

## Anarchy in administering plasma therapy

### Lack of guideline may be counterproductive

COVID-19 has compelled countries to test, try and come up with new treatments to cure the afflicted. We have been clutching at every straw, because the virus has defied and resisted many known medications. Clinical trials have only been approved in a few countries, but that is being done under well spelt-out and clear guidelines. In Bangladesh plasma therapy has been approved recently, but, reportedly, it was being used by many hospitals well before the treatment was approved by the authorities, with, regrettably, calamitous results in many cases.

Approval has been given last month, to three hospitals, namely, Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and Rajarbagh Police Hospital—to conduct randomised clinical trials of plasma therapy for Covid-19 patients, but doctors are still not sure as to when exactly to administer the therapy. What we see now, and which is the lament of all the experts, is complete chaos in respect of this particular mode of treatment. There are so many factors that need to be considered and so many if and buts, which the hospitals must be made aware of. It is rather alarming to hear experts describe the current manner of applying the therapy as unethical. How can one determine the fitness of the donor without carrying out antibody test, for example?

We fail to understand why, if the relevant persons in the health ministry and its agencies are doing their jobs honestly to justify their keeps, should it take a month to come out with a guideline to a treatment procedure which should have been accompanied with clear instructions to start with. One wonders what to make of the statement of the head of the national technical advisory committee on coronavirus that decision to whether a guideline will be formed will be taken only after the results of randomised clinical trials are in hand. The trial needs a procedure guideline too, one would have thought. A suggested proposal from the DMCH was sent to the national technical advisory committee over formulating a policy on plasma therapy on June 20, without any response as yet.

Actions intended for public good can be counterproductive unless it is well thought out. In this case it can cost lives. Will the technical committee please wake up?

## Cyclone affected people living in shelters for two months!

### Rehabilitate them until the embankment is repaired

It is unfortunate that nearly two months after cyclone Amphan hit the country's coastal regions, many families in Khulna's Koyra upazila still could not return home because their homes and croplands remain inundated. Reportedly, the embankment along the Kopotakkho river broke at several points due to the impact of Amphan on May 20, washing away homes and belongings of thousands of people of the upazila. As the water did not recede later, the upazila authorities built temporary earthen dykes, known as ring dams, inside the embankment to save themselves from waterlogging. What happened as a result was that hundreds of people whose homestead, agricultural land and fish enclosures fell outside the ring dams became homeless and jobless, as those still remain under water.

At present, over 150 families are living in the two cyclone shelters of the upazila. According to the Koyra upazila administration, over 1.5 lakh people in the upazila were affected by Amphan while 36,000 houses were partially and completely destroyed, 3,000 hectares of cropland damaged and 4,000 hectares of fishing enclosures submerged.

Now the immediate task for the government would be to rehabilitate the families living in the cyclone shelters, which will reduce their sufferings to some extent. Also important is to provide them with cash and food assistance regularly until they can return home. But what is most important is to take immediate measures to reduce the waterlogging created in the villages. While it is good to know that the government has taken some projects to build sustainable embankments in the coastal areas, the reality is that these projects will take years to complete.

Therefore, the question is, where will these homeless people live until the work of the embankment is complete? Have the authorities considered taking any temporary measures to repair the embankment and drain out the water from inside the embankment? Was building the ring dams a good idea which saved some people's homes and land while leaving many others in distress? These are some of the issues the authorities concerned should ponder and then take measures that are people-friendly and sustainable.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Continue distance learning

As a primary school teacher I never thought I would have to teach my students on the digital platform, sending them lessons through SMS and giving them instructions over the phone. Fortunately, it worked out well. Currently, I am providing the students with learning material as well as whatever mental support possible. One can argue about its' effectiveness, but I think that the kids are at least connected to the culture of learning and in touch with their teachers and peers, and that is very significant.

I have also been conducting mini-exams on the digital platform through various apps. For those students who are not connected online, I ask them simple questions (mostly true false or MCQs) over the phone to confirm that they are learning. I would encourage all the primary school teachers across the country to use whatever resources available to keep the wheels of education turning. During this pandemic, not only doctors and other frontline workers, but teachers also have a crucial role to play.

Mostafa Al Hossaini, Chattogram



**MACRO MIRROR**  
FAHMIDA KHATUN

**W**HEN the coronavirus pandemic is raging around the world, political leaders are being weighed in for their performances in containing the pandemic. It is widely discussed that countries with

female heads of state have done much better than those having male leaders even in the strongest countries. The Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Prime Minister of Finland Sanna Marin and President of Taiwan Tsai Ing-wen have been applauded for their success in fighting Covid-19 in their countries. Analysts have tried to dig down the reasons. Though there are several factors behind their achievement to control the spread of coronavirus in these countries, it is also undeniable that these women leaders have been much more caring, sincere and thoughtful in addressing the crisis which have been absent among some of the so called mighty male leaders.

Many have commented that their accomplishment with regard to managing the corona situation would pave the way for more women coming to leadership positions as these women have shown how to do things better. They have a better perspective of doing things and that has been successful. Stretching this optimism a bit further, some have even observed that since corona pandemic has shown "work from home" is a viable option for many jobs, this will help women to continue with their professions, perform better and rise to the leadership position. And in the end, we will be able to make progress towards gender equality.

Actually, it is a big "NO". Gender equality is still an elusive phenomenon in our country and everywhere in the world. Just because these women leaders have done well does not mean they will change the minds of people which are guided by strong stereotyped political, social and cultural values. There are of course many more female politicians in important positions across the world. But the numbers are still far from being

"equal". Women in positions of power are still few and far between. This is not only in case of politics, but also in business, corporate sector, and all other professions. If the skill of women leaders in corona pandemic management is any clue as to how women can do a better job, we are in fact missing out on several other good initiatives and tasks that women can do well which are beneficial for the society.

However, the patriarchal system is the biggest barrier for women to advance.

loud and strong, she would be perceived as a problem in the system. She would be further undermined for her firm opinion and stance. These are not theoretical knowledge written only in books and articles. These are practical and real problems that we face every day even in the so called civilised workplaces.

In the patriarchal society, when a daughter revolts against her husband her parents would try to mend the relationship by any means fearing

protecting the prestige of the institution. In many organisations, the complainant has to leave unceremoniously. And in the meantime, the male dominated media would be analysing her life in great detail. This is how a woman travels while in her journey towards leadership!

In fact, the challenges women face in the workplaces are multifarious, enormous and underreported. The breadth of the problem is much more than what we know. It is mostly the mean-minded men who are the biggest barrier for women's advancement. They cherish to see vulnerability and fragility of women. While awareness and sensitisation are needed among men, the problem has to be also looked through a broader lens. Indeed, such mindset is the result of a political process where both men and women can stand in the way of women's development. A political system which does not believe in equality, inclusion and justice will always be a hindrance to a progressive and just society where everyone can enjoy benefits from growth and prosperity. An exploitative political mechanism will also discriminate against poor and weak men. In a regressive political framework, we will always observe resistance towards the adoption of a liberal women development policy and face obstruction in stopping child marriage. This underscores the need to invest in political, legal and social frameworks.

Thus, the change has to also come from the top as well as from the bottom. All efforts have to be made parallelly to deal with the vicious challenges that women face in their professional careers. We should not also ignore the strength of sisterhood in this journey. It is said there are not many role models for women. We have not seen so many female ministers, secretaries and high officials in the government before. We have not also seen so many entrepreneurs and professional women in the past. So, why is there a dearth of mentors and role models for women? Actually, we do not look for them. Besides, to be a role model one does not have to be at the helm of power only. Every fighter is a role model for another woman, no matter how small and less paying her job is. So, we will listen to them and echo their voices to realise the power of every woman.

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In the context of Bangladesh, it is a constant struggle for women to prove their worth in the workplace and society. Irrespective of their education, expertise and experience women are perceived to be less competent, less capable and less knowledgeable than men.

Unfortunately, hypocrisy and pretence exist among the so called educated and cultured men in our society. They talk too much on gender equality, but do not believe in that a bit. Regardless of a woman's experience, education and ability, men would undermine women to establish their own supremacy. When a man says the same thing that a woman says in meeting he is heard, and appreciated but a woman's point is ignored and unnoticed. If a woman is

society's impression towards them but at the expense of their daughter's happiness. In the same manner, when a woman raises her voice for any fault in a male colleague, she would be considered as a troublemaker creating disruption and all men would be out there to protect him. A woman with strong personality is always a threat to a man. Hence the strategy is to silence her by belittling her in whatever way he can. Since a woman in our society is still so careful about her image, she shuts herself up quite often. If not, she will bear the brunt of her dissent. There would also be joint efforts by men and even women to malign her and undermine her achievements and performance. This is all in the name upholding harmony in the workplace and

## Why consumers are complicit in workers' sufferings



**RMG NOTES**  
MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

**I**n the United Kingdom, they have a small but thriving garment industry in Leicester, an industrial city about 100 miles north of London. There, several hundred garment factories supply to a few UK

brands, although Boohoo is by far the biggest buyer. Boohoo purchases about 70 percent of the garments produced in Leicester and this close proximity to suppliers allows Boohoo to get the latest lines onto its website rapidly. This is ultra-fast fashion, a speed to market which no rivals can compete with.

However, in the past week, journalists and NGOs have announced the results of investigations which show that workers at Leicester's garment industry worked throughout the UK lockdown. Moreover, it has been revealed that many workers were forced to go to work despite being ill with coronavirus. They were told they would be fired if they did not turn up.

It has also been revealed that garment workers are earning as little as 3.50 pounds per hour. This is way below the UK National Minimum Wage of 8.72 pounds. Imagine the scandal if such issues were uncovered in Bangladesh! There would be a global outcry. But that is another story for another day.

For now I want to focus on Boohoo. Boohoo's clothes are amazingly cheap. The company sells dresses for 10 pounds, T-shirts for 3 pounds, jeans for 8 pounds, bikinis for 5 pounds. During lockdown, the business announced a year-on-year annual increase in sales—this at a time when all other retailers were struggling. How did it manage this? Because it switched production to loungewear, pyjamas, and joggers, recognising that people wanted comfortable clothes as they were self-isolating at home.

Bear in mind that the company will not have had any of this clothing made up nobody saw the coronavirus pandemic coming. So it will have had to ask its suppliers to switch lines and work flat out to meet soaring demand from homeworkers for comfortable clothing.

I am relating this to make a very simple point: if an online retailer is selling a dress for 10 pounds or less, and responding rapidly to the demand for loungewear when the whole country is

in lockdown, what would your thoughts be as a consumer? At the very least, you might wonder, firstly, how the company managed to produce clothing so cheaply and, secondly, how it was managing to continue with "business as usual" during lockdown while many other retailers were struggling to meet market demand.

This is the thing in all of this: nobody ever asks questions of consumers.

Nobody ever raises concerns about their buying habits.

going to give any consideration to people making their clothing in far-away places such as Bangladesh? They clearly are not.

I am not defending Boohoo here. It is they who have helped to create this ultra-fast market. But a large majority of consumers have been more than willing participants. They have talked openly about wanting a better world but when it comes to cheap clothing, they vote with their feet. There is no point in denying this anymore.



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PHOTO: DANA PLEASANT/AFP

We keep being told that millennials are conscious shoppers, that they care about the environment and they have consideration for the people who make their clothes. And yet it is these same millennials which have made Boohoo the powerhouse that it is today. These same young shoppers, who are supposed to have a conscience, have enabled Boohoo to grow by 1,000 percent in five years.

Here's the thing: if these millennials do not appear to give consideration to clothing made in the UK, why are they

in all honesty I believe there are large swathes of young consumers in the West who do not give any consideration to the above issues. All they are concerned with is the look of the clothing and what it costs. Boohoo and others like it have therefore responded accordingly to what is essentially a massive market demand for the latest fashion trends at the cheapest possible prices.

The prices on Boohoo are the price points set by the market—the price points set by consumers. If Boohoo disappeared

consumers and their conscientious purchasing from shops can protect workers, it can also largely contribute to preventing unethical practices of buyers. It's the consumers in whose hands is the ultimate power to reform the global apparel industry, make it more responsible and restore the lives and livelihoods of the workers.

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