

## Another bad precedent in public service

Loosening service rules, and the grip of accountability, raises fresh concerns

In another questionable move with the potential to exacerbate corruption, the government seems set to allow public servants to engage in stock market trading, reversing a decades-old prohibition. According to a report, the law ministry has positively vetted an amendment to the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979 forwarded by the public administration ministry. If or once approved, employees will be able to legally buy or sell primary shares and bonds of registered companies. This is one of the several changes billed as necessary for a "modern and time-befitting" code of conduct. But given past experiences, we must say this is the wrong way to go about it as allowing officials to trade stocks may open a Pandora's box of unethical practices.

We don't need to go that far back to understand why. Matiur Rahman, a top NBR official now under investigation for corruption, allegedly made a fortune through stock market investments, using insider information, which is illegal. He is not alone in such pursuits. Many government employees, despite current prohibitions, are believed to be engaged in stock trading. Many have already demonstrated their willingness to exploit their positions for personal gain. Against this backdrop, legalising stock trading could widen the scope for corruption. The speculative nature of stock markets means that losses are inevitable, and when faced with losses, employees might be tempted to recoup them through illegal means.

The proposed amendment, therefore, will further weaken, rather than fortify, the ethical framework governing public officials. Unfortunately, the public administration ministry seems to be going in the opposite direction. In another editorial not long ago, we commented on its proposal to relax another provision in the Government Servants (Conduct) Rules requiring officials to submit wealth statements every five years, and how the removal of such an important layer of scrutiny could encourage dishonest officials to commit crimes with little fear of detection. Over the years, we have seen how such anti-graft rules and regulations have been relaxed, sometimes even lightening penalties for proven corruption.

As we write this, news has emerged of another top official, a former additional IGP, and his wife who illegally amassed wealth worth Tk 30.35 crore while concealing information of wealth worth Tk 36.91 crore—adding to the recent disclosures of scams involving former and current security and revenue officials. The list will only grow, whether it comes to light or not, unless we tighten relevant rules, enhance existing oversight mechanisms, and enforce stricter penalties for violations. Government employees, because of the power they exercise, must be held to the highest standards of conduct. We, therefore, urge the public administration ministry and other authorities to refrain from further relaxing service rules.

## Sad plight of BSMMU specialised hospital

Govt must ensure unimpeded operation of health facilities

When it comes to public healthcare in a poor country like Bangladesh, any wastage of resources and money hits particularly hard as it deprives millions of low-cost medical care. This is why it is hard to accept what has been happening at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University's (BSMMU) super-specialised hospital.

Inaugurated in September 2022—with world-class facilities capable of providing stem cell therapy, gene therapy and robotic operations, and a capacity to treat 5,000 patients a day—the hospital now receives less than 500 patients. This is due to shortage of doctors, technicians and support staff, and the corruption involved in their recruitment. We have commented on it before, and sadly, the situation has not changed much even in a year. What's more disheartening is that 90 percent of the medical equipment bought from South Korea with \$33 million remains unused because of the manpower shortage. The warranty period of some of the machines is nearing expiration, requiring additional maintenance cost. Add to that the burden on the public to repay the Tk 1,047 crore loan that the government had taken from South Korea to build this state-of-the-art hospital.

In short, far from providing world-class, low-cost health service as advertised, it's turning into a white elephant. A country where out-of-pocket health expenditure is among the highest in the world, and where approximately 800,000 people travel to foreign countries for medical treatment, this super-specialised facility could have been a beacon of hope. That hope has turned into despair because of systemic negligence and corruption, with visiting patients not getting to see doctors on time or having simple diagnostic tests done there. They even have to pay almost the same doctor fees as in private hospitals.

This is not the first time that public trust in the health sector has been betrayed. Thanks to the problems mentioned above, we have often seen how well-intentioned projects like this one turned into a debacle in their operation phase. It seems the projects are valued more for the money that can be spent rather than the return on investment, or the benefits owed to the public. How else can the purchase of medical equipment without even recruiting technicians to operate them be justified? We urge the higher authorities to critically look into the case of BSMMU's super specialised hospital and make it fully operational. Longstanding issues in public procurement and recruitment that are also plaguing other health-sector projects must be resolved too.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Republic of the Philippines attained its independence

On July 4, 1946, the Republic of the Philippines was proclaimed an independent country, with Manuel Roxas as its first president.

# EDITORIAL

## Coasting on the 'highway to climate hell'



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According to Copernicus, the European Union's climate monitoring service, average global temperatures reached record highs for 12 consecutive months since June, 2023. The Director of Copernicus warned that unless planet-warming pollution caused by greenhouse gases is slashed, "This string of hottest months will be remembered as comparatively cold." The worse is yet to come, he said. Indeed, we are pummelled by the second round of blistering heatwaves across the globe that is threatening to leap to a whole new level.

This "shocking but not surprising news" has alarmed António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, to the extent that in a bare-knuckled speech in New York timed for the World Environment Day (June 5), he compared humans to meteors that wiped out the dinosaurs. Moreover, he called the fossil fuel conglomerates the "godfathers of climate chaos."

In response to Guterres' fiery speech about the future of our planet, US congressman John Curtis, a Republican from Utah, sarcastically quipped, "I'd be curious to ask him how he got to work in the morning. How he gets around when he flies,

**Part of what makes Earth "just right" is the interplay between carbon dioxide, water vapor and the planet's energy balance. If there is too much carbon dioxide and water vapor in the atmosphere, global warming will accelerate and energy imbalance will increase, causing more ocean evaporation and baking out of carbon dioxide from rocks and oceans.**

because as far as I know, there aren't any electric planes." Then again, how does Mr Curtis commute from Salt Lake City to Washington DC? Certainly not by a stagecoach, bicycle, or walking!

As a self-proclaimed "better steward" of climate change and founder of the Conservative Climate Caucus in the US House of Representatives, Curtis thinks "false narratives" that equate fossil fuels with greenhouse gas emissions are duplicitous. He speaks for approximately 75 percent of Republicans who hold that the economy should be given priority, even at the risk of ignoring climate change.



'We need an exit ramp off the highway to climate hell,' said UN Secretary-General António Guterres during a World Environment Day speech. PHOTO: AFP

That is why the fossil fuel industry loves the Republicans and their like-minded hucksters worldwide so much that they donate millions of dollars to them for the sole purpose of rolling back environmental regulations.

Despite what climate change deniers believe, concentration of planet-warming carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is surging "faster than ever" to a level not seen for millions of years, the administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said in a statement earlier this month. In May, the concentration hit an all-time high of nearly 427 parts per million.

A key measure of global warming is the difference between the amount of solar energy absorbed by the planet and the amount of thermal infrared radiation Earth emits back into space. A positive energy imbalance means the Earth is gaining energy, causing the planet to heat up. Due to greenhouse effect, this imbalance has doubled in the past 20 years, raising

concerns about the large amount of heat the oceans are absorbing.

Presumably, that is why Guterres also said: "We need an exit ramp off the highway to climate hell." His reference to hell may have been metaphoric, though our closest neighbour and the brightest planet in the solar system, Venus, often called Earth's evil twin because it shares similarities with our planet in size, composition and gravity, became hellish billions of years ago.

How did Venus, once a pleasant planet, become an inferno? Without going into details, Venus' thick envelope of carbon dioxide, roughly 200,000 times the amount in Earth's atmosphere, gave rise to runaway greenhouse effect, a climatic phenomenon where the greenhouse effect became so intense

temperature. This is a precursor to the onset of runaway greenhouse effect.

Part of what makes Earth "just right" is the interplay between carbon dioxide, water vapor and the planet's energy balance. If there is too much carbon dioxide and water vapor in the atmosphere, global warming will accelerate and energy imbalance will increase, causing more ocean evaporation and baking out of carbon dioxide from rocks and oceans. This added water vapor and carbon dioxide will intensify the greenhouse effect, driving temperatures a little higher. The higher temperatures will induce a positive feedback loop, intensifying the greenhouse effect even further. This self-sustaining process of intensification, most efficient in tropical ocean regions because large amounts of water vapor are pumped upwards by convective storms high in the atmosphere that, in turn, traps heat so effectively, will eventually snare the Earth into a vicious cycle of runaway greenhouse effect.

Against the ambivalence of China, Russia, the United States, and other countries equally committed to their fossil fuel industries, are we really coasting on Guterres' "highway to climate hell?" In a paper published last year in the journal *Astronomy*, scientists at the University of Geneva and France's CNRS laboratories in Paris and Bordeaux suggested that because of escalated global temperatures and the evaporation of water from seas and oceans, Earth could become an "uninhabitable hell" similar to Venus in just a few centuries, or even sooner.

Arguably, the general trend of catastrophic climate change we are witnessing currently is a bad omen for runaway greenhouse effect. Therefore, combating this threat to preserve Earth's climate stability and avert cataclysmic consequences requires urgent and collective efforts to stop the rapacious extraction and consumption of fossil fuels without further delay. However, world leaders and business magnates with stakes in the fossil fuel industry seem intent on continuing to gain morbidly vast wealth at the expense of every human and other creatures on our planet.

Meanwhile, the average temperature will continue to rise, and millions of people will die as a result.

Finally, we cannot give our children and grandchildren the same number of years we had because we are all guilty to one extent or another for speeding on the "highway to climate hell." We are letting our jewel of a home be ruined by greed, stupidity and indifference. The Earth will still be here for a long, long time, spinning as a dead ball of rock.

## What is wrong with business law education in Bangladesh?



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Imagine a business professional who does not know the laws that govern their industry in the country they operate in. How can they make smart decisions, avoid legal troubles, or lead their company effectively? The truth is, they can't. This is why business law education is so crucial. Yet, in Bangladesh, the business education system is falling short. Our business schools are not preparing students to handle the legal challenges they will face in their careers.

So, what is wrong with business law education in Bangladesh? Firstly, there's the curriculum. Business law courses in Bangladesh heavily rely on Indian textbooks about Indian laws. Sounds odd, right? It is. Because why would Bangladeshi business schools teach Indian laws? These books focus on Indian laws, which are not relevant to Bangladeshi students. Imagine learning about laws you will never use in your career. It is like training for a cricket match with football equipment. When these students enter the workforce,

they struggle with compliance issues because they have not learned the laws that apply in Bangladesh, and they are not taught how to freshly learn the laws that apply to themselves. While it is true that there is a lack of good books on business law in Bangladesh, teaching Indian textbooks based on Indian laws cannot be a solution.

Secondly, who are the people teaching these courses? Surprisingly, it is not law academics. Instead, business academics, who may know a lot about business but not as much about law, are teaching these courses.

This gap means students miss out on vital legal knowledge and updates that could be crucial for their careers. Because in the commercial justice sector, regulations are updated, or new regulations are introduced almost every year. Moreover, in many business schools, teaching business law is viewed as a less desirable assignment, akin to a "punishment posting" for full-time faculty members in business schools. This negative perception leads

to a lack of enthusiasm and investment in delivering up-to-date, engaging, and practical education.

Thirdly, we are missing the point of teaching business law as a core course of the business curriculum in Bangladesh. Currently, business law courses are too theoretical and contentious. They focus on disputes and litigation rather than practical, everyday business transactions and compliance.

Instead of learning how to avoid legal pitfalls, students are taught how to fight them in court. Shouldn't we be preparing them to avoid these problems in the first place? Moreover, there is a lack of practical training. Students do not engage in simulation exercises or real-world scenarios. Business students need similar practical exposure to understand how to apply legal principles in real-world situations.

Now, can we fix this? If yes, then how? We need a major overhaul of how business law is taught in business schools. The pedagogy for business law in business schools must be significantly different from that of law schools because these are two different ballgames.

The business law curriculum in business schools should be based on laws relevant to Bangladesh. This way, students learn what they will need in their careers. Hiring law academics to teach business law should be the way to go as they are the people

who know it best. They can provide accurate, up-to-date information and practical insights. Shifting from purely theoretical teaching to include practical exercises is crucial as well. Simulations, case studies, and real-world scenarios can help students understand how to apply what they learn.

And why does this matter? Think about the impact a heightened awareness of the legal doctrine can have on the business environment in Bangladesh. Well-informed business leaders can drive compliance and ethical practices. This leads to more stable and robust corporate sector. Wouldn't you prefer to work in a business environment where leaders understand the laws and navigate them confidently? By revamping business law education, we are not just improving individual careers, we are strengthening the entire business landscape in Bangladesh. Informed leaders can avoid costly legal mistakes, foster ethical practices, and ensure compliance. This contributes to the country's economic growth and stability. Isn't that what we all want?

Revamping business law education is more than just an academic exercise; it is a strategic move for the future of Bangladesh's corporate world. Let's equip our future leaders with the right legal knowledge and skills. Let's prepare them to lead with integrity and legal acumen.