

The Daily Star

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Address the supply shortage at OMS selling points

Introduce ration and OMS cards if necessary

WITH the prices of essential food items going out of reach of the low- and mid-income people, the queues for subsidised food from the government's OMS selling points are getting longer than ever. People are struggling to buy daily necessities with their limited income as the prices of rice, soybean oil, lentil, sugar, flour and other essentials continue to soar in the local market. Previously, it was mainly people from low-income groups who were buying daily necessities from the OMS selling points and TCB trucks. Now, even those from the low-mid income and middle-income groups are queuing up at these points, according to our report.

During the past few months, the prices of most daily essentials have skyrocketed, forcing many middle- and low-income people across the country to make hard choices that adversely affect their standard of living. It has almost become impossible for these people to have three proper meals a day. Finding no other alternatives, people are standing in long queues for subsidised food. But sadly, many are returning empty-handed because of the shortage in supply. Our report has mentioned a pregnant woman from the capital's Kazipara who went to buy food from the TCB trucks for the third time, failing to buy anything in her first two attempts.

Apparently, there are some systemic flaws in the government's OMS selling system, as the authorities cannot provide the essentials to people based on their economic vulnerability. Oftentimes, those at the end of the queues do not find anything to buy. The mismanagement and manipulation at different OMS selling points are rising with more and more people queuing up for food at subsidised prices.

Against this backdrop, the government must take emergency measures to address the issue. Many consumers and consumer rights activists have suggested that the government reintroduce the ration card system so that those who are most vulnerable can get the government's support all year round. Introducing ration cards for the poor will also stop the malpractice of buying more than once at a time from the OMS points or TCB trucks. Through this system, the authorities would also be able to maintain discipline at the selling points. The Consumers Association of Bangladesh had also suggested this to the government in the past.

The government should also consider expanding its OMS programmes to increase the number of poor people under its coverage. It should also consider providing cash support to the vulnerable sections of the population to see them through these tough times.

Three days of power outage at dorms unjustifiable

Students must not be made to suffer like this

IT is disconcerting that students of some dormitories in Cumilla University had to face hardships without electricity for three days. What sounds further inconceivable is that there was electricity in the administrative and academic buildings of the university, but the following halls had to run without this essential service from March 16 till March 19: Nawab Faizunnesa Chowdhurani, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shaheed Dhirendranath halls. Reportedly, students formed a human chain in front of the Vice Chancellor's residence recently demanding immediate restoration of this essential utility connection—until electricity was temporarily restored after three days.

As a result of the blackout, there was no water in the washrooms, and the students had to go without a bath in this humid weather. And, most importantly, they could not study at night in the darkness, due to which they could not prepare for exams and submit their assignments. Who will take the responsibility for what the students had to endure?

With coronavirus cases going down in recent months, the government has taken the decision to allow all educational institutions to open and resume academic sessions. As a result, university students now look forward to uninterrupted academic sessions after the loss of over two years because of Covid-19 pandemic. They are gearing up to complete the courses within the stipulated time so that the loss of two years can be compensated by obtaining the graduation certificate and entering the job market. At such a critical time, keeping the students of four halls of Cumilla University without electricity for days is even more unacceptable.

The ineptness of the university authorities becomes frustratingly tangible when students tell us that the engineering department of the university could not find out for three days the cause of the power outage. And during this time, we saw another classic case of passing the buck, instead of the authorities taking responsibility and acting promptly to restore the electricity.

Our simple questions are: why did it take the authorities three days to restore power temporarily by pulling an alternative line from somewhere else? Why couldn't this have been done earlier? Aren't students the lifeblood of a university? In any case, we are pleased that power has temporarily been restored at the dormitories. However, it needs to be investigated why it took the authorities so long to act, despite the sufferings of the students.

We must not stop talking about Tonu's murder

How long will the culture of fear come in the way of justice?



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Aasha Mehreen Amin is senior deputy editor at The Daily Star.

AS ritualistic as it may be, we must keep talking about the murder of Sohagi Jahan Tonu, even though there is nothing new to say—or precisely because of that. We must talk about it because her murder is one in the long list of unsolved killings that have occurred over the last decade or so. It is this “unsolved” aspect that has become such a crucial part of our reality as we try our best to stay alive by seeing no evil, saying no evil and hearing no evil.

In six years, the story of Tonu's ghastly death has remained the same, eliciting the same conclusion. A 19-year-old studying history at Cumilla Victoria College, a theatre activist, interested in poetry and music, who tutored students to help out with her family's expenses suddenly gets her life cut short by unknown individuals who attack her inside the Cumilla cantonment, beat her up, rape her and kill her. Her father finds her lifeless body behind a bush and files a murder case. An autopsy is carried out that establishes nothing despite all the signs of severe injury. Protests break out all over the country, demanding the killers be brought to book. A second autopsy is conducted, which turns out inconclusive. Finally, a DNA analysis reveals that three men had raped Tonu before killing her. You would think that such compelling evidence would lead to the arrest of the individuals whose DNA matched the samples and their subsequent conviction. Under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 (under which this case would be applicable) murder after rape may award a death sentence to the accused. But this time, although the police have the DNA of the murderers, they continue to remain traceless. The police have said that they did not find any matches for the DNA samples. No individuals have been accused and, after six years of investigating, the police have come up with nothing.

Shocking, right? Not really. Alongside our outstanding successes in development and economic growth, we have also excelled in firmly establishing a culture of impunity of certain sections of society linked to power. It is not easy to say whether wealth comes before power or the other way around. It is a circular



▲ As a nation born out of democratic values, can we not ask how long justice for these innocent souls will continue to be gobbled up by those connected to power?

ILLUSTRATION: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

system that allows individuals to get away with any crime under the sun and make sure that uncomfortable questions are either not asked or are silenced.

The Taqi murder case and the Sagor-Runi killings exemplify this better than any others. Tanwir Muhammad Taqi was a 17-year-old A level student who went missing on March 6, 2013 on his way to

MP's nephew had indeed led the killing, only to retract their statements later. It does not take much deduction to guess why they backtracked and why they were set free on bail. Again, it is the fear of the powerful and mighty that comes in the way of justice for an innocent teenager. This fear is so great that even law enforcers who have found incriminating

the library from home. Two days later, his body was found in the Shitalakkhya River. A day earlier, his A level results revealed he had the highest score in Physics—297 out of 300. There is always heart-breaking irony to these stories.

But unlike Tonu's case, where no one could be accused and no clear motive could be established, Taqi's father, Rafiur Rabbi, a well-known cultural activist in Narayanganj, was quite sure who his son's murderers were. He filed a case at the police station accusing seven men, including a prominent MP, by name and around 10 other unnamed persons. A year after, a draft of the investigation was leaked and it revealed that the investigating officers found evidence that the nephew of a powerful MP of the district and 10 of his associates were involved in the murder.

According to the investigating report by Rab, Taqi had been targeted because of a personal vendetta against his father. Rafiur says that although the investigation was completed in a year, the Rab officials have not submitted the probe report to the court till date, and this March marked Taqi's eighth death anniversary.

In 2013, law enforcers arrested a few individuals in connection with the murder. Two of them confessed that the

evidence cannot submit their charge sheet. To make sure that this fear is kept intact, local media have been gagged while others have been attacked by goons.

The culture of impunity can only thrive in the culture of fear. Which is why in the famous Sagor-Runi case the shroud of mystery weighs heavier than ever. Instead of justice being served, members of the victims' families have been harassed and intimidated in a bid to make them give up seeking justice. The investigating officer in the case has failed to submit the probe report in court 85 times. Mahir Sarowar Megh, the couple's only son who was just five-years-old and present in the apartment when his parents were so brutally slaughtered, is now 15 and continues to wait for some kind of closure for the indescribable loss and trauma he has endured. The same goes for Taqi's inconsolable mother and his father, who has led countless demonstrations to demand justice.

Then there is Tonu's father whose health has severely deteriorated after her death, her distraught mother, her other loved ones—when will they have closure?

As a nation born out of democratic values, can we not ask how long justice for these innocent souls will continue to be gobbled up by those connected to power?

PAYRA SEAPORT

Another step towards prosperity



KHALID MAHMUD CHOWDHURY

IN response to the country's expanding needs, a modern, environmentally friendly seaport is being created in South Bengal. Payra Port's operations began on November 19, 2013, with the prime minister unveiling the foundation stone. When the infrastructural work was confirmed, the seaport officially began its journey on August 13, 2016.

The construction of a container terminal, bulk terminal, multipurpose terminal, passenger terminal, water treatment facility, power plant, modern city, airport, and economic zone are among the 19 component works currently ongoing. All of these development efforts are underway, with the goal of transforming Payra into a world-class modern port by 2023 and a thriving economic hub by 2035.

Since its inception, the port has been conducting certain operational enterprises, including a restricted range of import-export activities. A revenue of Tk 354 crore has been generated from the operation of 169 foreign merchant ships. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed with Jan de Null, a Belgian dredging business, for capital and maintenance dredging on the port's main channel.

This is the country's first project agreement involving the Bangladesh Infrastructure Development Fund. In terms of nature and geography, a wide shipping-friendly area within five

kilometres of the Rabnabad Channel's port in Kalapara upazila of Patuakhali is a viable area for the seaport. Furthermore, there is a large amount of undeveloped area available for port development and extension.

The Payra Seaport Project will be generating a variety of jobs in the EPZ, SEZ, ship-building and repair industries. The establishment of new industrial zones would provide employment to people in neighbouring districts such as Barishal, Patuakhali and Bhola, which are next to the port.

There are over a hundred ship-building factories in Bangladesh and the industry itself is fast paced. Bangladesh's market share in the global ship-building sector, on the other hand, is around USD 400 billion. If this sector develops around the Payra Port, we believe Bangladesh will soon be the world's second-largest exporter.

Because transportation and supply of commodities is easier and cheaper than by road, this port will be able to make a substantial contribution to the supply of cement clinker and food grains in Khulna and Madaripur through Barishal.

Through cooperative partnerships between Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, and China, an economic corridor is being created in the interest of South Asia's general economic development. Because it is a port developed near the sea, other countries will be interested in using the transit services. Payra Port has the potential to become one of the most important ports as a Silk Road transit hub, due to its geographic location.

By connecting the Padma Bridge, the government plans to build a four-lane road from Barishal to Kuakata beach via Patuakhali. As a result, the country's internal communication will be enhanced through the Payra Port. It will thereafter be connected by rail to Dhaka and other

areas. Currently, there are two shipping routes from Payra Port to other areas of the country.

For the purpose of establishing air communication, an airport will be built under the supervision of the Ministry of Aviation and Tourism. As a result, the Payra Port will become a hub for economic development of all kinds.

One of the project's goals is to keep the water level at 6.3 metres. By removing roughly 9.75 million cubic metres of silt from the 75-kilometre-long channel and 100-125 metres from the Rabnabad (inner and outer) channel, the channel will be kept at a depth of 7.3 metres. The channel's depth will be extended to 10.5 metres once the capital and maintenance dredging is completed. This will facilitate the transit of large ships and assist the port in establishing economic corridors in the country's south-western region. The port will be able to accept large commercial boats with a capacity of 3,000 TEU or 40,000 BWT of cargo once the dredging is completed in 2023.

The country's foreign trade will develop and new economic horizons will open up if the port is properly realised through these operations. New industries will be established in the area surrounding the port, infrastructure will be created, and trade and commerce will flourish. This will create a large number of jobs for the underprivileged in the country's south, and the port's activities will benefit the rest of the country, too.

It is expected that the development of this port will substantially stimulate the economy, resulting in a 2 percent GDP increase. As a result, the country will make progress towards constructing the “golden Bengal” of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's dreams, and this port will play a key part in achieving a wealthy and prosperous Bangladesh free of hunger and poverty by 2041.

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