



ILLUSTRATION: REHNUMA PROSHOON

How to deal with compulsive dodgers



NO STRINGS ATTACHED

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Most of us would like to think that we are sincere human beings, who always mean what they say and say what they mean, and make promises which they have every intention of keeping.

Most of us also tend to lie to ourselves.

If this sounds a tad harsh, think harder. How many times have you promised someone that you will meet and catch up with them, that you will come back early from work, that you will deliver the report ASAP (as in, by today), will NEVER leave the toothpaste tube uncapped, or will definitely not miss your column next Friday, and then royally failed in delivering? Brutal, isn't it, when you really get honest with yourself?

While the person on the receiving end of this failure might not accept this argument, the truth is often you really did have good intentions, but somehow faced all kinds of crises that come in the way: a flood of emails you just had to answer right there and then; the cap rolled off and before you could catch it, an overzealous mouse just grabbed it and ran off into the abyss of the drainpipes; your brain was too fried from too many meetings. Oh, just admit it: YOU FORGOT or JUST DIDN'T FEEL LIKE IT! Admit it, no matter what the consequences. It will, as they say, set you free.

Unfortunately, there are those among us who take this game of bluffing as a sport or an art form and give ardent reassurances with absolutely no intention of following through with them.

Officials of many public institutions have mastered this art. And this is where the phrase “*kalke ashen*” (“come back tomorrow”) was born, and where it is used for almost anything that needs to be done in a jiffy. Whether it is a passport, driver's licence, a letter from the land office, a correction on a voter ID card or fitness certificate – there is always that “*kalke ashen*” refrain. Usually, tomorrow never comes and can only be materialised through a monetary

“incentive,” after which everything works like magic. You may even get the document delivered to your home.

But it's not always because of this unofficial taxing system that many individuals play this dodging game. It is actually a part of our cultural make-up.

Take tailors, for instance. These clothing magicians are also the most slippery characters and will make

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you go round and round in circles with their artful circumvention. You ask your tailor if he can deliver your order on Sunday, the only blouse that matches the saree you will wear for a wedding on Monday, and he emphatically reassures, “*Ji, apa.*” Of course, you are settling yourself into a trap, because there is no way that he will deliver that blessed garment on the day he agreed he would; it goes against any well-established tailor's code of behaviour. So, the whole of Sunday will pass until it's evening, when the panic will set in and you will call the tailor and ask hysterically, “*Amar blouse koi?*” (“Where is my blouse?”) In

honeyed tones, he will inform you that it is still in the “factory” – that is, the work space where the actual sewing takes place – and he will definitely have it ready the next day, “in the morning” but actually in the afternoon! It won't matter how loudly you scream into the phone, telling him how he has ruined your life and if you had known he would betray you like this you would have never given him this task. The tailor has developed a strange immunity against these tirades from so many of his customers that it's all white noise to him now. Which is why he will placidly say, “*Achha apa, dekhi ki kora jay.*” (“Okay apa, I'll see what can be done.”)

Tailors, no doubt, are the kings of this psychological masquerade, but there are other equally adept contenders. Contractors, masons, plumbers, electricians – any service without which life will come to a standstill. The roof may collapse, the bedroom may get flooded, and you may get electrocuted, but these individuals will still be experts at dodging their clients. At the time of the negotiation, the alacrity with which they will agree to the time frame you set will leave you in a tizzy of joy or relief, depending on the circumstance. But once the deal is made, everything changes. Like marriage, one of the contracting parties will be left anxiously waiting for the other to show up, while the latter will flit around and save the entire world before coming home to the job they are supposed to do.

When those in important positions give instructions to their employees to get something done, they often make the mistake of believing that it will happen just because they said so. They forget to follow up. And if the instructions were given to someone who in turn needed to give instructions to another person, chances are that the first person forgot to follow up, too, and the second person plainly forgot (or thought it could wait till after a longish lunch), leading to an inevitable explosion. No wonder most bosses experience high blood pressure.

As irritating as it may be, the only way around these dodgers is to micromanage and nag them (every day) into compliance, while developing an extraordinary level of tolerance for irresponsible behaviour.

10 YEARS AFTER THE RANA PLAZA DISASTER

Let it not fade from public memory

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Ten years have passed since the Rana Plaza disaster shook the global garment industry to its core, claiming the lives of over 1,100 workers and leaving thousands injured. The tragedy, along with the Tazreen Fashion factory fire just months earlier, exposed the dire state of the ready-made garments (RMG) industry in Bangladesh – poor factory safety, unequal power relations and practices in the global fashion supply chain, and gaps in worker rights. In the aftermath of this catastrophe, various initiatives were launched to address the systemic issues plaguing the industry. Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), in collaboration with the Accountability Research Center of the American University, comprehensively reviewed the progress made in factory safety and workers' protection and highlighted issues and areas for further improvement, which are required to build an RMG industry that is fit for middle-income, 21st century Bangladesh.

The Rana Plaza disaster has been extensively documented by policymakers, academic researchers, trade unions, and activists. Yet, the tragedy seems to be fading from public memory, particularly among younger workers. The physical site of Rana Plaza now stands as an empty plot scattered with debris, marked only by a sombre statue erected by workers. Unfortunately, younger workers and new migrants to the area seem to be unaware of the historical significance of the event that unfolded at this location just a decade ago. Although the government initially promised to

Worker Safety, which implemented extensive training and monitoring programmes.

At the global level, foreign governments pledged funding and implemented legal protection measures such as mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence (mHRDD) to safeguard the rights of workers in the global supply chain. The Bangladesh government has taken on more responsibility for factory regulation and workers' rights through efforts such as the

While building safety has been a prominent concern following incidents like the Rana Plaza collapse, there has been a narrow focus on the physical safety, health, and well-being of workers. The underlying processes and internal relationships that create risks for workers' health on the factory floor have been largely ignored. Addressing these underlying factors will involve labour law reform, strengthening workers' rights and unions, and improving working conditions.

amendment of the Bangladesh Labour Act, strengthening of factory inspections, institution of mandatory revision of minimum wage for RMG workers every five years, adoption of the National Occupational Safety and Health Policy, and formation of a cabinet committee on the RMG sector. These measures demonstrate a commitment to increasing transparency and oversight in the industry.

There have been significant changes at the factory level, too.

high inflation – particularly of food, energy, and housing costs – means that in real terms, wages have declined. Despite commitments made by leading brands and buyers to ensure decent wages for workers, comprehensive efforts are yet to be made to follow through on these commitments. Buyers should take responsibility for the wages of workers in their supply chains and ensure a living wage. This requires setting clear and enforceable standards for wages and working conditions, and working with suppliers to ensure that these are met. This issue is even more relevant at present, when the RMG sector wage board is set to declare a new minimum wage in August 2023.

Besides, efforts to strengthen workers' rights to freedom of association and collective

action have been less notable or successful compared to factory safety initiatives over the past decade. Despite the creation of the Accord and its successor, the RMG Sustainability Council, which provides opportunities for workers' participation in the core steering committee, trade unions remain contentious in Bangladesh with low union membership and limited freedom to operate. To secure decent wages or minimum wage reforms, it is essential that the trade unions are independent



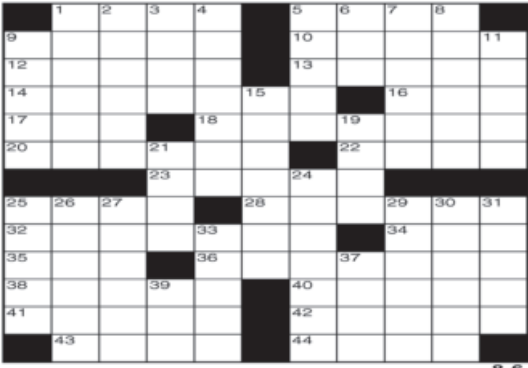
The Rana Plaza tragedy has been extensively documented. Yet, it seems to be fading from public memory, particularly among younger workers.

FILE PHOTO: STAR

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS			feeling	to Fernando
1 “Get lost!”	32 Curative	6 Take in		
5 German cries	34 Tapped item	7 Blather		
9 Puffball bit	35 Hosp.	8 Bee activity		
10 Made cow sounds	Sections	9 Egypt's Anwar		
12 Football's Rashad	36 Kind of wax	11 Avoid		
13 Bisected	38 Convergent	15 Triton orbits it		
14 Vegas job	40 Washer cycle	19 Lead on		
16 Help out	42 Out of style	21 Writer Bellow		
17 Bol. neighbor	43 Louver piece	24 Fencing cry		
18 Taking its toll?	44 Amorous archer	25 Larceny		
20 Prepares to drive	DOWN	26 Medal recipients		
22 Spur on	1 Bubble shape	27 Scamp		
23 Showy fower	2 Tribute	29 Like		
25 By way of, informally	3 Spoken	30 Detects		
28 Anxious	4 Antigone's father	31 Spurred (on)		
	5 Female friend,	33 Key		
		37 Teller of tales		
		39 Simile center		

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

W	A	T	T	G	A	L	S
A	C	H	E	E	L	E	C
S	T	U	N	T	E	N	O
P	I	N	E	D	U	C	A
S	O	D	A	P	O	P	L
N	E	X	U	S	E	T	A
R	I	P	B	U	I		
P	A	S	S	B	U	R	S
A	N	T	D	E	N	O	T
S	C	R	A	W	N	Y	R
T	H	O	S	E	A	R	O
Y	O	K	E	L	N	A	K
R	E	A	L	M	E	T	S