

The Daily Star

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## A waste of resources and knowledge

### Why are medical, engineering graduates opting for BCS general cadre?

At a time when graduates' fixation with government jobs amid shrinking economic opportunities has emerged as a serious concern, it is perhaps not shocking that a large number of them are from medical and engineering backgrounds, who are forgoing careers in their specialised fields in favour of civil service positions. According to data from the Public Service Commission, approximately 30 percent of general cadre recruits in the last three BCS exams came from medical and engineering backgrounds. The allure of these positions—coupled with perceived discrimination against non-admin cadres in terms of power, perks, and promotions—may make their choice a pragmatic one. But it's one that comes at a substantial cost to the nation.

The government invests heavily in the education of medical and engineering students, much more than it spends on students in general universities. Their migration, after graduation, to administrative roles thus represents a waste of both knowledge and resources. The migration of doctors is particularly troubling given the shortage of doctors in public healthcare. "When medical graduates prefer general cadre positions to practicing medicine, or postings in city hospitals to services in rural health facilities, if recruited as doctors, it is the people that suffer as a result." This raises critical questions about our investment in—and allocation of—human resources in vital sectors.

But why are so many graduates opting out of specialised fields? According to our report, there are 13 categories in both general and specialised BCS. The former includes administration, police, and foreign services, while the latter includes education and health, among others. Those recruited in general cadres enjoy high ranks as well as substantial perks and benefits. They have the chance to be top bureaucrats. By contrast, those in specialised cadres face slower career progression, have fewer benefits, and mostly work under younger admin colleagues. This imbalance not only demoralises them but also undermines the sectors they serve.

Addressing this issue is almost as important as fixing the unhealthy fascination of graduates and would-be graduates with BCS exams in the absence of decent opportunities in the private sector. It is, therefore, imperative that the government reevaluates the incentives and career paths for specialised cadres. Equitable promotion opportunities, better benefits, and recognition of their critical contributions can help retain these professionals in their respective fields. Additionally, there needs to be a cultural shift within the civil service to value and integrate the expertise of doctors and engineers into policy-making and administrative roles that align with their training. We must ensure that our investments in education translate into tangible benefits for society.

## JU needs a new master plan urgently

### The uniqueness of its green campus must be preserved

It is deeply concerning that the Jahangirnagar University (JU) campus has lost nearly 40 percent of its waterbodies over the last three and a half decades. This has been revealed by a new study on JU land use that analysed data from 1988 to 2023. The study also found that the university's vegetation cover shrunk by 26.5 percent during the same period. By contrast, its built-up area went up by 159.3 percent, with around 172.5 acres being converted into built-up land.

In 1988, waterbodies covered an area of 122.4 acres on the campus, which dropped to 73.58 acres last year. At the same time, its vegetation coverage of 388.80 acres shrunk to just 285.88. The study does not mention how such vast areas of waterbodies have been lost—this is something that the JU authorities need to find out. We do, however, know that many trees have been felled in the name of development, and that green spaces have been decreasing at a worrying rate as a result. What is further concerning is that the JU's original master plan, designed by renowned architect Mazharul Islam in 1968, has been repeatedly neglected during the subsequent structural development phases, which is one of the reasons why the campus is losing its originality including its green spaces.

The architecture of the buildings constructed in the last two decades does not harmonise with the surrounding environment either, and does not utilise maximum airflow and natural lighting. Moreover, many abandoned structures remain in place, unnecessarily occupying campus space. The haphazard manner in which the authorities have been developing the campus is also harming its biodiversity and leading to its pristine beauty being lost. Hence, students and teachers have been organising protests demanding a new master plan. Even though the authorities have been claiming that they are in the process of preparing a new master plan for the last two years, nothing substantive has so far materialised. Their apathy and negligence in this regard are unacceptable.

The JU is one of the most beautiful universities in Bangladesh. For its campus to be treated the way it has been over recent decades is a great travesty. It is high time the authorities started taking proper care of the campus—particularly its natural beauty—and prepared a new master plan. They must cease construction or planning of any new building or structure in contravention of its master plan.

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY



## Nasser became president of Egypt

On this day in 1956, 99.95 percent of Egyptians elected Gamal Abdel Nasser as the first president of the Republic of Egypt after he overthrew the Egyptian monarchy in a military coup four years prior.

# Why this intimidating police statement aimed at the media?



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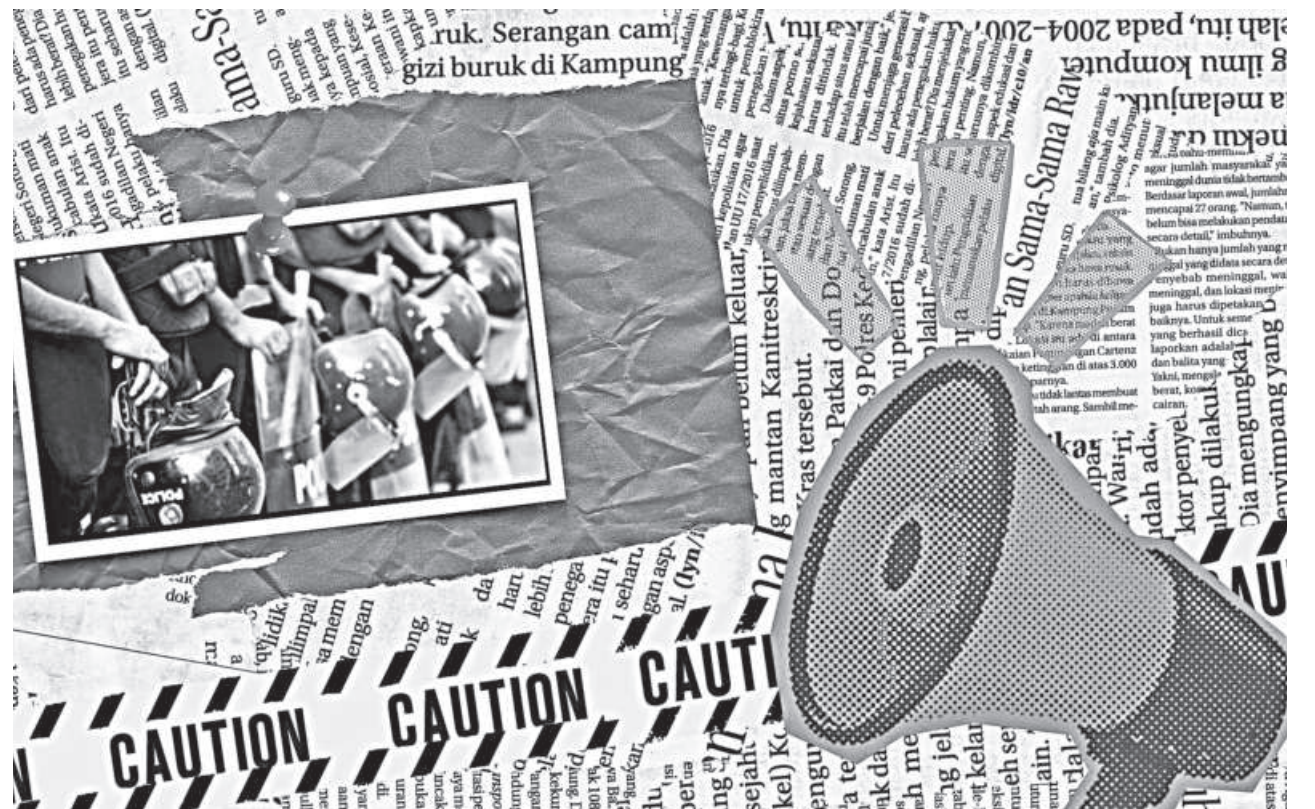
The Bangladesh Police Service Association (BPSA), representing elite officers (BCS cadre) of the law enforcement force, has issued a strong and ominous message to the media. The statement was disturbing, as its tone and tenor appeared to intimidate journalists from reporting on corruption involving any of its members. In an unusually lengthy release (12 paragraphs and over 50 lines), the association did not cite a single report or name to which they objected for being slanderous.

The association's statement seems to place collective blame on the media, claiming, "Partial, motivated, and indiscriminate reports about former and serving members of the Bangladesh police are being published serially in the news media (print and electronic) and on social media."

While the association has every right to protest what it calls a "smear campaign" against its members, it did not name any alleged victims of defamation, making it difficult to justify accusing any media outlet of "publishing offensive and negative news reports" out of "personal vengeance and self-interests, which goes against journalistic ethics." Furthermore, the association issued an advisory to journalists, asking them to exercise caution and maintain journalistic principles when reporting on the police.

In recent weeks, the stories that shocked the nation involved alleged grand corruption and abuse of office by two top officials: former Inspector General Benazir Ahmed and former Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Mohammad Asaduzzaman Miah. Apart from these two retired top cops, there have been no major graft allegations against any serving officers in recent days, though this does not imply the force is corruption-free. Many would argue that reporting corruption against any in service official carries too much risks for journalists as individuals and the survival of their organisation.

This raises the question of why the association felt compelled to defend its former members. Has the



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current leadership of the organisation transformed it into a welfare association for retired police officers? Or is this a preemptive attempt by the BPSA to prevent the media from investigating some of its members who may have assisted their top boss in their alleged criminal enterprises, including providing police protection for land grabbing, as alleged by some members of the minority community in Gopalganj?

The BPSA release claimed that the police have always maintained a policy of "zero tolerance" against corruption, stating that if allegations of corruption are proven against any member, both departmental and legal actions are taken. However, had the BPSA leadership reviewed some of the speeches by former IGP Benazir, they might have refrained from using the term "zero tolerance." On June 16, 2022, he warned his force that those seeking to become wealthy

through illegal means had no place in the police force. However, based on the court's seizure order, we now know that by the time Benazir made that speech, his list of real estate properties was extensive.

It's frustrating to hear the tedious argument that the police's departmental disciplinary procedure deals with all kinds of misconduct,

The BPSA's warning to the media is particularly concerning given the overall media environment in the country, which is intimidating and lacks meaningful freedom to hold power to account. On June 1, Mahfuz Anam, president of the Editors Council and editor of this daily, stated at a meeting in Dhaka that, "Benazir's case is a startling example where we, in

including corruption. Who would believe that the force chief can be investigated by his subordinates freely and fearlessly? Numerous human rights groups have made allegations against him for commanding grave violations of human rights, which led to sanctions against him. Has there ever been any investigation into those charges?

Consider the Dhaka Boat Club incident, where actress Porimoni alleged rape attempts by one of the club executives. Subsequent investigations revealed that its founder president was then IGP Benazir Ahmed, and the club was set up on encroached and illegally filled-in portions of the Turag river. This issue was raised in the Jatiya Sangsad on June 16, 2021, by an opposition MP and was not contested by the treasury bench. Neither the Police Headquarters nor the home ministry investigated these allegations.

the media, knew all these things. But we didn't dare to publish them." He noted that as the head of a powerful law enforcement institution, Benazir could have punished a journalist for reporting his corruption, and the government likely wouldn't have protected the media.

It is also worrying that some senior ministers have already deployed deflection tactics, claiming that certain quarters are trying to discredit the government by labelling "all as corrupt". This appears to be a desperate attempt to distance the ruling party from such corruption. Otherwise, why would someone give a clean chit to the former DMP commissioner before any investigation into his alleged conduct in office? We don't know whether the ministers' statements and the BPSA statement are synchronised, but neither is helpful for uncovering the truth through a credible investigation.

# What if we finally recognised women's unpaid care work?



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In 1929, Virginia Woolf, in her essay *A Room of One's Own*, raised the issues of economic and social barriers faced by women, including their unpaid labour. However, she was not the first to bring this concern to light.

In her 1898 book *Women and Economics*, American sociologist and novelist Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued that women's dependence on men for economic support due to unpaid household labour was detrimental to their status and freedom. Another influential figure, British social reformer and economist Beatrice Webb, worked in the late 19th and early 20th centuries on issues of women's labour and the conditions of the working class. While her focus was not specifically on unpaid household labour, her broader social and economic reforms were relevant to understanding women's roles in the economy.

Canadian economist Margaret Reid conducted the first systematic economic analysis of unpaid household labour in her 1934 book *Economics of Household Production*. Her work laid the foundation for incorporating household labour into economic theory and measurement.

There has been a significant amount of literature on unpaid household and care work over the past three

decades, both from local and global perspectives. Notably, a 2015 study conducted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), titled "Women's Unaccounted Work and Contribution to the Economy", estimated the value of women's unpaid work in Bangladesh as 76.8 percent of the GDP in the fiscal year 2013-14 (on condition). It found that a female member in a household undertakes 12.1 non-SNA (System of National Accounts) activities in a day—activities not included in the national GDP—compared to only 2.7 activities for a male member.

In 2019, Oxfam and the International Labour Organization (ILO) released reports on the global perspective of unpaid work. Oxfam's study revealed that unpaid work done by women worldwide amounts to a staggering \$10.8 trillion a year. ILO's report "Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market" found that the value of unpaid care work is approximately \$11 trillion, accounting for around 9 percent of global GDP. Without exception, women carry out 75 percent of unpaid care work, which is 88 percent in Bangladesh.

The issue gained further attention last year when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked the Planning

Commission, through the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), to determine the actual contribution of women's unpaid household and care work to GDP. BIDS presented its findings (15 percent contribution to GDP) at its last Annual BIDS Conference on Development (ABCD) in December.

As a part of my regular editing job, reading an article in the Bangladesh Development Studies (BDS) journal titled "Economic Valuation of Women's Unpaid Household Service Work in Bangladesh," which detailed the study led by Dr Binayak Sen, sparked my interest in writing on this issue. Using the 2021 time-use survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and BIDS survey of 64 villages in 2023, the authors calculated that women's contribution to GDP through unpaid non-market household and care work is about 15 percent. If unpaid work for both women and men were reflected in national accounting, it would add approximately 17.6 percent to Bangladesh's GDP.

Unpaid household and care work are crucial for developing the next generation's skills and knowledge, essential for a productive workforce. It strengthens family and community bonds, fostering social stability and reducing social strife. It also allows other family members to participate in the formal paid workforce, boosting overall economic productivity and ensuring the population's physical and mental well-being.

If unpaid household and care work were replaced by market services, it would significantly increase GDP; preventive and routine care at home reduces the burden on public healthcare systems, and

parental involvement in education can improve outcomes, reducing the need for remedial education. When societal structures support unpaid household work, it enables higher female participation in the labour force, boosting economic growth. The indirect benefits of unpaid work can lead to increased productivity and economic activity in other sectors.

So, unpaid household and care work being the buzzwords, if the UN does agree to include it in the SNA and the world follows accordingly, some questions may arise: will we still not be satisfied with this crucial work they are doing? Will we value the work they do in agriculture, like livestock or poultry rearing?

The BIDS article suggests as policy implication that male contribution to household unpaid care work should be socially encouraged. This will help ensure—the article reads—the spread of care work across genders, ensuring gender equality in unpaid work. I do agree, but did we keep it in mind that people engaged in the formal labour force may end up working a "double shift" of paid and unpaid work, which has serious consequences for their health and well-being?

Wrapping up (leaving the questions) with a quote from Reid and another line from the BIDS article:

"The more we have concentrated on money values, the more we have overlooked that part of our economic system which is not organised on a profit basis."

Unpaid care work is an essential element of social reproduction—a process that supports individuals, families, and society to continue thriving.