

End exploitation of Indigenous people

Govt must punish those involved in attacks, implement CHT accord

We are deeply troubled by what happened on Thursday afternoon and then overnight in Khagrachhari's Dighinala upazila, which once again showed how vulnerable the Indigenous communities are to violence and displacement. These people were historically exploited by Bangalee settler groups and majoritarian politicians, and the recent change of guard in Dhaka has done little to improve the situation. Thursday's events, according to a report, began as a protest over the lynching of a Bangalee man accused of motorcycle theft the previous day, and then quickly spiralled into a cycle of violence that led to the deaths of three people, numerous injuries, and the destruction of over 100 houses and shops, many set afire and even looted.

It goes without saying that Indigenous people have suffered the brunt of the violence, which eventually spread to Rangamati and caused a similar mayhem. This is not simply a case of lawlessness; it's emblematic of the complex ethnic, political and security dynamics that have long plagued the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). There are differing narratives surrounding the origin of Thursday's violence—with some Bangalees claiming that peaceful protests were interrupted, and Indigenous people asserting that the attacks were unprovoked—which only highlight the role of misinformation in such fluid situations, and how quickly it can fuel unrest. Equally notable is the failure of law enforcement authorities to protect the victims from attacks. Panic still grips the region even though security has been beefed up.

The alarming frequency of such incidents, even after the overthrow of an autocratic regime that viewed the CHT crisis only through the lens of national security and majoritarian interests, calls for a critical rethink about the Indigenous experience in Bangladesh. At a public gathering held in Dhaka on Friday, activists rightly demanded exemplary punishment for those involved in vandalism and arson attacks. But the recurrence of such attacks, they said, largely owes to the state's failure to fully implement the CHT accord. We cannot agree more. The non-implementation of this accord has not only held off a political resolution to fundamental Indigenous issues such as land ownership and various rights, but also caused tensions that frequently disturbed the region.

This cycle of tensions and attacks has to be broken. While bringing a zero tolerance approach to any instigation and rumours that put Indigenous communities in harm's way is paramount, the interim government should also look at the bigger picture and eradicate the vulnerability of these marginalised people altogether by fully implementing the accord. We urge the government to declare its plans with regard to the accord without delay. Simply adopting a law enforcement approach to these issues is no longer enough.

How can a minister gather such wealth?

Revelations about ex-land boss deserve critical reflection

It is astounding how the former minister of land, Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, managed to build a half-billion-dollar property empire spanning the UK, the US, Dubai, Malaysia, and Singapore despite being on a modest government salary. According to an Al Jazeera report, Chowdhury holds properties and other assets worth around \$675 million across these countries. How he was able to invest millions of dollars abroad, despite our laws limiting individuals to only transferring \$12,000 per year out of the country, is another mystery that needs solving.

The report further revealed that between 2016 and 2021, Chowdhury purchased 265 properties in the UK, including acquisitions from major developers. In 2021, he bought a luxury apartment worth a whopping \$15.8 million. In the UK alone, Chowdhury allegedly owns 360 properties valued at \$252 million. Additionally, in Dubai, he owns real estate worth over \$195 million, and in the US, he holds around \$20 million in stocks and owns nine properties. However, Chowdhury failed to disclose this information in his tax returns in Bangladesh or in the affidavit he submitted to the Election Commission.

While amassing such wealth, the former minister allegedly set up a network across multiple countries to conceal his assets. Although Chowdhury told Al Jazeera that his wealth was derived from legitimate business, if that were indeed the case, why did he resort to such deceptive means to hide it? Moreover, as a sitting minister, he was prohibited from earning money from private businesses. So, how did he accumulate such vast wealth?

Chowdhury himself claimed that the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was aware of his property-buying spree in the UK. This raises serious concerns about the extent of corruption within the Awami League government at the height of its power when Bangladesh was struggling economically. It is alarming that our governance structures—ranging from the Anti-Corruption Commission to other regulatory bodies—were unable to prevent what appears to be significant wealth accumulation through illegal means and money laundering.

It is, however, good to know that the interim government has suspended Chowdhury's bank transactions, and that he is under investigation for corruption. However, given that he is currently on the run, we strongly urge the authorities to locate him, thoroughly investigate his financial activities, and coordinate with the authorities in other countries—whose laws he also appears to have broken—to bring him to justice.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



'The Hobbit' published

On this day in 1937, English writer JRR Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, a coming-of-age fantasy that became a classic, was published.

We must protect doctors from violence

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza is professor of English at Dhaka University.

SHAMSAD MORTUZA



After a recent attack on a doctor at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, his colleagues reviewed the CCTV footage to assess his handling of the patient. The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) admitted the patient, who had a history of bypass surgery, due to acute left ventricular failure. When his condition worsened, the doctor came in and administered CPR. The nurse was seen preparing an adrenaline injection, as is the protocol. The process failed, and the patient passed away. The attendants met with the doctor. He believed they were requesting an explanation. Suddenly, they started beating him mercilessly. They dragged him down to the ground floor lobby, where the beating could be more spectacular. The stairs remained stained with the doctor's blood. Dr Sajeb Kazi is now fighting for his life at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) with a brain haemorrhage and a rupture of the inner ear membrane.

The incident on September 10 is one of the many instances of workplace violence (WPV) against doctors.

pressure of treating patients in a resource-constrained environment, but also the rising possibility of being physically or verbally assaulted.



"These numbers don't fully convey the agony that doctors endure when they become targets of anger and frustration from people who are at an emotionally charged height of vulnerability."

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are only 5.26 doctors for every 10,000 people in Bangladesh. Overcrowded hospitals, a lack of medical supplies, and a shortage of healthcare personnel result in long wait times, rushed consultations, and patient dissatisfaction.

Following the tragic death of an accident victim at a private university earlier this month, three doctors from the neurosurgery department of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) faced attacks. These incidents are symptomatic of a critical fault line in our healthcare system. They show the risks that healthcare professionals face daily. Doctors face not only the immense emotional and physical

pressure of treating patients in a resource-constrained environment, but also the rising possibility of being physically or verbally assaulted. Unfortunately, violence against doctors is an issue that is neither unique to our country nor recent. This issue is prevalent all over the world. Systemic healthcare challenges, resource constraints, and rising patient expectations contribute to this issue. The emotional stress during medical crises exacerbates the situation further. Due to high patient expectations, doctors in the US have to pay substantial legal fees to protect themselves from lawsuits, and any perceived failure in medical outcomes can lead to costly malpractice claims, regardless of the complexity or inherent risks of treatment.

In Bangladesh, particularly in the current fad of mob justice, it is difficult to guarantee such social and legal succour. The March issue of *Bangladesh Medical Journal* reflects on this growing concern. Their study on a public hospital found that a staggering 67.3 percent of surveyed physicians reported experiencing WPV last year. Of these incidents, 84.5 percent were psychological in nature—primarily threats and bullying—while 13.5 percent involved physical violence, and two percent were cases of sexual

harassment. These findings are similar to those in South Asia. In Pakistan, for example, 53.4 percent of healthcare workers reported WPV, while in India and Nepal, the figures stood at 63 percent and 45.5 percent, respectively.

However, these numbers don't fully convey the agony that doctors endure when they become targets of anger and frustration from people who are at an emotionally charged height of vulnerability. Despite their efforts to keep a critically ill patient alive, doctors may have to give in to the reality of life. Family members

any conclusion, we must thoroughly judge the charges of perceived neglect or incompetence. Indeed, there can be greedy or negligent doctors, just like professionals in all other sectors.

Hospital administrations need to make efforts to create a friendly, secure environment that allows physicians to work with confidence. The reality is that there are not enough policies to redress WPV. The entire healthcare system suffers when doctors work in fear, and patients ultimately bear the brunt of this crisis. Hospitals must invest in better security infrastructure, including the deployment of security personnel in high-risk areas like emergency wards, installation of surveillance cameras throughout their premises, and restriction of public access to certain areas.

Above all, hospitals must adopt a zero tolerance policy against WPV. Legal responses should be swift and just. The government should clearly articulate national-level policies to protect doctors and healthcare workers. To create a greater sense of empathy and patience, there has to be an awareness campaign. These campaigns can focus on managing patient expectations and understanding the limitations of both medical treatment and palliative care. In addition, the health authorities also must set up a system at all hospitals and other healthcare facilities where patients' complaints of malpractice and other grievances are addressed properly.

Doctors themselves should have their own support services. They can use their collective platform to insist on psychological counselling and emotional support for those who experience violence. All hospital staff should receive training in conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques, helping them manage tense situations more effectively. We should not leave doctors to handle the aftermath of violent incidents alone.

Unless we address the root causes of violence, none of this will be effective. The healthcare system needs significant investment to improve infrastructure, reduce patient load, and ensure that doctors have the time and resources they need to provide quality care. The amount of foreign currency that we lose due to outbound medical tourists can be invested to bring in these systemic changes.

Doctors are our last line of defence when life hangs in the balance. To protect them, we must do everything in our power. Without immediate intervention, we risk losing not just our doctors but also the very heart of our healthcare system. Now is the time for action.

Womenomics: What women entrepreneurs can do for a smart economy

Dr Soma Dhar is a research economist and independent consultant.

SOMA DHAR



Womenomics, coined by Goldman Sachs analyst Kathy Matsui, was introduced as a policy by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2013 to promote gender equality in the workforce and stimulate economic growth in Japan. Womenomics is a smart social policy to motivate women to be smart and create a smart economy that will increase the world's GDP by \$12 trillion by 2025.

French economist Jean-Baptiste Say coined the term entrepreneur in 1800 and defined it as "one who undertakes an enterprise, especially a contractor, acting as intermediary between capital and labor."

In Bangladesh, as per the Industrial Policy 2016, a woman is considered an entrepreneur if she owns a business as a proprietor, or in the case of a partnership organisation, owns 51 percent of a company registered with the office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies (RJSC).

Empowering women economically paves the way for inclusive and sustainable development. In Bangladesh, women's increasing participation in the job market is one of the main outcomes of Womenomics, especially as an entrepreneur. Bangladesh has a high potential to create "Entrepreneuri," a term invented by Navya Naveli Nanda, an Indian entrepreneur. The word

refers to a movement advocating for women's entrepreneurship.

Women own just 7.2 percent of enterprises in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) estimates that 28 lakh SMEs in Bangladesh were owned by women in 2020, accounting for roughly 24.6 percent of all SMEs here.

In Bangladesh, women's introduction to entrepreneurship is the result of a complex interplay between opportunities and barriers, as well as outside aims and forces. According to the 2013 economic census, the total number of industrial units in Bangladesh stands at 78,18,565. Of them, 563,368 are companies headed by women, and 37,349 are SMEs led by women. According to the SME Foundation, women entrepreneurs have received 30 percent of a Tk 300 crore government incentive.

Additionally, in Bangladesh, women created about 40 percent of Facebook groups about entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs also have a significant impact on Bangladesh's GDP. They have made substantial contributions to the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector, which made up about 25 percent of the country's GDP in 2021.

One of Bangladesh's first women entrepreneurs is Selina Qadar. She concentrated on agriculture, one of

the nation's main sectors. In 1980, she noted that the government only offered a 10 percent export subsidy for potatoes. In 1985, she founded Agriconcern to promote the export of potatoes and produced 10,000-20,000 metric tonnes of potatoes annually, encouraging farming among women local business owners.

Women in urban areas are involved in various small and medium business enterprises such as handicrafts, fashion houses, beauty parlours, home textiles, food, cooperatives, chain shops, ICT, and even some larger businesses to some extent. In rural areas, many women are self-employed in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, engaging in activities such as cropping, rearing livestock and poultry, fish farming, nursery and tree planting, making tools, handcraft, processing food, tailoring, processing rice, etc.

Women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh are using a variety of platforms to run their businesses. These include Facebook and Instagram, brick-and-mortar stores, community-based organisations, e-commerce platforms such as Daraz and Amazon, fintech tools such as mobile banking and online lending, and business management software. However, women are still left out of the formal financial system. To address this, the government has launched several efforts, such as programmes to enhance financial literacy, remove barriers based on cultural differences, and increase access to financial services in rural areas. Yet, digital services are still severely hampered by a lack of access to mobile phones, cell coverage and the internet, and this is especially true for women.

As of 2024, per the Global System for

Mobile Communications Association (GSMA), mobile internet adoption rates are 40 percent for men and only 24 percent for women in Bangladesh. The use of technology, particularly in mobile financial service/digital financial service (MFS/DFS), highlights issues about the digital gender gap. Minimising this gap in its different forms is essential to ensure inclusive, sustainable economic growth and integrate all adult individuals and small enterprises into a "financial ecosystem."

A wide range of industries, including technology, manufacturing, e-commerce, agriculture, and services, is seeing significant advancements among women. Microfinance programmes, women-specific financial services, and focused policy interventions are a few examples of initiatives that can significantly contribute to women's entrepreneurial empowerment. The Bangladesh Bank has several noteworthy programmes to foster entrepreneurship, particularly among women. It established the Credit Guarantee Scheme providing SMEs in various cluster regions with more access to financing women entrepreneurs.

Fostering women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh is essential for developing a framework to support women's entrepreneurship. A country's progress towards gender equality and inclusive economic development can be gauged by the number of women entrepreneurs. Their contribution will accelerate the sustainable development of a smart economy with assistance from the government, civil society organisations, and stakeholders. It is high time we helped Banglar Nari to evolve as "Entrepreneuri."