

Star BUSINESS



Present accurate data before making policies

Economists and entrepreneurs say

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The interim government must first correct data, as the previous government not only mismanaged but also manipulated various types of data, making it difficult to form effective policies based on the existing information, economists and entrepreneurs said yesterday.

They made the comments at an event titled "Dialogue for democratic reconstruction" organised by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) in the capital.

Almost all data in Bangladesh is inaccurate due to malpractice, said Md Sabur Khan, chairman of Daffodil International University.

"You are making your policy depending on wrong data, then how will the policy give you a good result?"

For instance, the country's population is assumed to be 18 crore, but in reality, it is likely much higher, he said.

If the population size is inaccurate, then data related to food demand and per capita income do not reflect the actual figures, he added.

So, the first priority should be correcting the data and finding a way to build a sustainable and correct data set, he added.

M Abu Eusuf, former chairman of the Department of Development Studies at the University of Dhaka, also emphasised the need for reliable data.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the data correction has already been set as the first priority in the white paper, which is going to be prepared to assess the extent of corruption in the country and identify the reasons behind it.

People have seen how the previous government toyed with the data of per capita income, inflation, and export income and how the data impacted the economy, he said.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the data correction has already been set as the first priority in the white paper

People will have to realise that the interim government was formed just three months back and it found a country almost disabled by the previous government, he said at the event as the guest of honour.

Still, the country's bureaucracy is not functioning well and its law enforcement department is not working properly, he said.

So, it is difficult to fulfil the dreams of all people overnight, he said, adding that people should understand the situation properly.

Bhattacharya said he realises how tough the situation is for the interim government and that is why he would talk in favour of the government although he is not a part of it.

The government will have to reform things piled up and should have been done by the previous government, he said.

It also has to reform policies so that the country can prepare itself for the next level of development, he said.

To do that, the government is bringing institutional reforms along with reforming the election system, he said.

Abdul Awal Mintoo, a veteran businessman and vice-chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), also stressed the need for correcting all types of data, saying: "All data are wrong and full of lies now."

Regarding the business environment, Mintoo said that conducive social capital and savings are necessary to boost investment.

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STOCKS		WEEK-ON WEEK
DSEX	CASPI	
2.73%	3.50%	
5,114.60	14,302.59	

COMMODITIES		AS OF FRIDAY
Gold	Oil	
\$2,748.09	\$71.70	
(per ounce)	(per barrel)	

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Bida's one-stop service plagued by non-stop negligence

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Services rendered by government agencies through a single-window platform to facilitate business remain marred by unscrupulous activities, despite expectations of improvement among entrepreneurs under the interim government.

Although the country has been trying to find new ways to draw investment and boost economic growth over the past decade, the scenario of habitual negligence at government offices has remained virtually unchanged.

Such attitudes have hamstrung the one-stop service (OSS) portal of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (Bida), which was launched in February 2019 to help investors implement business projects quicker by centralising delivery of necessary regulatory, compliance and value-added services.

Currently, Bida provides 112 investment services through the OSS from 29 departments, including the Department of Environment (DoE), the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), and the Office of the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms (RJSC).

However, entrepreneurs claim they are unable to avail services from those bodies online, adding that they must physically visit the offices, where they are subject to the whims of officials.

These allegations came up when The Daily Star recently spoke to over 20 businesspeople who applied to avail services from the OSS.

"Before the start of each fiscal year, we apply to renew all licences and other certificates from the DoE, DIFE, and RJSC through Bida's OSS portal. But our staff practically have to rush to the concerned offices to avail services," remarked Eleash Mridha, managing director at Pran Group.

Mridha added that officials insist on queries and factory visits despite the scope to provide services online.

He opined that the system was haphazard,



AT A GLANCE

Entrepreneurs can't avail all govt services through the one-stop service of Bida
Businesses need to visit different govt offices to get the services
Entrepreneurs often need to spend speed money to move files
Businesspeople face hassles to renew licences or get clearance certificates

NUMBER OF SERVICES

Currently, Bida provides 112 investment services of 29 departments
It aims to integrate as many as 150 services from 35 agencies

adding that businesses had to waste a lot of time each year. Most opt to appoint a dedicated team to deal with such activities to avoid hassle, he added.

The Pran Group has 30 companies under its umbrella, which are all required to renew necessary documents each year.

Mohammed Amirul Haque, managing director of Premier Cement Mills PLC, alleged that processes related to licence renewal or clearance cannot be obtained from the RJSC, DoE or DIFE unless some "speed money" is paid.

Haque, also chairman of Seacom Group, which has 25 companies under its umbrella, said he employs at least 50 employees to deal with government agencies.

He added that he must spend Tk 25 lakh in bribes each year just to renew a trade licence,

alleging that files do not move from one desk to another at government offices unless undue benefits are provided.

A top official of Chattogram based conglomerate PHP Family echoed the same, adding that they hired consulting firms to deal with business-centric government services to avoid hassle.

According to him, there is no alternative to providing such bribes when it comes to running a business in Bangladesh.

"It is an open secret," the official lamented. Riad Mahmud, managing director and chief executive officer at National Polymer Group, said government services are almost never provided online, although applications may be submitted virtually in some cases.

READ MORE ON B3

Onion price rises on supply crunch

SUKANTA HALDER and AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

Onion prices at retail markets in Dhaka rose by Tk 10 to Tk 15 per kilogramme (kg) over the past week, deepening the woes of low and fixed-income people.

Wholesale and retail traders across the capital said a supply crunch is causing the volatility in onion prices.

Nurul Alam Shikdar, a retailer in the Pallabi extension area of Mirpur, said onion prices saw gradual increments over the past week, with local varieties going for Tk 140 to Tk 145 per kg yesterday.

The sudden hike in prices of the popular cooking ingredient comes after six months of persistently high food inflation, which has hovered above 10 percent price since April this year.

Data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) showed that local varieties of onions were selling for Tk 115 to Tk 135 per kg yesterday compared to Tk 110 to Tk 120 a week ago.

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New policy for goods transport by lighters draws opposition

DWAIPAYAN BARUA, Ctg

A recently formulated policy for transporting imported cargoes from Chattogram to different parts of the country has failed to be enforced thanks to strong opposition from importers and vessel owners, as they accused the system of posing threats to monopolise control over vessel serials and fares.

Framed on October 15, the policy has mandated the private platform Bangladesh Water Transport Coordination Cell (BWTRC) to control the maintenance of serials and allocation, and the determination of freight rates of the vessels.

Businessmen allege that allowing a single cell to do so is an attempt to reinstate the recently ended monopoly and syndication in imported

bulk cargo transport through inland water routes. They claim the policy contradicts the Competition Act and the spirit of a free market economy.

In the face of opposition from Chattogram-based lighter vessel owners, the Water Transport Coordination Cell failed to start its scheduled operation on Thursday

In the face of opposition from Chattogram-based lighter vessel owners, the Water Transport Coordination Cell failed to start its scheduled operation on Thursday.

More than 10 crore tonnes of annually imported bulk cargo, including commodities,

fertilisers and industrial raw materials, are unloaded from mother vessels at the outer anchorage of Chattogram port onto lighter vessels and transported through 40 different inland water routes.

Over 1,800 lighter vessels are engaged in this job.

According to the new policy, a 10-member supervisory committee led by the Director General (DG) of the Department of Shipping would monitor the activities of the cell.

Without allocation and permission from the coordination cell, no lighter vessel, except for those owned by business groups, would be allowed to transport cargo from mother vessels, the policy mandates.

It mentioned some conditions for factories and companies in using vessels.

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