconomic stability, high investment rates, economic incentive and an institutional regime that demanded improved performance. Most of the fast developing countries in Asia except for Korea and India are using Foreign Direct Investment extensively as a way to acquire foreign knowledge and to penetrate export markets. These countries have been producing an increasing variety of goods and services by applying new technology and advanced knowledge. This has happened because

supportive enabling environment (UNO 2007). Technological advance is complementary with higher skills and more education. Therefore, education and skills are becoming more important in the context of global competitiveness.

The government of Bangladesh is working on reaching a developed country status by 2041 by increasing GDP per capita to USD 12,000 from USD 1,700 over the next 22 years. By forging a path towards creating a knowledge-based economy and society, Bangladesh will possibly achieve that status by 2041.



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industry in India earns USD 175 billion, whereas software earning in Bangladesh is about USD 700 million. Fast economic development happened in India and China not primarily because their labour-endowment advantage gave them the ability to compete in labour-intensive manufactures. But because they were able to quickly diversify into more sophisticated, technically-demanding activities that supported higher rates of economic growth.

The development story of Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan is different and interesting. It is an example of moving the economy quickly from a cheap, unskilled workforce to becoming a knowledge-based economy. The top priority sector of their governments was education. They invested a lot in secondary, vocational and tertiary education, in upgrading the skills of the workers in order to remain competitive. Their strategies of economies included strong outward orientation, heavy use of foreign knowledge (including copying and reverse

of the increasing importance of new manufactured products and services in trade. Interestingly, in this century, the demand for manufactured products is more income-elastic than for primary commodities.

The key strengths of both India and China are their large domestic market, their young generation, a strong business sector with experience in the market institutions, and also a well-developed legal and financial system. In addition, from the perspective of the knowledge economy, another source of strength is a large mass of highly trained English-speaking engineers, businessmen, economists, scientists and other professionals, who have been the dynamo behind the growth of the service sector. Nowadays, competitiveness does not just depend on the cost of factors of production, or on a specific technological advantage. Rather, it depends on continuous innovation, high-level skills and learning, efficient communications and transport infrastructure, and a

But it won't be an easy task, and the country will face many challenges in the increasingly competitive and fast-changing global economy.

At this stage, Bangladesh's population has average educational attainment. And the supply of highly trained knowledgeable workers required for the knowledge-based economy is very limited. The higher education system in Bangladesh is traditional, and it is not future-oriented. Present teaching pedagogy encourages memorisation, and learning is mainly classroom teaching. Students are passive recipients of this methodology. Teaching is deeply teacher-centred. It should be student-centred.

Universities should develop expertise in fields essential to human flourishing. And the government needs to invest heavily in the education sector in order to produce highly skilled and innovative workers to meet the nation's perceived economic needs.

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## Folk Fest registration controversy exemplifies the need for data protection law

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RECENT events surrounding the use and sharing of personal data collected from users during registration for the recently concluded Dhaka International Folk Fest, has once again brought to the forefront the legal vacuum in the critical area of data protection in Bangladesh.

has been a proliferation of IT-based industries and start-ups, online platforms, mobile applications, and websites in Bangladesh that provide a wide variety of services starting from providing medical advice to filing income tax returns (although, one could argue about the user-friendliness of the latter).

These services and platforms have collected a treasure trove of personal data

be used for a plethora of commercial purposes and even sold to or shared with third parties, most of the times, without knowledge or consent of the actual user or consumer, and sometimes to their detriment resulting in a grave invasion of the user's privacy.

It is unfortunate that more than a decade after the government began to promote the idea of a "Digital

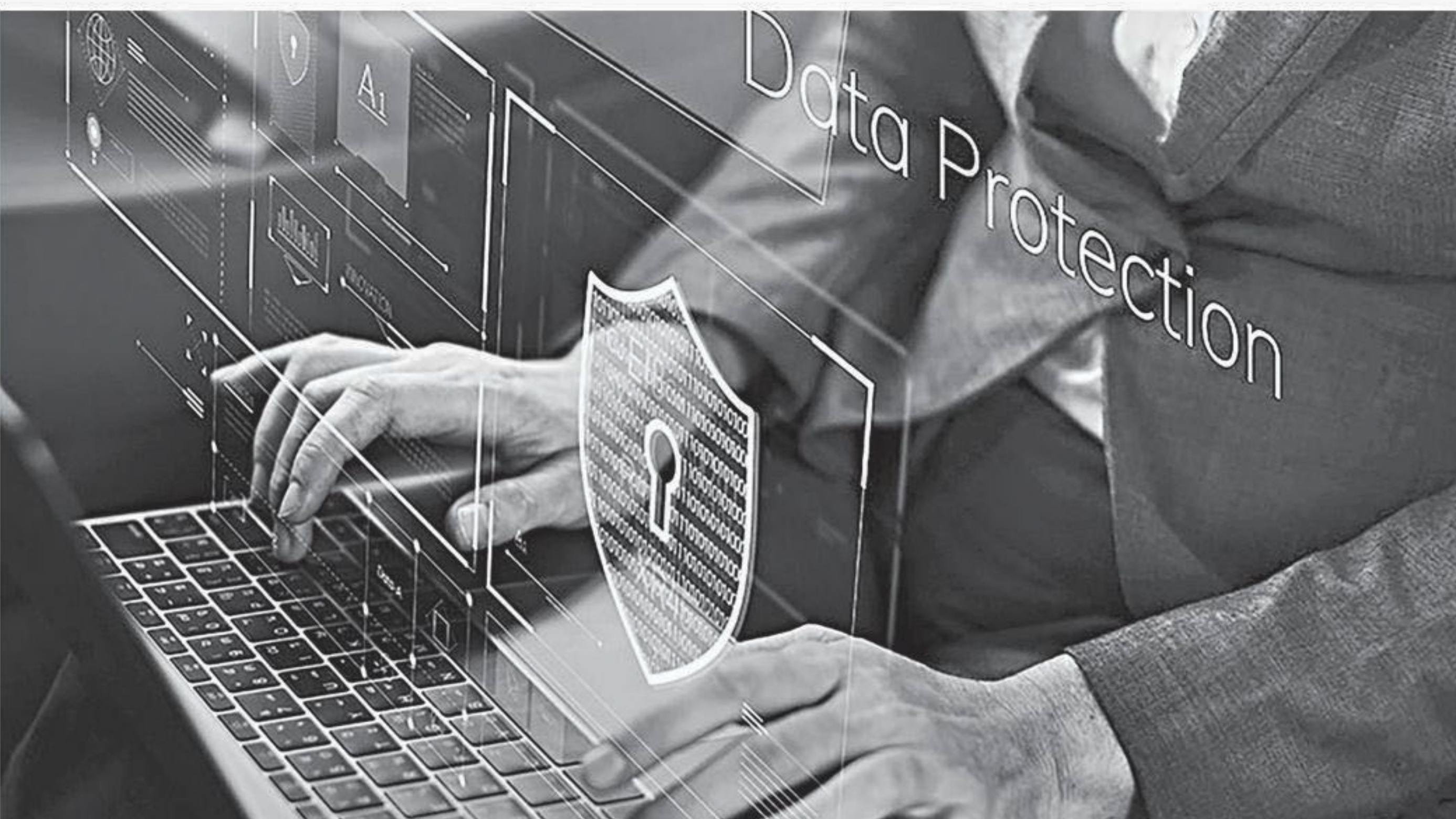
The lack of a legal regime for data protection in Bangladesh means that data controllers such as websites and mobile applications are not obligated to inform the users or data subjects about the purpose for which they are collecting the personal data, how they intend to use it, how long they intend to store it, or whether they will share it with a third party.

It is the lack of this legal regime that is the underlying cause of the "uproar" surrounding the Folk Fest registration; which has enabled businesses, online platforms, and even the state to collect and use personal data of citizens in whatever manner they please; many a times by inserting a clause in the "terms and conditions" of the service in order to legally justify their privacy infringing actions, which the user has to accept during registration.

In recent times, there has been a proliferation of online services and mobile applications which require a copy or a photo of the National Identification Card (NID) for registration and verification. Since Bangladesh does not have a legal regime on data protection, it is unclear whether these personal data are stored securely, and when, how and why they are used and shared with third parties. The aforesaid illustration relating to NID information can be replicated in case of every bit of personal data or information of users and citizens that has been collected or is being processed by companies and entities all across Bangladesh.

The lack of a data protection law in Bangladesh is also a significant hurdle to foreign investment in the high-end IT services sector. Therefore, it is high time to draft, enact, and implement an effective and efficient data protection law in Bangladesh.

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Although the relevant parties involved may have been the subject of significant "fury" and "uproar" from the users or registrants, as things stand, their reported actions are technically legal; and this is the actual problem.

Bangladesh has progressed significantly in the ICT sector in the last decade. There

from users starting from their date of birth, all the way to extremely personal medical information. The websites and applications which collect such personal data may be owned and/or operated by banks, food delivery services, online shops, or a "not-so-reliable" tech start-up. The collected personal data is and can

Bangladesh", Bangladesh is yet to adopt a data protection law protecting the personal data of citizens by stipulating specific legal requirements and standards for the collection, use, storage, accurateness, and sharing of personal data with third parties by data controllers.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Rise in onion price

In the wake of the skyrocketing onion prices, I was shocked to see the news on TV of huge quantities of the bulb rotting away at various places. How can such an essential cooking ingredient that has been priced at over Tk 200 per kilogramme be left to rot? It just does not add up.

Even though the problem began with India banning the export of onions to our country, the authorities here had enough time and thus the possibility to avoid this catastrophe by making alternative arrangements before the market for onions went out of control. Even if the shortage was fabricated, we know that consignments of Burmese and Egyptian onions have been imported recently. Then why is the price taking so long to stabilise?

This goes to show that it is the result of fraudulent traders who are trying to manipulate the prices unnecessarily out of greed. The traders who are all involved with this ludicrous act must be identified and brought to book.

Masum Molla, retail store owner in Khulna

