

The Daily Star

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A matter of life and death

Due recognition, pay needed for trained anaesthesiologists

Without trained anaesthesiologists, even a simple procedure such as circumcision can turn fatal, as proven by the shocking deaths of two young boys in the span of just two months. A recent report by this daily highlights an acute shortage of trained anaesthesiologists in the country and overall neglect of the field. Despite the critical role they play in surgical procedures and emergency care, there are only approximately 2,400 anaesthesiologists serving a population of 170 million, according to Bangladesh Society of Anaesthesiologists, Critical Care and Pain Physicians (BSACCP). The global standard is five anaesthesiologists for every one lakh people. Meanwhile, of the 213 posts for anaesthesiologists at government facilities, at least half of them are currently vacant.

Anaesthesiologists are the unsung heroes of operating rooms. They often labour in the shadows, overshadowed by the prominence and remuneration enjoyed by surgeons. At most private healthcare facilities, an anaesthesiologist has to depend on a surgeon to earn money. The disparity in pay and recognition compared to other medical specialties dissuades many from pursuing a career in anaesthesiology, exacerbating an already dire shortage.

The shortage of trained manpower is compounded by a lack of proper equipment and management in operating rooms across the country, particularly in rural areas. Without adequate infrastructure and protocols in place, the risks associated with anaesthesia administration are heightened, leading to preventable fatalities. Moreover, the delayed involvement of anaesthesiologists in surgical procedures, often at the eleventh hour, further increases the risks for patients. Proper pre-anaesthesia assessments are essential to mitigate potential complications and ensure safe outcomes. However, systemic deficiencies in healthcare delivery result in suboptimal practices, placing patients at unnecessary risk.

Addressing the shortage of anaesthesiologists requires multifaceted solutions encompassing policy reforms, incentives, and educational initiatives. The government must prioritise the recruitment and retention of anaesthesiology specialists, offering competitive salaries and creating pathways for career advancement within the public healthcare sector. Furthermore, initiatives to raise awareness about the indispensable role of anaesthesiologists and to promote the specialisation among medical students are imperative. Quotas and incentives can be introduced to attract aspiring doctors to pursue anaesthesiology, aligning professional demand with workforce supply.

However, efforts to address the shortage must extend beyond recruitment to address the pervasive disparities within the medical profession. Anaesthesiologists deserve equitable compensation, recognition, and social status commensurate with the critical nature of their work. The prevailing culture of surgeon-centric healthcare must evolve to acknowledge and celebrate the indispensable contributions of anaesthesiology professionals.

Let not female workers lose out

Govt must be serious about decreasing women NEET

In a disheartening revelation, recent data from a Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) report underscores a significant setback in the country's pursuit of leveraging its demographic dividend. According to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2022 report, a staggering 62 percent of young women aged 15-24 years were classified as NEETs—not in employment, education or training—marking a 2.53 percentage point increase from 2021. While around 40.7 percent of the country's 3.15 crore youths falls under NEET category, a lack of gender parity also becomes evident when we see that the number of male NEETs over the same period decreased by 1.35 percentage points, to 18.59 percent. These alarming statistics not only reflect squandered workforce potential, but also signal serious socioeconomic crises for Bangladesh in the long run.

The factors behind the aforementioned NEET increase can be narrowed down to limited employment and training opportunities for women, pandemic-related dropouts, and lack of overall social and economic security. While the government has done well to bring more girls into education—as evidenced by the country's gender parity rate of 93.6 percent, per the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023—its efforts to train them for employment fall far too short. But perhaps the biggest hurdles to women obtaining education or entering the labour force are ones hidden behind the data. As we know, the period during and right after the pandemic saw a marked rise in child marriage and, relatedly, a high level of female dropouts. And in general, due to prevalent social norms, it is usually the working mother who must give up her job or education in order to stay home with the children.

We urge the government to take the BBS findings seriously and provide young women with the practical opportunities and social support needed to realise their full potential. Failure to address the rise in women NEET will not only jeopardise Bangladesh's demographic dividend, but may also hinder our progress towards achieving the SDGs and becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2031. We must nurture the talents of our young population in order to chart the path towards long-term sustainable and inclusive development.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Suffocating Dhaka

It is becoming increasingly difficult to live in Dhaka due to polluted air. Even wearing masks when outside is little effective now. I know the issue has been raised many times. But I must ask the authorities once again to do something about air pollution urgently if they want us to be able to breathe.

Mashrufa Tania
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Liberating domestic workers for equity and dignity



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FAIZ AHMAD TAIYEB

In the bustling urban landscapes of Bangladesh, where the rhythm of life beats relentlessly, lies a significant yet often overlooked segment of society: domestic workers. These individuals, who tirelessly dedicate themselves to maintaining the smooth functioning of households, are the unsung heroes of our communities. However, their contributions often go unnoticed, and their rights are frequently neglected. It is time for us, as a society and as a nation, to recognise the invaluable role of domestic workers and take proactive steps towards ensuring their empowerment and well-being.

The prevailing practice of employing domestic workers, often denoted as "maids" or "helpers," at disproportionately low wages, irrespective of their job responsibilities, underscores systemic inequalities, perpetuates dependency, and fosters detrimental social norms. This practice not only highlights the stark disparities in our society but also reinforces a culture of exploitation and marginalisation. By normalising the notion of "low-class" or "menial" work, we inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of poverty and subjugation, wherein individuals are compelled to accept undignified employment simply to survive.

The existing norms surrounding the employment of domestic workers are part of a perceived "lower class" conflict with fundamental principles of morality, civility, and progress. It is imperative that we challenge and dismantle these outdated notions of hierarchy and status, and strive towards creating a society that values the inherent worth and contributions of every individual, regardless of the type of work they perform.

At the heart of this endeavour lies the need for comprehensive labour registration. Through this mechanism, the government can play a pivotal role in formalising the employment relationship between employers and domestic workers, thereby ensuring accountability and protection of the rights of both parties. Mandatory registration for employers and service workers will create a transparent framework, within which labour rights can be upheld and disputes resolved amicably. By formalising this relationship, we not only safeguard the rights of domestic workers, but also foster a culture of respect and dignity within our society.



Empowering domestic workers is an essential step towards building a more inclusive and sustainable future for Bangladesh.

FILE PHOTO

Furthermore, it is imperative that we address the issue of child labour in urban areas. By promoting compulsory primary education up to Class 8 and aligning it with policies to prevent child labour, we can create a conducive environment for children to pursue their education without being compelled to engage in labour activities. Education is not only a fundamental right, but also a powerful tool for social and economic empowerment.

In addition to education, we must also prioritise the mental health and well-being of domestic workers. The nature of their work often exposes them to stressful and demanding conditions, which can take a toll on their mental health. Therefore, it is essential to implement measures for mental health rehabilitation and provide access to support services for those in need. A mentally healthy workforce is not only more productive, but also contributes to a more harmonious and compassionate society.

It is unacceptable that household workers are expected to be available at the beck and call of their employers 24/7, without regard for their own comfort or well-being. There must be clear, guided, and regulated principles governing the employment of domestic workers to ensure that

their rights, dignity and well-being are protected. This includes establishing reasonable working hours, providing adequate rest periods, and ensuring fair compensation for their labour.

Moreover, we must ensure that domestic workers receive fair and just compensation for their labour. Standardising working hours and

and employers, and provide them with the necessary support and guidance to adhere to these standards. Codes of conduct should outline expectations regarding working hours, behaviour, labour rights, housing, and health facilities. Specialised training should be provided for specific tasks, such as childcare, to ensure the safety and

payment rates, and providing benefits such as sick leave, festival bonuses and health insurance are essential steps in this regard. Additionally, we must embrace digital payment systems to ensure transparency and efficiency in wage disbursement. By valuing the labour of domestic workers and providing them with adequate compensation and benefits, we affirm their dignity and worth as members of our society.

Furthermore, we must prioritise the provision of decent housing and clothing facilities for permanent domestic workers. These individuals often live in precarious conditions, lacking access to basic amenities such as clean water and sanitation. Additionally, it is crucial to invest in training and skills development programmes for domestic workers. By providing them with opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge, we can empower them to pursue better job opportunities and improve their economic prospects. Training programmes in housekeeping, home management, hygiene, and cleaning will not only enhance the professionalism of domestic workers, but also ensure the quality and efficiency of their services.

Furthermore, we must enforce codes of conduct for domestic workers

well-being of those under their care.

Moreover, it is imperative to establish stringent measures to hold landlords and home employers accountable for any mistreatment or exploitation of domestic workers. In cases where a domestic worker is subjected to physical or verbal abuse, denied leave for extended periods, underpaid or unpaid, and deprived of adequate food and living conditions, swift and decisive actions must be taken against the perpetrators. Legal provisions should be enforced to ensure that such actions are met with appropriate punishment. By imposing consequences for such violations, we send a clear message that the rights and dignity of domestic workers will be upheld and protected at all costs.

Empowering domestic workers is more than a matter of social justice; it is an essential step towards building a more inclusive and sustainable future for Bangladesh. By formalising their employment relationships, investing in their education and training, and ensuring fair compensation and decent working conditions, we can create a society where every individual is valued and respected. It is time for us to recognise the invaluable contributions of domestic workers and take concrete steps to safeguard their rights and dignity.

Drive electric cars, save the planet



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QUAMRUL HAIDER

Electric vehicles (EV) have been around since 1834, but with the discovery of crude oil in Texas, EVs in the US all but disappeared by 1935. However, soaring oil prices and gasoline shortages peaking with the 1973 Arab oil embargo revived interest in EVs. Today, EV sales are surging as more people are becoming concerned about climate change.

Besides being environment friendly, the biggest advantage of owning an EV is never having to fill up the gasoline tank because, unlike gasoline-powered cars that use internal combustion engines, EVs use electric motors powered by 200-volt to 800-volt battery packs.

In Bangladesh's context, EVs hold an answer to easing the energy crisis the country is facing now.

The sticker price of an EV will likely seem higher when compared with gasoline-powered cars because batteries are very expensive. Nevertheless, investment in battery research and development has helped cut battery costs by roughly 50 percent in recent years, while simultaneously improving their power and durability. This has helped lower the costs of EVs, making them more affordable for consumers.

Plus, in contrast to gasoline-

powered cars, the operating cost of EVs is significantly cheaper and more predictable. Whereas gasoline prices vary over time and by region, and even between pumping stations, the price of electricity is less volatile. A typical EV in the US incurs \$1.22 to go the same distance a traditional car can travel on one gallon of gas.

EVs also require less maintenance, thereby adding to the savings. There are fewer fluids to replace, fewer moving parts that can break down, and regenerative braking helps the car's brake system last longer. The one exception to this can be the need to replace the tires more frequently, but only if we really push the pedal all the way to the floor.

As for the travel range, while every EV comes with an estimated travel range, a fully charged EV generally gets 250-300 miles of range. But exactly how much distance we will actually be able to cover on one full charge depends heavily on how efficiently we use the car's battery. Driving smoothly is key to achieving the best range. Gradual acceleration and deceleration are more energy-efficient than sudden speed shifts.

Speaking of charging, nearly 90 percent of EV owners in the US

charge their cars at home where they do not pay a surcharge to a third-party provider or the government. A 220V outlet that is used for high-powered home appliances should be able to fully charge an EV overnight. There are commercial charging stations with direct current (DC) fast charging chargers that can recharge the battery to 80 percent within 15-45 minutes, depending on the car's voltage capacity. Industry analysts believe that, in the near future, a new technology developed by NASA for use on the International Space Station will be able to charge the battery within five minutes.

Another major advantage of EVs is that the motors can run in two directions. When the car accelerates, the motor runs in the drive direction, propelling the car forward. When the foot is taken off the accelerator pedal or the brakes are applied, the motor reverses direction and generates electricity that helps recharge the battery.

Moreover, EVs are quiet and therefore do not contribute to noise pollution. And because there is only a small motor generator and a battery pack, instead of a bulky engine under the hood, there is more space for passengers and luggage.

Most EVs have their battery packs located at the bottom of the vehicle. This creates a low centre of gravity, giving the vehicles several performance and safety advantages. For example, it improves the EV's stability, makes it easier to navigate tight turns, and reduces the likelihood of the car rolling over.

Given that the transportation sector

is responsible for about a quarter of the world's carbon dioxide emissions, efforts are underway towards decarbonising transportation by shifting to renewable sources of energy. Because of their high performance and considerably lower emissions over their lifetime, EVs are featured prominently in mitigation pathways.

Although EVs do not emit greenhouse gases, they do generate emissions in a different way. The electricity used to charge the battery is still produced from fossil fuels in many parts of the world. Also, the plants which manufacture the body parts and the batteries also use fossil fuels. So, their carbon footprint, though small, is not zero and can be reduced further, by as much as 95 percent, if we can find ways to charge EV batteries with renewables.

EVs on their own are nowhere near enough to forestall the worst effects of climate change because the path towards limiting global warming is arduous, hog-tied with economic, political, and societal roadblocks. Yet, it will not be possible to tackle global warming without EVs. Perhaps that is one reason why EVs swerved so dramatically into the climate solutions spotlight.

In sum, EVs are not a passing fad. Whether we like it or not, they are here to stay. They are on the road navigating many of the roadblocks and frustratingly stalled political action on climate change. So, buckle up and charge your batteries, because hitting the open road in an EV promises to be an exhilarating and eco-conscious adventure.