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FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Govt made good progress in implementing some stimulus packages

But there are still many that haven't reached recipients yet

ACCORDING to a finance ministry report released on November 26, of the more than Tk 1,21,000 crore earmarked by the government under its 21 stimulus packages to tackle the pandemic fallout, 39.23 percent or Tk 47,615 crore was disbursed till October 31. The report estimates that a total of 3.54 crore people have received assistance from various stimulus-cash-food support packages over the period, and 76 lakh firms, organisations, entrepreneurs, and other beneficiaries got loan facilities under the economic bailout scheme. While we appreciate the success of the government in implementing the various schemes, we must also mention here that not all sectors got similar attention.

The finance ministry divided the 21 packages in three broad categories—job retention, restoration of demand and maintenance of supply chains; employment creation and revitalising rural economy; and enhancing social security and food supply. The readymade garments sector, under the first category, is ahead of all others in terms of fund disbursement. An interest-free loan of Tk 10,500 crore was given in two phases with a service charge of two percent for providing salaries to workers and employees of 1,992 export-oriented industrial units for four months. Reportedly, the full amount was disbursed by June and the support in the form of salaries helped save jobs of 50 lakh workers. While the fund disbursement rate for many of the export-oriented and large industries has been quick, the progress has been slow for small and medium enterprises and farm sectors, as they are yet to get enough benefits from the packages.

Although, according to the finance ministry report, the government has distributed Tk 880 crore of the allocated Tk 1,258 crore to 35 lakh poverty-stricken families as cash incentives, under the second category of stimulus packages, there have been reports of gross anomalies in making the list of beneficiaries. A recent TIB report revealed the amount of corruption and irregularities involved in the entire process. Even if we take the government's account at face value, 15 lakh people have still been left out of the scheme.

While the government's free food distribution and OMS (open market sales) programmes have seen some success in the third category, they were also marred by corruption. The government also failed to provide frontline health professionals with the incentives it announced over four months ago—Tk 100-crore of funds was earmarked to this end, but it could not be released as the health ministry has not yet sent the list of recipients.

However, we appreciate the government for preparing the report in order to evaluate the progress of the stimulus packages. Now, what we need is an independent evaluation of the packages that have been executed so far. We hope our economists, local think-tanks and other stakeholders will work together to find the weaknesses of the scheme, so that the government can make adjustments to the packages whose implementation is lagging behind.

Survivors of Baunibandh slums shiver in the cold

Govt must find long term solutions to alleviate their suffering

THE fire that broke out in Baunibandh slum in the early hours of Friday may have spared the lives of its 350 residents (at least) but they have left them without a roof over their heads, completely destitute and shivering in the winter chill. Their homes and belongings, including their cash savings, are all lost. A cow and its calf also perished in the flames. This is hardly a novel tragedy but one that keeps repeating itself over and over. Only a few days earlier, a massive fire broke out in Mohakhali's Sat Tola slum gutting 100 shanties and shops—leaving the dwellers with nothing.

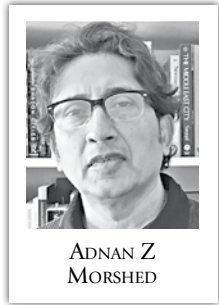
The question we must ask is, what happens to these hapless people? Where do they go?

The report in this paper described how little children, young adults and the elderly are all huddled in the premises of Ananda Niketon Model School, which has given them temporary shelter. It is heartbreaking to read about many of them desperately rummaging through the charred debris to retrieve whatever they can. Most often it is a futile search.

We hope that the authorities will provide quick relief to these people. Apart from food, temporary shelter and sanitation facilities, they need warm clothes on an urgent basis. In fact, the government should start a drive to distribute warm clothes and blankets to these people, who have little to protect themselves from the cold. People in general can pitch in by donating warm clothes, but this requires efficient management by the authorities.

These are of course merely relief efforts that should be taken on an emergency basis. But the larger problem is how these people can be rehabilitated. The government must help them with financial and other support to rebuild their homes and initiate projects where they can stay permanently. This applies to all slum dwellers who, as we know, live in precarious conditions, always vulnerable to disasters like this. They are also at the mercy of local thugs who control everything in the slums, from rent to illegal utility connections. The authorities must make efforts to provide safe, low cost housing to all slum dwellers in the country. The slums in this city are a testament to the apathy with which the authorities, and society in general, treat the people living in them, despite their contributions to the economy. It is not just a humanitarian issue that needs immediate attention but one that needs to be addressed if we are serious about realising our development goals.

The impending wrecking ball for another Dhaka masterpiece



ADNAN Z MORSHED

I do not know how to respond to this barrage of apocalyptic news from Dhaka. After TSC, it is now Kamalapur Railway Station's turn to disappear because it is considered an obstacle to the epic of development. Bangladesh Railway and Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited concluded that MRT-6 requires a new, realigned transit hub, much larger and more "modern" than Kamalapur Railway Station.

We need development. All nations do. But the burning question is: at what social and historical cost?

I wonder if the railway and MRT-6 authorities felt the moral burden of demolishing an iconic structure that, along with the American architect Louis Kahn's Parliament building and Greek architect-planner Constantinos Doxiadis' TSC, symbolised Bangali aspirations during the 1960s. Did the authorities deliberate the cultural cost of losing a national heritage? Before it is too late, let us consider the historic significance of Kamalapur Railway Station.

The first railway line in East Bengal—connecting Kolkata with the western Bangladeshi town of Kushtia—was introduced in 1862. Called the Eastern Bengal Railway, this expansion of train services to East Bengal signalled a new phase in the growth of the region's colonial economy. However, the province east of the Padma River, including such urban centres as Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet, long remained deprived of the benefits of railway because the extensive river system of the deltaic country created geographic logistical issues.

Even by 1885, the only railway line on the eastern side of the Padma was the one connecting Dhaka and the northern town of Mymensingh. Still considered a provincial town at that time, Dhaka's railway infrastructure was nominal. The railway station constructed at Phulbaria, demarcating the northern extent of Dhaka, only served the people in and around the urban area. It was a rudimentary facility with one platform, a small yard, and a locomotive shed.

During the early 20th century, Dhaka's urban status rose, and its economy grew, even more so after 1947, when it became the provincial capital of East Pakistan. The existing railway line bifurcated the capital into the old city and the new city, expanding northward. The north-south traffic flow was severely hampered because the existing train lines converging at the Phulbaria Railway Station cut roads at various points.

The most reasonable remedy was to shift the Phulbaria Station and divert the railway lines to a less populated and sparsely used area, thus easing the north-south vehicular movement without much hindrance. Furthermore, this move would help unify

the old city and the new city. Accordingly, in 1948, experts suggested that the railway station be re-situated to its present location at Kamalapur. However, the proposal came to fruition only a decade later, in 1958, when the provincial government was entrusted with executing the plan. The train line was diverted from Tejgaon to Khilgaon and then to Kamalapur, removing the previous east-west barrier that cut through the middle of the growing city.

The inauguration of the new railway station at Kamalapur on April 27, 1968, introduced a new chapter in the history of railway transportation in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Not only was it the largest modern railway station in the country, but it also embodied the modernist spirit in architecture that defined the decade of the 1960s. The key buildings of the station and the yard occupy about 63.13 hectares (156 acres) of land in the southeast region

Boughey was trained as an architect at New York's Pratt Institute (where he also taught in the late 1960s) and the Architectural Association in London.

At Kamalapur, Dunham and Boughey's design challenge was to create a wide-span structure that would synthesise the language of modern architecture with the requirement of a tropical climate. Furthermore, the official demands to incorporate Islamic building iconography in the railway station's design complicated their task. The result, however, is the unusual concrete roof structure of the train terminal, with a parasol roof that shelters an interconnected series of low-rise structures. The profile of the terminal—a rhythmic pattern of gently pointed and arched concrete shells—evokes a typical image of tropical conditions, in which an umbrella provides protection from the monsoon rains. The design creates a light-

at the John F Kennedy International Airport in New York and a number of parabolic structures in Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer's Brasilia.

The design of Kamalapur Railway Station organises various functional spaces, such as ticket booths, administrative offices, passenger lounges and waiting areas, under one unifying canopy roof. There are no internal divisions between function types. The entire architectural ensemble consists of two systems: the parabolic roof structure above and low-rise (one- and two-story) flat-roofed structures below it. Thus, the ambiance of the whole terminal is of a free-flowing, democratic public place, accessible from all sides.

The completion of the Kamalapur Railway Station was hailed as a landmark accomplishment. Realising the project's political capital, Pakistan's President Ayub Khan attended the opening ceremony.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

of Dhaka. The sprawling complex includes new railway lines, access roads, staff quarters and various other amenities for railway passengers. There are 10 platforms, 11 booking counters, and multiple passenger lounges.

The architects of the Kamalapur Railway Station were two Americans: Daniel C Dunham and Robert G Boughey. They came to Dhaka as employees of Louis Berger and Consulting Engineers (PAK) Ltd, a multinational architectural and engineering consortium with headquarters in America and West Pakistan. Founded in 1953 by Dr Louis Berger, Louis Berger and Associates undertook many infrastructural projects around the globe. While working in Dhaka as a design consultant for the firm, Dunham (a Harvard graduate) was hired to teach architecture at the East Pakistan University of Engineering and Technology (EPUE); renamed BUET, following the independence of Bangladesh). The Pennsylvania-born Robert

filled and cross-ventilated train terminal, reminiscent of Mughal pavilions, with deeply recessed spatial volumes.

The square plan of the terminal contains six square bays on each side. Forty-nine columns support 36 cusped shells that rise to a height of 17.98 m (59 ft). The columns widen as they rise, splitting into four ribs that create the diagonal square grid of the roof system. The concrete roof structure provides a rhythmic visual effect, unifying the spaces below it. The parabolic roofline recalls other contemporary masterpieces, such as Danish architect Jorn Utzon's Sydney Opera House (1957–1973). Just as Utzon's Opera House shaped the skyline of the Sydney harbour, Kamalapur Railway Station's repetitive arches created a new skyline in this low-rise area of the city. Other contemporaneous iconic roof structures that might have inspired Kamalapur were Eero Saarinen's Trans World Airlines Flight Center (1956–1962)

The lives of many political leaders of our independence struggle are inseparably linked to this station. Serving over half a century as both a literal and a symbolic gateway to the capital city, Kamalapur is intertwined with the country's histories of modernity, transportation and nationhood. Why destroy such a structure?

It is time for the Supreme Court to declare certain historic buildings as *living beings*, so that nobody can "kill" them. Anybody who kills a historic building should be charged with murder. The highest judicial body of the land tried to save our rivers this way. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has a historic opportunity to create a new development model, one that treats history and ecology with a philosophy driven by honour and empathy.

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Adnan Zillur Morshed is an architect, architectural historian, urbanist, and educator. He teaches in Washington, DC, and serves as Executive Director of the Centre for Inclusive Architecture and Urbanism at BRAC University. morshed@cua.edu

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Ten ways you can help end violence against women, even during a pandemic

UN WOMEN

In 2020, Covid-19 touched our lives in nearly every way, everywhere, as countries went into lockdown and restricted movement to contain the spread of the virus. As doors closed and isolation began, reports of all forms of violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, began to rise.

The pandemic of violence against women is not new. Even before Covid-19 hit us, globally, 243 million women and girls were abused by their intimate partners in the past year. The Covid-19 pandemic intensified the violence, even as support services faltered and accessing help became harder.

As we mark the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence campaign (25 November–10 December), UN Women is joining hands with survivors, activists, decision-makers, the UN system, and people from every walk of life, to shine a light on the need for funding, essential services, prevention and data that shapes better-informed responses.

Ending violence against women is everyone's business. Here are just ten ways you can make a difference, safely and impactfully.

Listen to and believe survivors: When a woman shares her story of violence, she takes the first step to breaking the cycle of abuse. It's on all of us to give her the safe space she needs to speak up and be heard. It's important to remember that when discussing cases of sexual violence, a victim's sobriety, clothes, and sexuality are irrelevant. The perpetrator is the sole reason for assault and must bear the responsibility alone. Call out victim-blaming and counter the idea that it's on women to avoid situations that might be seen as "dangerous" by traditional standards.

Survivors of violence are speaking out more than ever before, and everyone has a role to play to ensure they can have justice.

Don't say, "Why didn't she leave?" Do say: "We hear you. We believe you. We stand with you."

Teach the next generation and learn from them: The examples we set for the younger generation shape the way they think about gender, respect and human rights. Start conversations about gender roles early on, and challenge the traditional features and characteristics assigned to men and women. Point out the stereotypes that children constantly encounter, whether in the media, on the street or at the school, and let them know that it's okay to be different. Encourage a culture of acceptance.

Talk about consent, bodily autonomy and accountability to boys and girls, and also listen to what they have to say about their experience of the world. By empowering young advocates with information, and educating them about women's rights, we can build a better future for all.

Call for responses and services fit for purpose: Services for survivors are essential services. This means that shelters, hotlines, counselling and all support for survivors of gender-based violence need to be available for those in need, even during the coronavirus pandemic.

Every year, the 16 Days of Activism campaign calls for united, global action to end all forms of violence against women and girls. This year the United Nations, together with our partners, are demanding four critical actions, summarised by our 2020 campaign theme: fund, respond, prevent, collect.

Join us in calling on governments to bridge funding gaps to address violence against women and girls, ensure essential services for survivors of violence are maintained during this crisis, implement prevention measures, and invest in collecting the data necessary to adapt and improve life-saving services for women and girls.

Understand consent: Freely given,

enthusiastic consent is mandatory, every time.

Rather than listening for a "no," make sure there is an active "yes," from all involved. Adopt enthusiastic consent in your life and talk about it.

Phrases like "she was asking for it" or "boys will be boys" attempt to blur the lines around sexual consent, placing blame on victims, and excusing perpetrators from the crimes they have committed. While those that use these lines may have fuzzy understandings of consent, the definition is crystal clear. When it comes to consent, there are no blurred lines.

Learn the signs of abuse and how you can help: There are many forms of abuse and all of them can have serious physical and emotional effects. If you're concerned about a friend who may be experiencing violence or feels unsafe around someone, review these signs and learn about the ways to help them find safety and support.

Start a conversation: Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation that's been perpetuated for decades. It's pervasive, but it's not inevitable, unless we stay silent.

Show your solidarity with survivors and where you stand in the fight for women's rights by oranging your social media profile for the 16 Days of Activism. On Instagram, you can use UN Women's face filter to spread the word and encourage your community to do the same. Use #orangetheworld, #16Days and #GenerationEquality to start your own conversation about gender-based violence, or share some of the content from our social media package.

Stand against rape culture: Rape culture is the social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalised and justified, fuelled by the persistent gender inequalities and attitudes about gender and sexuality. Naming it is the first step to dismantling rape culture.

Every day, we have the opportunity

to examine our behaviours and beliefs for biases that permit rape culture to continue. Think about how you define masculinity and femininity, and how your own biases and stereotypes influence you. From the attitudes we have about gender identities to the policies we support in our communities, we can all take action to stand against rape culture.

Fund women's organisations: Donate to local organisations that empower women, amplify their voices, support survivors, and promote acceptance of all gender identities and sexualities. UN Women works with women's organisations everywhere to end violence against women, assist survivors, and secure equal rights for women and girls everywhere.

Hold each other accountable: Violence can take many forms, including sexual harassment in the workplace and in public spaces. Take a stand by calling it out when you see it: catcalling, inappropriate sexual comments and sexist jokes are never okay. Create a safer environment for everyone by challenging your peers to reflect on their own behaviour and speaking up when someone crosses the line, or by enlisting the help of others if you don't feel safe. As always, listen to survivors and make sure they have the support they need.

Know the data and demand more of it: To effectively combat gender-based violence, we need to understand the issue. Relevant data collection is key to implementing successful prevention measures and providing survivors with the right support. As gender-based violence has spiked during Covid-19, the gaps in gender sensitive data collection have become more glaring than ever. Call on your government to invest in the collection of data on gender-based violence.

Find out at data.unwomen.org how UN Women works to bring about a radical shift in how gender statistics are used, created and promoted.