

## Ensure compensation for road crash victims

BRTA must fast-track the process to ease suffering of the affected

In a country where so many people are killed or injured in road crashes—with the Bangladesh Passengers' Welfare Association citing 105,338 deaths and 149,847 injuries from 2014 to September 2024—the importance of compensation for the victims cannot be overstated. Yet, it is disheartening to see this basic measure of justice being denied to most victims or their families. For the families losing their primary breadwinners, the effect is particularly devastating as they have to grapple with the financial and emotional tolls of a tragedy simultaneously.

Why, then, is the BRTA failing to deliver compensation promptly, even after the ouster of a regime that prioritised the interests of transport bosses over those of ordinary passengers? According to a report, despite the establishment of a fund under the Road Transport Act in January last year—mostly with contributions from vehicle owners—bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies have slowed the process to a crawl, with only 592 of the 1,940 victims or their families that have applied for compensation receiving it. During this period, at least 22,855 people have been killed or injured in road crashes, all eligible for compensation.

It goes without saying that a compensation denied or delayed effectively doubles the suffering for the affected families. Our report cites the case of Mohiuddin Mal, a ride-sharing driver who was killed in an accident last year. As the sole earner, he provided for his four-member household, including two school-going children. Now, his family is in dire straits. Despite filing an application for compensation as well as a case with the local police station about a year ago, the family is still waiting, with no financial relief or justice in sight. This is also the story of thousands of families ruined by road accidents.

What this shows is how complex and exclusionary the compensation process has been—something we cautioned about when the rules were first formulated. This is further exacerbated by delays in the application, inquiry and disbursement processes. For example, the BRTA's inquiry committee, tasked with verifying compensation claims, often takes far longer than it should. All this also discourages victims from even applying, which defeats the very purpose of the fund, while many do not even know about it.

We have recently called for the establishment of a commission to address our road safety issues holistically. Such a commission, besides bringing necessary reforms to improve road safety, could also ensure that crash victims receive justice as well as fair compensation. This is an issue that deserves utmost priority. Moreover, since the BRTA itself is at the centre of most problems in the transport sector, it must be overhauled so that it can perform better. The government must take these issues with the seriousness they deserve.

## Proper data vital for sound policymaking

Govt must build a robust data governance structure

Details of the economic distress left by the Awami League's authoritarian regime are still surfacing as more instances of data falsification come to light. From inflating export figures to including luxury items in inflation baskets in order to manipulate the Consumer Price Index, few economic indicators could escape the misrepresentation that was designed to improve the regime's image.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, who heads the white paper committee on the economy, is the latest to join voices reinforcing concerns about the AL's inflated economic growth narrative, particularly its reported GDP growth rates. At a recent event, he pointed out that the six to seven percent growth claimed by the AL government over the years doesn't align with the low private and public investment or the stagnant tax-GDP ratio observed during the same period. Recent media reports have also exposed how a syndicate of officials at the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), under the then Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, fabricated data to paint a misleadingly rosy picture in line with the AL's growth and progress narrative.

Beneath this dubious account, however, default loans surged more than 13 times in 15 years, and billions of dollars were laundered abroad. While the regime's megaprojects reshaped the skyline, essential sectors like health, education and social services languished from low investment. According to Dr Bhattacharya, a pro-corruption alliance of certain businesspeople and politicians sprang up in the country, which led to the rise of oligarchs. He warned that reforms would not be possible if these oligarchs' grip on our banking and energy sectors and the capital market was not broken.

These words demand consideration as we try to move beyond AL's shadow. Thankfully, the interim government has initiated several positive measures to address the country's financial challenges and revive the banking sector, which was left on the brink of collapse. The government's plan to separate the National Board of Revenue's tax policymaking and tax collection wings is also a step in the right direction. However, it is also very important that we reform our data collection, analysis, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation processes, as sound policymaking is not possible without proper data. Of equal importance is overhauling the BBS and other relevant agencies to prevent future data manipulation and politicisation.

Moreover, the government should prioritise investment in this area to ensure accurate, comprehensive data from all sectors and social strata, enabling the crucial economic and social welfare reforms that Bangladesh urgently needs.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Mickey Mouse launched



On this day in 1928, Walt Disney released *Steamboat Willie*, the first animated film with sound to feature Mickey Mouse. The huge success of the cartoon helped make Mickey an iconic character and led to the Disney Company's dominance over the animated film market.

# EDITORIAL

## A moment of truth for BNP



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In an otherwise high-profile meeting attended by diplomats from 38 countries and organisations, senior leaders from various political parties, teachers, journalists, intellectuals, and prominent citizens, held in Dhaka on November 14, BNP's Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman declared that, if elected to power, his party would not establish a family dynasty like the Awami League. Speaking virtually from London, Rahman pledged to build a prosperous and happy nation based on the 31-point agenda his party had unveiled in July 2023. He also committed to implementing a policy that would prevent any individual from serving as the prime minister of the country for more than two consecutive terms.

In the brain-storming session titled "BNP's 31 Point Outline to Reform the State Structure," 56-year-old Rahman said no individual, including the prime minister, can abuse power or act arbitrarily in the future Bangladesh. "Accountability will be ensured at every level of government, from the highest ranks of the state down to every government tier. If BNP takes charge of governing (the country), we aim to restore freedom of expression for all citizens, regardless of party affiliation," he said.

"Our goal is to build a state structure where no one will be harassed for expressing their thoughts on platforms like YouTube, Facebook, or other online mediums, even when commenting on the prime minister or other prominent figures. The mainstream and social media will not be compelled to conceal the truth, nor will the government pressure anyone to spread false information."

The promises are both welcome and reassuring against the backdrop of the fall of the autocratic Hasina government, brought down by a mass uprising reflecting the public's aspiration to reform the structure of Bangladesh's state and society.

With the Awami League—the immediate past ruling party and the BNP's chief rival—being forced to retreat from the political process, at least for the time being, after party chief Sheikh Hasina fled to India, the responsibility now rests on the BNP and its acting chairman, Tarique Rahman, as the major political force to lead the reforms demanded by both the youth and the broader public for an inclusive and democratic Bangladesh.

Having examined BNP's constitution, it is evident that the party chief wields near-absolute authority, calling all the shots, attracting all the spotlight, and essentially doing or undoing anything he or she wishes. For instance, the 19-member standing committee, the party's most powerful policymaking body, has the authority to revoke or temporarily suspend membership or take punitive measures against anyone charged with misconduct, breaching discipline, or engaging in anti-party activities. However, if convening a meeting of the standing committee

matters. The constitution explicitly states, "The aggrieved person may appeal to the Chairman against the penalty, but the decision of the Chairman will be considered final."

Moreover, according to the party charter, all metropolitan and district executive committees require approval from the secretary general, who acts on the chairperson's advice. This provision starkly undermines internal democracy within the BNP.

The BNP chairperson is entrusted with immense power, enabling the leader to make key decisions and both enforce and reverse actions at will. For example, the party constitution grants the chairperson the authority to dissolve the 470-member national executive committee, the national standing committee, thematic sub-committees, and other committees. The chairperson may reconstitute these bodies, provided the decision is ratified by the next council.

Additionally, the party chief is empowered to fill vacancies in the national standing committee, the national executive committee, and thematic sub-committees. The chief may even alter the number of members in the national executive committee in special cases, though the total number of members cannot exceed the limit by more than 10 percent.

The party charter also allows for the creation of one or more

organisational bodies within the BNP. However, no organisation is recognised as an affiliate of the BNP without the chairperson's approval.

Even amendments to the party constitution can bypass the national council under certain conditions. The charter states, "If any amendment becomes necessary due to urgent reasons, then the Chairman of the



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

Party may amend the constitution, but the said amendment must be accepted by a majority at the next meeting of the National Council."

Given such provisions, it is imperative for the BNP to prioritise internal democracy and foster a culture of collective decision-making.

At the high-profile meeting on November 14, one speaker cautioned that if the state reform promises were not fulfilled, the BNP would be labelled by the public as a failure.

It is, however, reassuring that the BNP is not only discussing reforms now, but has been proposing state structure reforms since 2016. This consistent advocacy raises hope that the BNP is serious about implementing these proposals.

The BNP should remember that Bangladesh is on the verge of transitioning from authoritarian rule to a path of democracy, achieved through the sacrifices and blood of hundreds of people. This transformation is rooted in the sacrifices of the students and people during the July uprising, as well as the BNP's prolonged struggle enduring imprisonment and oppression. BNP leaders and activists have also faced extrajudicial killings and thousands of lawsuits. Certainly, no one made these sacrifices for yet another authoritarian and undemocratic regime.

## COP29 and the future of our RMG sector



RMG NOTES

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MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

COP29 offers a unique opportunity for global stakeholders to accelerate the transition toward sustainable practices in sectors that heavily impact the environment. One sector where this transformation is particularly urgent is the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh. The RMG industry in Bangladesh. The RMG sector, which accounts for a significant portion of our GDP and is a vital employment source, faces mounting pressure to adopt circular and sustainable practices.

As Bangladesh joins the world at COP29, here I look at how this conference could shape the future of circularity and sustainability in our RMG sector.

Bangladesh is the world's second-largest garment exporter, supplying major fashion retailers in the US and Europe. However, the industry's contribution to the economy is accompanied by equally significant environmental challenges, including high levels of water consumption, pollution, waste, and carbon emissions. Furthermore, its linear production models, focused on high-volume, low-cost outputs, have resulted in considerable textile waste, with limited infrastructure to support recycling and reuse.

The concept of circularity entails moving from a "take-make-waste" linear model to one where resources are used, reused, and recycled, reducing waste and environmental

harm. For the RMG sector in Bangladesh, circularity could mean designing garments for longevity, adopting sustainable materials, recycling textile waste, and building infrastructure that supports garment reuse.

COP29 could potentially play a critical role in establishing universal standards and frameworks for circular economy practices across industries. For Bangladesh's RMG sector, such frameworks could create clear guidelines and benchmarks for sustainable production, helping manufacturers align with global expectations and attract more eco-conscious international buyers. With standardised metrics for circularity, companies could potentially better measure and report their environmental performance, which could further increase their competitive edge in the global market.

One of the key outcomes anticipated from COP29 is an increased commitment to climate finance, which could open doors for Bangladeshi RMG manufacturers to access funding for green technologies and circular infrastructure. Why does COP29 not propose a Circular Transition Fund? This could be used to support the garment industry's shift towards the circular economy which will be a costly process. Climate finance will be key to support small

and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which make up a significant portion of the RMG sector, adopt circular practices despite resource constraints.

For Bangladesh's RMG sector, international collaborations could provide access to new technologies and knowledge in circular textile practices. Partnering with countries

policy direction on sustainability, it's possible the government could introduce incentives to encourage RMG manufacturers to adopt circular models. For instance, tax breaks for companies that use recycled materials, subsidies for sustainable technology adoption, or grants for eco-friendly infrastructure could make circular practices more feasible for manufacturers.

As Bangladesh aligns with COP29 goals, it's essential to ensure the transition to circular practices also benefits the millions of workers in the RMG sector. This includes providing training for green jobs, ensuring safe working conditions, and fair wages. COP29 could serve as a platform to push for labour practices that support social sustainability alongside environmental objectives, ensuring a just transition for RMG workers.

One important aspect to consider is consumer behavior. To succeed in a circular economy, brands and retailers must educate consumers on the importance of sustainable fashion and encourage responsible consumption. However, if Bangladesh seizes the opportunities presented at COP29, the RMG sector could emerge as a leader in sustainable fashion, providing a model for other developing economies. By embracing circularity, the sector could reduce its environmental impact while increasing resilience to global supply chain disruptions.

I believe COP29 holds major promise for the future of circularity and sustainability in Bangladesh's RMG sector. Through climate finance, partnerships, policy support, and a commitment to worker well-being, the conference could help cement meaningful change in how garments are produced, consumed, and disposed of.