

# The root of our unhappiness

## When the personal becomes political



NAHALY NAFISA KHAN

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I woke up from a Covid-induced fever dream to this news: Bangladesh has ranked seventh among the world's angriest, saddest, and most stressed nations, according to the 2022 Global Emotions Report.

Let me present to you some more jarring numbers. A total of 61.2 percent of youths (aged between 18 and 25 years) in Bangladesh are suffering from depression and 3.7 percent have attempted suicide during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a survey conducted by Aanchal Foundation.

Mental health is an issue that has much taboo associated with it. Even in 2022, seeing a therapist is considered abnormal in many Bangladeshi households. Not many discussions are held on the issue, and even when they are, mental illnesses are portrayed as a purely individualistic crisis, rather than a collective one.

Yes, each individual needs a different method of dealing with the problems they are facing; everyone has a different story and a different pattern. But the underlying correlating factors, if not the causes, remain rooted in some common parameters. So does the approach of battling them.

Mentioning the reasons for the unhappiness, the Global Emotions Report said there are five significant contributors to the rise of global unhappiness: Poverty, bad communities, hunger, loneliness, and the scarcity of good work.

Voila. The personal just became political.

Amid the shiny, picturesque image of development, we often forget to address the basics. We forget that the country is faced with rampant income inequality, corruption, communal and other violence, lack of justice, freedom of speech and expression, and a vulgar disparity of life in all spheres. While mental health is shaped by personal sufferings and how we process the realities of our lives to a great extent, we tend to forget that our surroundings contribute to it too – the very surroundings that are afflicted with the aforementioned issues.

Mark Fisher, in a 2012 column written for *The Guardian*, argued against this notion of depoliticising mental health: "Mental illness has been depoliticised, so that we blithely accept a situation in which depression is now the malady most treated by the NHS. The neoliberal policies implemented first by the Thatcher government in the 1980s and continued

by New Labour and the current coalition have resulted in a privatisation of stress... It would be facile to argue that every single case of depression can be attributed to economic or political causes. But it is equally facile to maintain – as the dominant approaches to depression do – that the roots of all depression must always lie either in individual brain chemistry

DU, from where I graduated very recently, is one of the institutions that has seen an increase in reported suicide cases. As many as 26 students died by suicide between 2005 and 2018. Many factors that contribute to this phenomenon are purely political such as financial crises, academic pressure, threatening environment and bullying by members and activists of the

battle against the depression and perpetual unhappiness that this nation finds itself facing.

In the months after Hafiz's death, there were talks of bringing university students under mandatory dope tests; last month, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal announced that dope tests will be made compulsory for students during



ILLUSTRATION: TEENI AND TUNI

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ruling party's student wings through guest room culture and others. Yes, personal crises also exist, but they are only elevated by the political ones.

There are only three known mental health facilities in a university of more than 40,000 students that just turned 101 years old. They are severely understaffed and cannot provide quality services despite their best intentions, from what I can tell from my own experiences and that of my friends. It's difficult to get monthly appointments, let alone weekly ones. Moreover, there is no year-long advocacy that can encourage students to seek the help they need from these centres.

I naturally assumed private universities would have better counselling facilities with their better-managed resources. However, I was surprised to discover otherwise from my friends who graduated from some of the most reputed private universities in the country. Their mental health facilities are equally underfunded and understaffed, as reported by both the current students and the alumni. Thus, the well-being of the youth, the driving force of the country, remains ignored, while so many bright minds succumb to their

university admission by amending the law. Imagine the magnitude of resources needed to bring that huge a population under dope tests! Why are we focusing on that instead of allocating those resources to mental health facilities that are suffering from a scarcity of these resources? Why are we ignoring mental health, one of the core factors behind this rampant drug dependency, once again? Or the underlying oppressive factors, like the lack of equal opportunities for every student and the terror unleashed by the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in public universities, that need a politicised call for action? Why is there no reflection of mental health in the budget allocation for the health sector, despite evidence highlighting the deterioration of people's mental health during the Covid pandemic?

The Global Emotions Report is a wake-up call for all of us. It is slightly comforting, though mostly alarming, to realise that this is not only an individual crisis, but rather a collective one. It only makes us more powerful in our fight to ensure social justice for all, to take a job at the root of our collective unhappiness.

You are not alone. We are not alone.

or in early childhood experiences. Most psychiatrists assume that mental illnesses such as depression are caused by chemical imbalances in the brain, which can be treated by drugs. But most psychotherapy doesn't address the social causation of mental illness either."

Last year, when Hafizur Rahman, a student of Dhaka University (DU), critically injured himself and eventually bled to death in the campus area, the entire university was left in utter shock. Investigations revealed that Hafiz had been on a psychedelic drug, and a misdirected war against drugs ensued. We blamed the victim, as we always do, and refused to take a long look at the underlying causes that are driving our students to the depths of despair.

Nineteen students from five public universities died by suicide last year. Of them, nine were from DU, seven from the Islamic University in Kushtia, and one each from Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet, and Khulna University, according to newspaper reports and data obtained from the institutions.

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

Dhaka BRT Company Limited  
House No. 04, Road No. 21, Sector-04  
Uttara, Dhaka-1230

Memo No. 35.RHD.0000.BRT(MD).14.003.2013-580 Date: 03 July, 2022

**Subject: Invitation for submission of Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI) for Procurement of Electrically Propelled-Standard (12 meter-long) Air-Conditioned Premium Buses for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) under Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project (GDSUTP)**

The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh ('the borrower') is going to receive financing from the French Development Agency (AFD) toward the cost of Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project (GDSUTP). Part of this financing will be used for payments under the procurement of Electric Buses named above. The description of the GDSUTP project of Dhaka BRT System features is available at the following address: [www.dhakabrt.com](http://www.dhakabrt.com).

The word "Bus" wherever used in the specification means the "12000 mm" long electrically (Battery powered) propelled (Electrical Propulsion System or EPS), air-conditioned standard size premium segment bus with 900 mm ± 10 mm floor height, width 2600 mm, height of Bus 3800mm, battery capacity is more than 350 kwh energy for propulsion etc. Detailed specifications of bus can be received from Dhaka BRT Company Limited. The duration of the bus contractor assignment shall be about 12 months.

Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit Company Limited (DBRTCL) wishes to engage Contractor, having proven track records of carrying out similar assignments.

Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit Company Limited (DBRTCL) now invites interested firms to submit their Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI), for the above Project. This Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI) will be followed by an International Competitive Bidding. It is not a prequalification procedure and no participants will be excluded from the International Competitive Procedure at this stage.

The Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI) shall comprise of a brief presentation of the participant's previous experiences and financial situation, along with corporate profile (background of the firm, quality assurance system, organization of the firm, company structure, group companies and in-house facilities and overseas operation). Annual Turn Over, Company Registration Certificates, Brochures and any other relevant materials may also be shared as part of the Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI). If the participant intends to associate with other firm, it should state in brief in their Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI) the composition and intended form of the association. Such association is not binding at this stage and participants will be free to change association form and composition at the International Competitive Bidding stage.

The Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI) shall be written in English and shall not exceed 40 pages.

The copy of Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI) must be submitted no later than 16.00pm (Dhaka local time) **August 07, 2022** by email, by courier or by hand to the following address: **Managing Director, Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit Company Limited, House-04, Road-21, Sector-04, Uttara, Dhaka-1230, Bangladesh, Email: [md.dbrtc@gmail.com](mailto:md.dbrtc@gmail.com), Telephone: +88 02 48959101.**

Interested Participants may obtain further information via email or at the above address during office hours 09.00 - 17.00 hours from Sunday to Thursday.

Following the Preliminary Expression of Interest, Participants may be invited by the Dhaka Bus Rapid Transit Company Limited (DBRTCL) for further public or bilateral consultations.

SD/-  
**Safiqul Islam**  
Managing Director  
Dhaka BRT Company Limited

GD-1346

**Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

Dhaka BRT Company Limited  
House No. 04, Road No. 21, Sector-04  
Uttara, Dhaka-1230

Memo No. 35.RHD.0000.BRT(MD).14.003.2013-581 Date: 03 July, 2022

**Subject: Invitation for submission of Preliminary Expression of Interest (PEOI) for procurement of bus operator for operation and maintenance of buses on Gross Cost Contract (GCC) basis for Dhaka BRT Company Limited under Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project (GDSUTP).**

The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh ('the borrower') is going to receive financing from the French Development Agency (AFD) toward the cost of Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project (GDSUTP). Part of this financing will be used for payments under the procurement bus operator named above. The description of the GDSUTP project of Dhaka BRT System features is available at the following address: [www.dhakabrt.com](http://www.dhakabrt.com).

The Operator shall operate and maintain the Contracted Buses on BRT Routes specified by the Authority during the Total Contract Period. The Total Contract Period means, in reference to each of Contracted Buses, a period of 10 (ten) years beginning from Commercial Operation Date (COD) of the particular Contracted Buses and further extendible for additional one (1) year at sole discretion of the Authority ("Total Contract Period"). The detailed terms and conditions relating to the Total Contract Period will be specified in the Bus Operator Agreement. The Authority is in the process of purchase of the Buses for the BRT. It shall hand over to the Operator the possession of such Contracted Buses after the purchase, upon delivery and acceptance thereof.

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**Safiqul Islam**  
Managing Director  
Dhaka BRT Company Limited

GD-1345