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Vaccines should be obtained from multiple sources

Local production should also be encouraged

THE last thing that we wanted to hear now was that Bangladesh should not expect to get the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from India anytime soon. Bangladesh is likely to run out of its stock of 10.2 million doses by the end of May. Clearly, Serum Institute of India (SII) has defaulted on its part of the agreement that it signed with the Bangladesh government, under which it was supposed to supply 5 million doses of Covid-19 vaccines every month. Not surprisingly, the supply of the vaccine has been disrupted due to a shortage of raw materials and India's internal demand.

While acquiring the vaccines quickly and having about 5.7 million people administered the first jab are commendable tasks, the administration's reliance on a single source for a frontline medicine, without alternative sources, has betrayed poor planning on its part. One can take (SII) to court and do all the admonishments, but it is difficult to ride over the force majeure clause. This we hope will be a lesson for our state planners for future deals.

We have a huge demand for the vaccine, and given the situation in India which has reached the level of disaster, we cannot depend on SII to meet its supply quota of 30 million doses. In any case we need much more than that to immunise the most vulnerable groups before the rest of the country can be given the vaccine. It would have been a good idea to start producing the vaccine in Bangladesh jointly with another country. One wonders why the phase-III clinical trials of the Covaxin, as agreed between Bangladesh and Bharat Biotech in December last year, has not been approved. Our priority is to knock at all possible sources for the vaccine so that our initial objective to vaccinate the vulnerable groups can be met. We are relieved that COVAX, the Gavi-coordinated Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access will give Bangladesh one lakh doses in May. China has also said it will give vaccines as a gift. Although the latest report on the vaccine is that Serum Institute will be supplying 20 lakh doses by May, we should still pursue local production to avoid the uncertainty created by India's sudden suspension of supply before. In this regard, it is encouraging to learn that Russia is willing to produce the Sputnik V Covid-19 vaccines in Bangladesh. The country is waiting for a quick decision.

Women's unpaid care work must be counted

Viewing household chores in economic terms is the key

IT'S concerning that around 78 percent households primarily run by women have been facing acute financial distress during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, caused by sudden job losses, increased household responsibilities and, interrupted support services at work for child care. This data, published in a study titled, "Rapid Analysis of Care Work during Covid Pandemic in Bangladesh", brings to light the sorry economic realities that a large section of Bangladeshi women are experiencing due to the Covid-19 crisis.

According to the study conducted by an associate professor of economics at Jahangirnagar University, women of urban areas are spending 128 percent more time in household chores than the pre-pandemic period. Although almost 72 percent of home-makers used to spend around five hours per day doing unpaid care work before the start of the Covid-19 epidemic, 38 percent of these women have reported that hours for doing such works have shot up for them. What's more, 85 percent of women who already spend a large part of their waking hours in full-time jobs also have to spend more than four hours of regular unpaid care work when they return to their homes. These findings prove that men are still lagging behind in joining hands with women members of the household to lessen the burden on the latter by sharing everyday household work.

A report published by *The Daily Star* on January 18, 2016, highlights that men spend only 1.2 hours a day on average doing household work, which gives them 5.25 hours more than women to indulge in recreation or career development activities. The process of recognising the financial importance of women's unpaid care work has to take off urgently. Doing so will ramp up the country's economy too as economists have suggested in the past that the size of Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can be almost doubled if women's domestic responsibilities are calculated in terms of GDP.

The government must first come to the aid of women-headed households who are in extreme financial hardship due to the pandemic. Cash and food aid must reach them fast. Moreover, the government has to initiate immediate awareness campaigns across the country promoting the point that household chores are not exclusive to women only, it applies equally to men. Most importantly, women's economic empowerment can only be ensured through their access to and control over important resources. Being engaged with paid productive activities, women-only skills training programmes and lastly, strong and constant family support for girls to pursue their dreams of becoming educated and financially independent individuals are some of the boxes that have to be checked on a priority basis, to guarantee proper acknowledgement of women's unparalleled contributions in keeping both their family and professional lives functioning smoothly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Inflation making life difficult

Over the years we have seen an incredible rise in the amount of nonperforming loans in the country's banking sector. There is some fear that NPLs will rise even more due to the pandemic.

To stabilise the economy the government has introduced a number of stimulus packages. However, as that led to an increase in the money supply, commodity prices have gone up. The government should keep inflation in mind when making policies.

Imran Ahamed, North South University

New promise on climate by world leaders: A hope in the horizon



FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE climate change summit of 40 world leaders, spearheaded by the US President Joe Biden during April 22-23, 2021, amidst the concern for achievability of the climate ambitions is a significant step forward. A number of countries announced their new targets of higher reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, while the others reiterated their commitments. The USA has made commitments to cut GHG emissions by at least 50-52 percent (from its 2005 levels) by 2030, Japan by 46 percent in 2030 (compared to the levels of 2013), and Canada by 36 percent from its 2005 levels. Ahead of the summit, the EU committed to cut GHG emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030 (compared to 1990 levels) and the UK pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 75 percent by 2030. On the other hand, China repeated its commitment to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. South Korea plans to stop funding overseas coal development.

While the historic responsibility of the advanced countries has been reflected in these commitments, the world eagerly awaits their implementation in the coming days. In the past, such rhetoric has not been acted upon, and thus the world is still far away from achieving net zero emissions—as targeted in the Paris Climate Agreement. In 2015, at the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris, 196 parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) made commitments to reduce GHG emissions and achieve carbon neutrality by the middle of this century.

Six years later, when countries are preparing to review the progress on climate commitment at COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021, there are mixed feelings on the work done towards climate mitigation. The Paris Agreement aims for reaching net-zero emissions so that global temperature increase can be stabilised below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The carbon neutrality targets have been set by more than 100 countries. They have announced transformation of their economies to fulfil their commitments. Non-state actors, including various large private companies, have also set their targets by redesigning their business models. However, the achievement of lower temperature targets still seems to be

a far-fetched ambition. According to the estimates of the Climate Action Tracker, if all the net-zero pledges made by countries as of November 2020 are implemented, global warming could be as low as 2.1 degree Celsius by 2100. This implies that all actors have to expedite their actions towards net zero emissions by 2050.

The major players in this are a few developed and developing countries. Hence, the major responsibility for GHG emissions reduction falls on them. In

commitments.

The fulfilment of the Paris commitment also depends on the availability of climate finance, particularly to the global South. The ambition to mobilise USD 100 billion per year by 2020 as Green Climate Fund remains unfulfilled. President Biden's pledge of increasing climate funds to USD 5.7 billion a year by 2024 for developing countries is a welcome move. But other countries and organisations will have

to community within countries. The poor, women, children, and the marginalised are the most vulnerable sections to climate change while the rich can withstand the impact to a larger extent. Differential impact of climate change also accentuates inequality in the society. The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is a double whammy on climate vulnerable countries such as Bangladesh. As the poor struggle with their livelihood challenges during the pandemic, inequality is apprehended to increase. So, developing countries and LDCs are in need of enough resources to address the fallout from the pandemic, rebuild their economies, and adapt to the climate challenges all at the same time.

Bangladesh, as the head of the Climate Vulnerability Forum (CVF), has called for higher international commitment for GHG reduction by countries and increased support for tackling the impact of climate change. Bangladesh will also announce its updated NDC by June 2021. In 2015, Bangladesh committed to reduce GHG emission by 5 percent by 2030 in three sectors (namely, power, transport, and industry). However, if additional finance and technology are available, Bangladesh will reduce GHG emission by 15 percent. Bangladesh's revised NDC—which is currently being finalised by national experts—will include two more sectors, such as waste and land use. Bangladesh plans to shift to renewable energy gradually by reducing the usage of coal-based power plants to fulfil its NDC.

Surprisingly, a certain quarter in the country is advocating for raising Bangladesh's NDC to 30 percent, which is close to that of some of the developing countries whose pollution level is much higher than Bangladesh's. But as of 2018, Bangladesh's share of GHG emission in total global GHG emission is only 0.45 percent, compared to 23.92 percent by China, 11.84 percent by the USA, 6.84 percent by India, and 4.07 percent by Russia.

Despite being a low emitter of GHG, Bangladesh's commitment on NDC is a reflection of its sense of responsibility towards the global community. Bangladesh will behave responsibly while making economic progress and need not increase its NDC, given its current level of insignificant emission level. It is the advanced countries which determine the trajectory in global emissions. Let them share the burdens proportionately and equitably. And let us not get swept away by the strong wave of global climate politics!

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The Paris Agreement aims for reaching net-zero emissions so that global temperature increase can be stabilised below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

PHOTO: AFP

Paris, all member countries made their climate commitments by submitting their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) towards climate mitigation. Article 4, Para 9 of the Paris Agreement calls for enhanced ambitions every 5 years. As the main emitters of GHG, the developed countries had set various targets and timelines. Several developing countries also made their targets for GHG emission reductions. The least developed countries (LDCs) are not major polluters and only the victims of the GHG emissions. But they also took on some obligations voluntarily. Historical trends of GHG emissions indicate that, during 1850-2017, the share of GHG emissions by 47 LDCs was only 2.9 percent compared to 24.1 percent by the USA, 15.8 percent by the EU, and 12.3 percent by China. The Climate Watch data also reveals that in 2017, the GHG emission of 47 LDCs was 3.4 percent as opposed to 13.7 percent by the USA, 8.2 percent by the EU, and 27.3 percent by China. Thus, in view of the slow progress towards net zero emissions, the polluting countries will need to make long-term and more serious

to come forward, too. Related to the access to climate finance is the issue of debt relief of low-income countries. During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, countries are making commitments for green recovery through making large-scale green investments and charting out green energy plans. This is difficult for developing countries with limited resources. Hence, these countries must be provided with more resources for making green economic recovery, while also making sure that they do not fall into debt traps. Besides, these countries also need technology transfer and support for technology development towards green energy transformation.

Countries such as Bangladesh, which are most vulnerable to the impact of climate change, require more actions towards adaptation. The international climate discourse focuses more on mitigation and less on adaptation. But stronger adaptive capacity and resilience are the keys to reducing the climate vulnerability faced by these countries. The extent of vulnerability varies from country to country. It also varies from community

Why we need an industry charter on buying practices



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

MUST we keep on making the same old mistakes? Last year during the pandemic, I wrote extensively about the issue of purchasing practices and their impact on garment supply chains and their workers. The pandemic, as we found out, proved a fertile ground for some retailers (some but by no means all) to ride roughshod over the issue of purchasing practices. This included refusing to pay for complete and in-progress orders, extending their payment terms (often to 90 days or more) and demanding huge discounts on orders.

As suppliers, we were—and continue to be—very much dependent on the goodwill of brands when it comes to payment. Some brands stepped up to the plate and looked out for their suppliers, but far too many others took advantage of a weak regulatory environment in which the penalties for renegeing on contracts are essentially non-existent.

We all know the impact of these poor purchasing practices. They have made an already bad situation even worse and ultimately hit those people right at the bottom of the supply chain—garment workers.

The irony in all of this, of course, is that our industry talks regularly about corporate social responsibility and the importance of looking after garment workers.

Well, here is a fact: garment workers will continue to be exploited, to live with uncertainty, to have months where they do not receive a pay check, and times when they cannot put food on the table until our industry gets to grips with this issue.

When I wrote about this last year, I was hopeful that, finally, the pandemic might be the wake-up call our industry needs to address purchasing practices. I thought that the public pressure placed on brands which had reneged on contracts and walked away from completed orders might actually lead to change. Maybe the industry would sign up to a binding agreement on this issue similar

to the Bangladesh Accord? Or perhaps governments would step in and regulate? It dismays me to say that I have yet to see any evidence of change in this area. Most recent reports show that, actually, unit prices for apparel continue to fall and suppliers are being squeezed as hard as ever. Market forces are doing their thing, essentially meaning too many suppliers fighting over too little business placing downward pressure on prices.

Has anything at all changed? I have

be purchasing practices. In recent media communication, this industry body acknowledged that responsible purchasing practices enable suppliers to plan their production and working hours effectively and to pay workers fairly. At the same time, they enable suppliers to invest in the overall improvement of working conditions and thereby strengthen resilience in the supply chain.

In fact, we know all of this because in industry we have been talking about it for



The pandemic proved a fertile ground for some retailers to ride roughshod over the issue of purchasing practices.

PHOTO: STAR

seen a couple of things. In recent months, the main trade bodies of leading textile hubs have established the Manufacturers Payment and Delivery Terms Initiative. This initiative has been started by the STAR Network—which is supported by GIZ FABRIC—and by the International Apparel Federation (IAF).

The Better Buying Institute has also done some incredible work in drawing attention to the issue of purchasing practices and how bad practice harms suppliers and their workers. This work has been in progress for several years and shows great promise.

Meanwhile, the German Partnership for Sustainable Textiles has announced that in 2021, its annual topic will

so long. Will the above initiatives change things? I think they are laudable and that it is good that these issues are now getting more and more spotlight. Purchasing practices certainly appear to have risen up the agenda in our industry.

My concern is that after more than a decade of talking on this issue and having had 12-months in particular where the relationship between brands and suppliers has been under the microscope like never before, we are yet to see anything tangible, or concrete put in place to tackle this. There are no binding rules, nothing is set in stone or codified, there are still no penalties for brands that renege on contracts.

Hand on heart, does anybody in our industry genuinely believe this issue can be changed from within? Does anybody really think that a collection of disparate initiatives can place enough pressure on buyers to do the right thing and consistently pay their suppliers on time on agreed terms?

Albert Einstein said that the definition of madness is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. This seems to be where we are now on this issue. We have spent years expecting our industry to regulate itself, of saying the same things, of talking the same talk. And still: we seem to be no further forward.

I sincerely hope the aforementioned initiatives, and much other well-meaning work in this area, have some success. But for my own part, the only real, long-term solution I can see is something legally-binding that the whole industry signs up to. This would be an industry charter, a set of minimum agreed conditions around brand purchasing which all buyers and sellers must adhere to.

The idea would be that such a charter would have an independent regulator and include signatories from across the board in industry—brands, suppliers, industry bodies, and unions. In many ways this would be modelled on an initiative such as the Bangladesh Accord which, for all its critics, has achieved spectacular results.

The difference here is that such a charter would need to be global so that no one garment sourcing hub was placed at a competitive disadvantage or otherwise. Perhaps the STAR Network initiative mentioned above could take on board or adapt the principles of such a charter. But it cannot be voluntary in my view. Voluntary simply does not work.

This is a global problem which needs a global solution—and sooner rather than later.

Like many, I am tired of having these conversations and often feel like I am a record stuck on repeat. I refuse to accept the solution is not out there, especially if brands are as serious about addressing this as they say they are.

Well, are they?

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