

Why can't the NBR protect its server?

Its vulnerability to hacking has emerged as a serious security threat

The ease and frequency with which cybercriminals continue to breach the National Board of Revenue (NBR) server is disquieting. According to a report by this daily, a cybercriminal gang attempted to release a container of foreign cigarettes from Chattogram Port after breaching the NBR server with the login credentials of a customs official. Acting on a tip-off, officials seized the container loaded with 50 lakh sticks of cigarettes worth about Tk 5 crore. The breach of the server came to light on Saturday after an investigation into the incident.

Despite the successful intervention, what worries us is that the breach could have led to something far more sinister. It shows once again the vulnerability of the NBR server to hacking which is proving increasingly difficult to address. Reportedly, following previous incidents of server breach, the NBR took some steps like the use of particular login IP and sending OTP to mobile phones of officials with proper authorisations. However, the latest breach has demonstrated that these measures are not enough. Criminals somehow managed to use the login credentials of a deputy commissioner of Chattogram Customs House to register the consignment with the NBR server, and also to access the server from a different IP address, while no OTP was sent to the mobile phone of the official concerned.

Over the last few years, at least 38 imported consignments of goods were released illegally by using the IDs of at least eight revenue officials. Investigators said a cybercriminal gang was involved in those incidents; however, they failed to identify the gang. After a few such incidents in 2022, it was discovered that earlier measures taken by the NBR had been insufficient to prevent its servers from being breached. The institution itself admitted that its technological safeguards could not thwart them. Even though these concerns have been well-known, the fact that the authorities have been unable to address them since is unacceptable. Another major concern is that despite repeated breaches, the probe committees that have been formed failed to identify the perpetrators or answer many critical questions raised by the incidents.

The entire security system of the NBR seems to be way below par, and the danger that it poses to our national security is disturbing. Against this backdrop, the NBR should urgently stamp down on such breaches by strengthening the security of its servers. Customs officials and others should be more vigilant about cybercrimes. And considering the gravity of the threat posed by such crimes, the authorities should consider involving independent experts who can look into what's really happening and suggest solutions.

Protect Tengragiri forest at all costs

We can't afford to lose the 'second Sundarbans' to timber thieves

We are outraged to learn that another reserved forest is being plundered by timber thieves who are felling and stealing trees indiscriminately, with no visible steps to stop them. According to a report by *Prothom Alo*, an organised criminal gang has been stealing trees from the Tengragiri mangrove forest and setting the stumps on fire to destroy evidence, in the process causing damage to the trees that still remain standing. Locals complained that this has been going on for a long time, alleging that these thieves are working in cohort with forest officials.

The Tengragiri forest, situated along the coast of the Bay of Bengal, stretches from Taltali upazila of Barguna to Kuakata in Patuakhali, covering 13,644 acres of area, according to data from the Forest Department. In 1960, it was designated as a reserved forest based on a survey done in 1927. Home to an incredible biodiversity system, Tengragiri is the second largest mangrove forest in Bangladesh, and is thus known as the "second Sundarbans."

Such an invaluable gift of nature—which, much like the Sundarbans, acts as a natural barrier to calamities and protects the locals—already faces a host of threats to its survival, such as the rising sea level and increasing salinity due to global warming, erosion, etc. Its chances of survival are being further jeopardised because of the greed and recklessness of local influentials. A recent visit has revealed that 3,000 trees have been felled and stolen in the forest's Behular Char area. According to the *Prothom Alo* report, in March, a fire broke out there and burned as many as 10,000 trees, damaging a lot of others. What really puzzles us is that after the fire was reported, it took local forest officials 18 hours to reach the scene and bring the fire under control. Another fire incident happened in the Disirkilla area in April, but that was put out quickly enough, so the damage was minimal.

When asked about their failure to prevent tree robbery and frequent fire incidents, forest officials in Tengragiri cited lack of manpower and necessary resources. This seems to be their go-to excuse whenever there are reports of timber theft from reserved forests. We must ask: how difficult is it to ramp up the capacity of the Forest Department so that it can protect at-risk forest areas? Or is the concept of "reserved forest" lost on them? This lackadaisical attitude is totally unacceptable, especially considering Bangladesh's fast-depleting forest coverage. We urge the authorities to ensure that no further damage is done to what's left of our precious forests.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Civil Rights Act signed

On this day in 1964, US President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, perhaps the most important US law on civil rights since Reconstruction (1865-77) and a hallmark of the American civil rights movement.

More women in construction sector should be our next goal

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Bangladesh's economy has witnessed remarkable growth, solidifying it as one of the fastest growing economies worldwide. According to the Bangladesh Economic Review 2023, the construction sector significantly contributes to this growth—approximately 6.41 percent in 2023. Construction's share within the industry sector and growth is on the rise, with the growth rate increasing to 8.71 percent in FY2021-22, compared to 8.08 percent in FY2020-21.

As the construction sector expands, it demands more labour. According to the Labour Force Survey 2022, construction is the fifth largest industry in terms of employment in Bangladesh, with about 5.44 percent of the employed population working in this sector. A study conducted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) projects that the construction industry is expected

To increase female participation and to create a more inclusive environment in the construction industry, several essential actions should be taken to overcome the challenges.

to require approximately 90 lakh workers by 2030. But among the top five employment generating industries, the construction sector ranks second to last in terms of female employment. Only 0.4 percent of women are employed in this sector, compared to 8.18 percent of men. With female labour force participation in Bangladesh increasing from 36.3 percent in 2016-17 to 42.7 percent in 2022, the expanding construction sector presents a significant opportunity to accommodate more female workers.

Additionally, with the country's LDC graduation and the anticipated decline in RMG exports, exploring sectors like construction is crucial for accommodating the expected

structural shift in labour dynamics. The rise of automation and Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technology highlights the need to focus on technology and skills-based occupations for women.

According to the Labour Force

participation in the labour force, there are no gender-specific policies in the construction sector. The Public Procurement Rule, 2008, and Occupational Health and Safety Policy, 2013 ensure workplace safety but lack gender provisions. The labour

industry stakeholders perceiving women as less productive and costlier due to additional safety and security needs. Barriers related to marriage, pregnancy, and care work, combined with a lack of role models and representation in workers' unions, further limit women's opportunities and perpetuate their marginalisation in the construction sector.

To increase female participation and to create a more inclusive environment in the construction industry, several essential actions should be taken to overcome the challenges. Firstly, establishing a comprehensive workforce database, gradually formalising the sector through structured recruitment, fair wages, standard work hours, proper implementation of well-defined health, safety, and compensation policies, and an institutional body addressing workplace abuse and harassment are crucial.

Secondly, promoting female participation through skills training incentives and creating a gender responsive ecosystem with standard wages, safety measures, maternity benefits, and flexible work hours are also extremely important. Ensuring that training programmes include 30 percent female participation as mandated by the government and declaring minimum wages for entry-level jobs should be considered.

Thirdly, streamlining the labour hiring processes for contractors and subcontractors, maintaining a worker database with national ID numbers to identify wage gaps, and adding specific clauses to labour laws addressing the construction sector-related concerns are vital. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs should play a significant role in this regard, with private actors and labour organisations advocating for workers' needs. Finally, state owned insurance companies should offer workers injury packages.

The construction sector has the potential to increase female workforce participation, ensuring gender parity and aligning with three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 5, and 8). Occupations in this sector are predominantly male-centric across all tiers, underscoring gender bias and stigma, necessitating considerable attention from the government and policymakers. Implementing the above recommendations can help make the construction sector a leading example of gender parity and inclusivity, driving sustainable development and economic progress in Bangladesh.



FILE PHOTO: ADAM JONES/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The construction sector in Bangladesh is highly informal—78.42 percent of female workers here are employed under verbal agreements.

Survey 2016-17, females in the construction sector are primarily concentrated in lower tier jobs: 31.23 percent as civil engineering labourers, 22.15 percent as building construction workers, and 18.27 percent as bricklayers. Studies found that women also work in senior management and administrative roles, accounting for approximately 7.1 percent and 4.3 percent of total female employment in the sector, respectively. Across all occupations, most female workers are either unskilled (53 percent) or semi-skilled (17 percent). According to the findings in the Construction Industry Skills Council (CISC) Employers surveys in 2018 and 2020, female workers are considered less productive than males.

The construction sector is highly informal; 78.42 percent of female workers are employed as per verbal agreements. Only 0.3 percent of female employees have access to toilets and sanitation facilities, and 1.88 percent have maternity leave benefits. This sector is inherently hazardous due to the nature of its work, yet only one percent of female workers have access to safety gear. Additionally, just 0.78 percent receive transportation and food subsidies, and 0.66 percent benefit from daycare facilities.

Despite policies to boost women's

law addresses critical women's issues like hygiene, maternity leave, medical facilities, and working hours, but enforcement is challenging in informal sectors like construction.

Women are largely confined to unskilled jobs like brick-breaking and excavation due to a substantial skills gap and lack of access to training programmes. The sector's high informality—characterised by irregular recruitment, work hours, and payment methods—limits job stability. Additionally, mobility and transportation issues, coupled with inadequate on-site infrastructure and security concerns, deter women from long-term roles. The work environment is often abusive, with frequent conduct violations, resistance to female leadership, and harassment. Unsafe conditions and inadequate accommodations, such as the lack of separate bathrooms and resting areas, further exacerbate these difficulties. Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and physical assault, remains a significant barrier, with limited avenues for complaint. Wage exploitation is prevalent, with female workers often paid less than their male counterparts for similar work. Societal norms and gender bias further discourage female participation, with

Celebrating the legacy of Prof Yunus

This is an excerpt of a speech given by Susanna B Afan, president of the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, at the opening ceremony of the 14th Social Business Day on June 27, 2024.

In 1984, forty years ago, a then 44-year-old Muhammad Yunus was elected to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership for "his pioneering efforts in enabling rural men and women to become economically self-sufficient through sound group-managed credit. His work challenged misconceptions about the capabilities of the poor to save, collaborate, and effectively utilise loans."

Since its inception, the Grameen Bank has achieved remarkable success. Grameen Bank has grown to provide collateral-free loans to 7.5 million clients, 97 percent of whom are women, in more than 82,000 villages in Bangladesh.

Yunus's model has demonstrated that even the poorest individuals can enhance their lives with dignity and contribute to their country's economic growth.

Muhammad Yunus is globally recognised as "The Father of Microfinance."

In the Philippines, the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development-Mutually Reinforcing Institutions (CARD-MRI) was established in 1986. To date, CARD-MRI has empowered millions of Filipinos. Nine million of them accessed microloans, 30 million are insured through microinsurance, and five million individuals have access to its health programmes. We are honoured to have Dr Aris Alip, the founder of CARD-MRI, in the audience with us today.

In 1994, in Indonesia, Dompot Dhuafa, a humanitarian institution, empowered millions of Indonesians through the principle and power



PHOTO: YUNUS CENTRE

Susanna B Afan, president of Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, presents a portrait to Prof Muhammad Yunus to commemorate the 40th anniversary of him receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award.

of Zakat, a religious offering that is one of the pillars of Islam. Dompot Dhuafa's microloans have benefited 24 million people—more than the entire population of Sri Lanka.

In Pakistan, Muhammad Amjad Saqib founded Akhuwat in 2001. His pioneering interest-free microfinance model is based on Islamic values and compassion, known as *Mawakhat*. Akhuwat has since grown into the world's largest interest-free microfinance organisation. To date, it has disbursed over \$789 million in loans and lifted the lives of over 5.4 million people in Pakistan.

These are the movements inspired directly by the work of Muhammad

Yunus and, as such, they too followed his footsteps.

In 2008, CARD-MRI received the Ramon Magsaysay Award.

In 2016, Dompot Dhuafa received the Magsaysay Prize.

In 2021, Muhammad Amjad Saqib also became a Magsaysay Laureate.

To date, there are countless other microfinance institutions globally that have followed Muhammad Yunus's model.

This is the collective impact that Professor Yunus started that merited him the Magsaysay Award. He has transformed the lives not only of millions of Bangladeshis but also billions of people around the world.

This is what the Ramon Magsaysay

Award stands for—celebrating transformative, courageous leadership, selfless service, and the Greatness of Spirit of ordinary individuals and organisations that bring meaningful, lasting change.

Named after the seventh president of the Philippines, the Ramon Magsaysay Award honours individuals and organisations embodying commitment to the common man, reflecting President Magsaysay's life and leadership. To date, 348 women, men and organisations working across Asia have been conferred with what is now widely regarded as Asia's premier prize and highest honour. We have captured their inspiring stories in our 65th anniversary commemorative book series, simply called *GREATNESS OF SPIRIT: Stories of Love, Courage and Service*.

Forty years since Muhammad Yunus received the Ramon Magsaysay Award, a precursor to many of his other international accolades including the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize, we continue to celebrate the undeniable impact of his work—billions of lives changed through the power of microfinance.

As a token of our appreciation and to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Muhammad Yunus receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award, the Foundation would like to present Muhammad Yunus, 1984 Ramon Magsaysay Awardee for Community Leadership, with his portrait. This portrait was specially commissioned for our 65th anniversary commemorative book series. This also serves as our birthday gift for his 84th birthday on June 28.