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Unseating MP Papul is not enough

He must be tried in his own country for the crimes he committed

WE are relieved to see, finally, that a clear decision has been taken by the parliament regarding disgraced lawmaker Mohammad Shahid Islam, also known as Kazi Papul, on grounds of moral turpitude. On January 28, 2021, Kazi Papul was sentenced to four years' rigorous imprisonment by a Kuwaiti court for bribing Kuwaiti officials. He also faces two more cases, one for human trafficking and the other for money laundering, in that country. According to media reports, Kazi Papul has been carrying out his criminal activities for many years.

Details have emerged of how he started as a worker, then becoming a recruitment broker and later establishing four companies that employed 9,000 workers. He earned his millions through his company; he would recruit workers in exchange for money, who later found that their visas were fake. Papul and his associates forced these workers to work for his company. Papul has also been found guilty of forcing workers to toil against their will, in inhumane conditions without wages or proper housing. He is also accused of threatening workers who opposed his views with false cases. Money laundering and human trafficking are also part of his crime portfolio.

After learning about the long list of serious crimes he was involved in, we cannot help but wonder, how did such an individual become an MP? What was the basis of his nomination? According to reports, Papul spent huge sums of money to get his nomination. Did the Election Commission bother to find out what kind of a person Papul was before accepting him as a candidate?

The conviction of Papul in a foreign court should be a wakeup call for the parliament and lead to some serious rethinking about the role and moral character of an MP. From reports, we know that Papul spent crores of money so that he could become an independent MP along with his wife, who became an MP from the reserved seats for women.

A Member of Parliament is a highly prestigious position; an MP is a public representative and lawmaker in the highest legislative body. Does not such a status come with certain expectations of integrity and moral uprightness? Unfortunately, we have often come across reports of abuse of power and corruption allegedly committed by our MPs, and the fact that they are rarely, if ever, prosecuted—let alone convicted—speaks volumes about the impunity they enjoy while in power. It is about time the parliament as a whole looked into the code of conduct of MPs and ensured that there is a system of accountability that will scrutinise whether an MP is playing his/her expected role inside and outside the parliament.

Papul's criminal activities and conviction has been a big blow to the image of the parliament and of the country. His crimes are heinous and include human trafficking and extortion. Just depriving him of his ill-gotten seat is not enough. We hope he is tried in his own country under the law of the land. The parliamentary secretariat must hold all MPs who commit crimes accountable. An MP candidate's nomination should be determined by their moral character and public acceptability, not by how many crores he can spend to buy his nomination.

Road accidents keep taking their toll

The systemic flaws remain unrectified

HARDLY a day passes without the painful news of deaths in road accidents. And it seems that we are helpless to do anything to redress the horrendous situation. Either that, or the administration is least concerned about the problem. Only the day before yesterday, a newborn was killed and at least 15 others were injured when an ambulance collided head-on with a bus in Barisal's Babuganj upazila. Yesterday, at least five people were killed and 23 others were injured in a head-on-collision between a bus and a truck at Konabari in Kamarkhand upazila of Sirajganj district. We accept that if we have vehicles on the road accidents will happen, but most of the accidents that occur so frequently on our roads and highways are quite avoidable.

Reportedly, the annual road crash deaths per capita in Bangladesh are twice the average rate for high-income countries and five times that of the best-performing countries in the world. Road accidents have actually taken the form of a pandemic in this country. It may sound like a strange comparison, but road accidents have taken more lives in the month of January, considering the seven-day average, than Covid-19 in the same month. According to the Road Safety Foundation (RSF), in January 2021 alone, as many as 484 people were killed and 673 injured in 427 road accidents across Bangladesh—a 25.58 percent rise year-on-year. At least 445 lives were lost in 340 road accidents in January last year.


It may sound cynical, but given the state of the vehicles that we see on the roads, the degree of sense and awareness of traffic rules of the drivers, their level of proficiency, and the wanton corruption that allows untrained drivers and unfit vehicles to ply the roads—it is perhaps surprising that even more accidents do not occur. The situation has gotten so bad that when one ventures onto the highways, it is likely he/she would be petrified the entire course of the journey, continuously praying to Providence for a safe termination of their travels.

According to a World Bank report published in February 2020, Bangladesh needs to invest an estimated extra USD 7.8 billion over the next decade to halve its road crash fatalities. We fully endorse the fact that the high death rate on Bangladesh's roads is due to a chronic lack of investment in systemic, targeted, and sustained road safety programmes. Added to that are the poor control measures in issuing road permits and driver's licenses, and non-enforcement of the road traffic laws. It is time for the government to act, and not simply look away as more and more innocent lives continue to be lost on our dangerous roads.

Ill-planned, if planned at all!

DSCC's short-sighted drive to remove four lakh rickshaws

A CLOSER LOOK



TASNEEM TAYEB

ON the face of it, it seems to be a logical move. An internal survey by Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) is said to have found only 200,000 of the about 600,000 rickshaws plying the DSCC areas suitable for operation. Therefore, the remaining 400,000 will be evicted in stages from March 15, 2021. They added that this will be better for the traffic situation. The question they did not seem to address however is on a more general level—will this move be better for the nation?

While the idea of a congestion-free Dhaka is something all Dhaka dwellers dream of, the DSCC's decision to phase out 400,000 rickshaws poses some serious questions. While studies tend to show rickshaws do indeed contribute to some of the lowest average vehicular speeds around the world, they are only one part of the problem.

On a purely mundane, logistical level, this decision will pose some challenges. The pavements and walkways of Dhaka city, when they are there, are notoriously unwalkable. They are mostly occupied by street vendors and are invariably litter-ridden. Then there are the motorcycle and bicycle riders who often resort to driving on the pavements to evade the traffic on the streets. And even amidst all these if one tries to walk, they are subjected to the random—and perhaps sometimes intentional—shoves and bumps, especially the women and girls.

Moreover, some of the streets and alleys of Old Dhaka, all of which fall

under DSCC's purview, are so narrow that often private cars cannot move through them. Under such circumstances, people have no other option but to resort to using rickshaws to commute from one place to another. While the young and the capable can always choose to walk, even on dirty walkways, jostling through the footpath vendors, what the elderly and the psychically challenged would do in the absence of rickshaws is something the

others whose livelihoods will be affected by the eviction of the 400,000 rickshaws will be rehabilitated. Are they going to be provided with alternative livelihood generation opportunities? Are they going to be sent back to their ancestral villages? If they do return, what are they going to do once back home? There are no answers to these questions. If the DSCC have these answers, then they must disclose these to the public and to those who are living

talk about easing the traffic situation of Dhaka, the first segment they point to are the rickshaw pullers. Talk about soft targets!

Instead of taking these whimsical—and at best piece-meal—measures to ease Dhaka's road congestion, the policymakers must look at the broader socioeconomic picture that is enabling this problem. Dhaka's traffic nightmare is not a black and white issue. If anything, it



Rickshaw-pullers sheltering from the rain inside sewage pipes/cylinders kept beside the road in Dhaka in 2019.

PHOTO: STAR/ SK ENAMUL HAQ

DSCC authorities need to clarify.

But on a more holistic level, the major issue that needs to be looked into by the authorities seeking to phase out 400,000 rickshaws is their economic rehabilitation. One must keep in mind that the rickshaw industry is a big one. There are multiple forward and backward supply chain stages that are linked with it: there are the parts suppliers of rickshaws, the makers, the painters, the rickshaw owners, the rickshaw pullers, the mechanics and the spare parts suppliers, among others, in this long chain. The phasing out of these rickshaws from DSCC would not only affect the lives and livelihoods of the 400,000 pullers, but also all those involved with the associated industries.

But more importantly, most of the rickshaw pullers are the main bread-earners of their families. When the DSCC talks about phasing out 400,000 of them from March 15, they must also consider its economic implication on the hundreds and thousands of people who are dependent on those rickshaw pullers.

There seems to be no plan on how the rickshaw pullers, their families and the

amidst fears of a bleak future.

A survey of 1,200 households of rickshaw pullers conducted last year by Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), in collaboration with Unicef, revealed that 31.81 percent of those surveyed have travelled to Dhaka from environmentally vulnerable areas in search of a better life. The people who toil day and night to earn a meagre living do not do it for pleasure; they do it out of desperation, to survive in a world where the prices of essentials are on the rise, and where access to education and decent, formal workplaces remain limited to a few.

These people brave the rains and storms, the scorching heat of summer and the bitter cold of the winter, peddling through the dirty waters when the roads are clogged, for a mere few Takas. And despite the backbreaking effort, they still peddle rickshaws because they have been left with no other option. They do not have access to finance or technical education, and they have no other means of earning a living except their Sisyphean jobs. Yet, every time the policymakers

is a complex maze where multiple factors are working together to exacerbate it. Rickshaws are certainly a part of it, but evicting them is not going to solve this problem.


If the policymakers really want to address this menace, they need to thoroughly assess all the factors that are contributing to it and take multi-pronged, comprehensive measures to ease the roads of the city, and this strategy should also include the bigger tasks.

Decentralisation of the capital, controlling internal migration and creating income opportunities in rural areas will be some of the major components of this strategy.

By removing 400,000 rickshaws from the roads of DSCC areas, the officials will be putting into uncertainty the livelihoods of 400,000 households. The DSCC officials should revisit this shortsighted move and come up with a better and detailed strategy to solve the problem of Dhaka's traffic, one that includes the rehabilitation of rickshaw pullers.

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PATRICK OWEKE

THE negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have necessitated various medical boards across the globe to begin the emergency usage of Covid-19 vaccines, bringing reprieve and optimism in 2021.

Pfizer-BioNtech is arguably one of the most effective Covid-19 vaccines, with a proven efficacy of 95 percent. The vaccine is, however, required to be stored between -80 degrees Celsius and -60 degrees Celsius. This implies that a home refrigerator cannot be used as a storage method given that its temperature is usually between 0 to -4 degrees Celsius.

The storage and the distribution of this vaccine, while maintaining its viability, will prove to be a challenge, and we are all wondering about the crucial question—how do you transport the temperature-sensitive vaccine from Pfizer's United States warehouse to the point of use in say, Pumwani Hospital in Nairobi?

Supply chain experts have adopted strategies such as the cold supply chain to distribute the vaccine across the world. Cold supply chains entail the transportation of the temperature-sensitive products along the supply chain through refrigerated packaging methods.

Refrigerated trucks fitted with dry ice will be required to transport the vaccine from the plant-attached cold storage to the airport or shipping companies. Dry ice is solid carbon dioxide, with a temperature of about -80C. Dry ice is preferred over regular ice or gel, simply because it does not melt. Its downside is that it sublimates when in contact with air. In preparing the refrigerated trucks to receive the consignment (vaccine), they are steam cleaned to reduce the risk of bacterial infections on the products. Insulated pieces, commonly referred to as quilts, are then placed over or around the

consignment to act as a buffer in the event of temperature variations due to outside conditions. Once the temperature control measures are in place, the vaccine is then loaded to the trucks and transported to holding facilities, and customs clearance is taken care of while waiting for either ship or air travel. The holding facility should be a dedicated cold storage facility where the required temperature is maintained.

Most cold storage facilities are

of the vaccines, route design and the environmental impact.

The demand for the Covid-19 vaccine is a lifeline to the airline industry, which for a major part of the year 2020 was faced with dwindling demand for passenger flights when compared to cargo and freight business. Kenya Airways has already remodeled some of their Boeing 787 airplanes to carry cargo. The route design for air transport is straightforward, simple and efficient. It simplifies



PHOTO: AFP

outsourced to third party logistics providers. There are various types of cold storage such as refrigerated containers, chillers, cold rooms, pharmaceutical grade cold storage, plant-attached cold storage etc. Specifically, for vaccines, transportation to a pharmaceutical grade cold storage would be ideal since they are custom made for the products' specifications. Once approval for shipping is received, the cargo is loaded.

Meticulous planning and preparation of the mode of transport and transit warehouse needs to be decided in advance. The pros and cons of shipping and air transportation need to be factored in. Some of the factors to consider are time to destination, cost, safety

transporting the vaccine from Airport A to B in the shortest possible time (reminds me of vector analysis!). The vaccines, to be transported by air, are packed with dry ice to act as a refrigerant. Data loggers and tracking devices are also packed to monitor the temperature and location of the vaccines during transport.

Data loggers are electronic devices that record data over time and have in-built sensors. The volume of vaccines to be transported requires an increase in the quantity of the dry ice that exceeds the previous amount allowed in airplanes during the pre-Covid-19 era. Data loggers and cargo tracking devices are powered by lithium batteries; hence, they have a high level of electromagnetic radiation

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that may interfere with aircraft systems. Aviators need to come up with the optimal balance of the vaccine quantity, dry ice, and sensors for safe air transport.

The route design for ship transport must consider the most secure and effective route, sea turbulence levels, and the port clearing efficiency at the port of delivery. Ocean shipments will take longer than air travel, although it is more cost effective. With respect to environmental impacts, ships generally emit fewer grams of exhaust gas emissions than air transport. The risk with the shipping transport is that the cooling system in the reefer container may fail while in the high seas, or the ship itself can fail. There is a need to consider how fast they can get spare parts or what arrangements have been made by the service provider to ensure the integrity of the product. Once the vaccines are on the high seas, there are many risks. One of the major risks is piracy, which is mitigated by ensuring the choice of the route is secure. Some of the other risk factors are theft, temperature performance and liability issues (in the event of vaccine integrity breach during transit).

For successful transportation of vaccines, it is imperative that the recipient countries invest in infrastructure (building of cold storage centres at airports and ports), seamless custom clearance systems, railway or road transport networks and skilled personnel.

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