

Why the outrage over pads but not violence against women?



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Let us try to not get into the specifics of whether sanitary napkins were being sold or distributed at the country’s largest annual book fair—the Ekushey Boi Mela. Let’s not even point fingers at the event management company or the Bangla Academy for allowing, and later, stopping the stalls to do so. The unsettling fact that surpassed these issues is that a group of men had a problem with the public display of such “private” product—sanitary napkins.

In this context, I couldn’t help but look back at a chapter titled “The Curse” from a superhero series named *Swamp Thing*, published by DC Comics. In this chapter, we are presented with a white female protagonist named Phoebe who is haunted by the spirits of menstruating women from the fictitious Native American “Pennamaquot” tribe. Those women were ostracised and quarantined in “the red lodge” that once stood in the plot of land, now occupied by Phoebe and her husband, Roy.

Phoebe’s rage is fuelled by the condescending way her misogynistic husband—an epitome of toxic or hyper masculinity, treats her. Phoebe is also infuriated by the stifling patriarchy that is

too ingrained in the system and sometimes propagated by women themselves—women who have internalised patriarchy. For example, at the supermarket, Phoebe buys a large box of sanitary napkins that the checkout lady hides in a brown bag “as if to protect other groceries.” This evidences the latter’s role in the patriarchal tool of making menstruation and menstruation products taboo.

Needless to say, this is also the norm in pharmacies and shops or supermarkets that sell sanitary napkins in Bangladesh. The need to hide the period product from the male gaze is similar to hiding Pennamaquot menstruating women from the rest of the tribe, which in turn, is similar to the demands of the group of men, who want to keep the sanitary napkins out of sight at the book fair. Menstruation, at the end of the day, in both so-called “civilised” and “uncivilised” societies, in the past and at present, is seen as something to be ashamed of because it is associated with undesirability and grossness.

Why should one be so vehemently against period products being openly displayed, when these very products ensure the physical and mental wellness of women while their uterus

sheds its lining during every menstrual cycle—a completely natural bodily function? Many girls and women in Bangladesh do not have access to period products due to financial constraints and lack of awareness and resort to using rags and unhygienic products that may lead to discomfort, skin issues, various kinds of infections, diseases, cervical cancer, absenteeism at school or workplace, low self-esteem, and overall, poor quality of life.



VISUAL: SIFAT AFRIN SHAMS

Some men have even gone on to claim that women in past generations never used sanitary napkins and they were healthy women, so what is the need for such a product now? This argument falls under two types of logical fallacies. First, the false equivalence

fallacy, which compares two situations—past generations who did not use sanitary napkins and current generations who are encouraged to do so, as if they are the same, ignoring critical differences such as advancements in hygiene, healthcare, and changes in lifestyle. Just because women in the past managed without sanitary products does not mean it was ideal or healthy. It’s like saying, my grandfather smoked his entire life and lived up to the ripe old age of 90, so smoking can’t be that bad for your health—a comparison that uses an anecdote ignoring scientific evidence that links smoking to cancer, heart disease and early mortality.

Second, the appeal to tradition fallacy,

which assumes that because something was done a certain way in the past, it should be continued in the same way. It suggests that traditional practices are inherently better without considering improvements or the problems that those practices used to cause. It’s like saying, we have always used home remedies for illnesses in our family, so there’s no need for modern medicine, which assumes a tradition or practice is better or correct simply because it has been done for a long time, while disregarding advancements in medical science that could offer effective treatments.

It is men who stood in unison to put an end to the public display of sanitary napkins, yet they remain conspicuously absent from efforts to combat violent crimes against women. Where do men gather to voice their protestations when children, disabled, and elderly women are violently abused, raped and murdered? When there’s hardly any hue and cry as far as gender-based violence is concerned, there is a terrorising frat party or congregation of conservative men who are uncompromisingly opposed to the idea of ensuring that women at a book fair can get easy access to sanitary napkins if they happen to bleed there. Do they expect us, women, to dislodge our private parts and leave them under lock and key, in a sealed safe, buried six feet under, in some impenetrable forest, when we go out?

What if this same energy that was exhibited by sanitary-napkin-hating men was channelled into advocating for women’s safety, dignity, and access to essential products? How different could our society be if those voices rallied for progress instead of suppression?

Bangladesh’s bureaucracy needs reinvention



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Despite nearing almost six decades of independence, Bangladesh’s administrative system remains stuck in the past, a relic of British colonial rule. Originally designed to serve foreign rulers, this bureaucracy now appears more interested in protecting its own privileges than advancing the nation. Outdated methods of handling paperwork and communication create unnecessary obstacles, slowing decisions and holding back progress.

One glaring example of delay is the “noting system,” where files must pass through multiple hands for comments and approvals before any action is taken. This confusing process loses time and money that could be used for better purposes, such as building schools, hospitals, and other infrastructures. Even now, high-ranking officials often behave like kings, expecting their staff and the public to show them the same respect people did in colonial times. This old way of thinking focuses more on strict rules than on getting things done and values appearance over helping others.

Despite numerous reform attempts, the core structure of the civil service has barely changed. The Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP), which evolved into Bangladesh’s administration cadre, retained its elite status and privileged position. This has created a bureaucratic class that sees itself as the guardian of the state rather than as public servants. As a result, they resist meaningful reforms that could challenge their authority and disrupt their control over government operations.

This rigid system affects every aspect of the country’s development. Simple tasks, like getting a business permit or accessing land records, become complicated, time-consuming, and prone to corruption. Resistance to

growth challenges is obvious. Although the country has improved in many ways, slow and complicated government processes are holding back economic growth, social progress, and public services.

What makes this situation even more frustrating is how stubbornly the system resists change. Experts point to an “iron triangle”—a powerful alliance between politicians, bureaucrats, and business elites—who benefit from the current system and work together to block meaningful reforms that could improve governance.

The colonial influence on Bangladesh’s bureaucracy is still evident in many ways.

look like.

For Bangladesh to progress, it is important to make a strong effort to improve the public service. The government should focus on hiring and promoting people based on their skills and qualifications to make sure the best individuals lead. Technology should be fully applied in governance to make operations smoother, increase speed, and lower crime rates. We need better ways for citizens to give feedback so that government leaders are held accountable and serve the people accordingly.

The cost of maintaining the current system is becoming unsustainable. In a world where nations compete



FILE ILLUSTRATION: BIPOB CHAKROBORTY

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change has also slowed the adoption of digital governance. Instead of using technology to improve services, many bureaucrats view it as a threat to their power. While other Asian countries have successfully implemented e-governance, Bangladesh struggles with endless delays and bureaucratic roadblocks. Digital systems would make processes more transparent, potentially reducing corruption—something many officials are unwilling to risk.

Another problem is that the promotion system is old-fashioned and tends to prefer generalists instead of specialists. As a result, leadership roles often go to people who lack the needed technical skills, leading to the creation of useless policies and bad execution. This stops the country from having the skilled leaders needed to deal with today’s problems.

The connection between this ineffective system and Bangladesh’s

District commissioners, for example, still live in grand colonial-era residences and follow traditions that appear outdated in a modern democracy. But this isn’t just about appearances—it reflects a deeper issue. The system continues to treat citizens as subjects to be controlled rather than as active participants in governance. This concentration of power in the hands of a few makes it harder for ordinary people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

However, there are signs of hope. A new group of civil servants, trained in modern management and aware of the best practices from around the world, is advocating for change from within the system. Young leaders in local areas are changing how things are done by focusing on serving the community instead of trying to rule them. Their method questions long-standing rules and shows what a better system might

based on innovation and adaptability, Bangladesh’s bureaucratic inefficiencies threaten to undermine its economic growth and development goals.

Bangladesh’s bureaucracy doesn’t just need reform—it needs reinvention. A system designed to serve colonial masters must be transformed into one that meets the aspirations of its citizens for a modern, efficient, and responsive government.

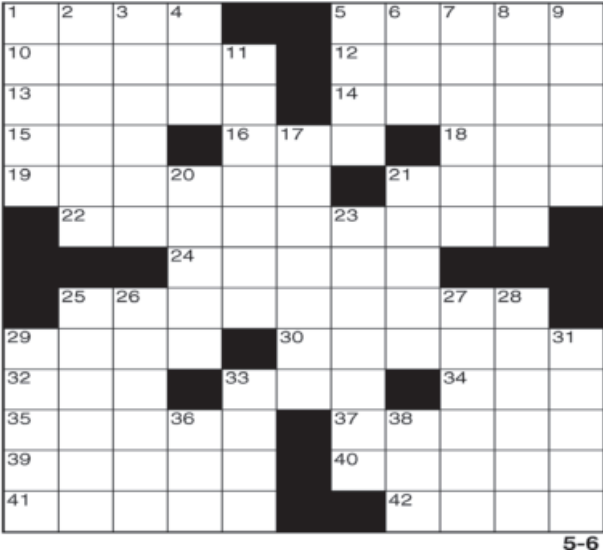
The real tragedy of Bangladesh’s bureaucratic maze isn’t just the wasted time and resources—it’s the dreams delayed, and opportunities lost. But with growing public demand for change and reform-minded officials gaining influence, there is hope. The question is no longer whether change will come, but whether it will happen soon enough to meet the challenges of the 21st century. For millions of Bangladeshis that change can’t come soon enough.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**

 - 1 Gold hue
 - 6 Elephant of stories
 - 11 Too trusting
 - 12 Skirt
 - 13 Change
 - 14 Turning tool
 - 15 Back muscle, for short
 - 16 Anticipated
 - 18 Have debts
 - 19 D.C. baseballer
 - 20 Hosp. parts
 - 21 Young miss
 - 23 Movie category
 - 25 Twisty fish
 - 27 Bashful pal
 - 28 Pig part
 - 30 Coyote call
 - 33 Serving feat
 - 34 Scot’s cap
 - 36 Cry of insight
 - 37 Halloween costume choice
 - 39 Family
 - 40 Spring sign
 - 41 Paris divider
 - 43 Fragrance
- DOWN**

 - 1 Counterpart
 - 2 Neighbor of Zambia
 - 3 Archfoes
 - 4 Seth’s mother
 - 5 Showed over
 - 6 Like some birthday cards
 - 7 Jai
 - 8 Danish sweets
 - 9 Stick
 - 10 Oboe parts
 - 17 Funny fellow
 - 22 Summer sign
 - 24 Japanese drama
 - 26 Some minstrels
 - 28 Uncommon
 - 29 La Brea stuff
 - 31 Acts spoiled
 - 32 Desolate
 - 33 Sailor’s cry
 - 35 Monument Valley sights
 - 38 Cooped (up)
 - 42 Hurler’s stat



YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

A	M	B	E	R		B	A	B	A	R
N	A	I	V	E		E	L	U	D	E
A	L	T	E	R		L	A	T	H	E
L	A	T			A	W	A	I	T	E
O	W	E		N	A	T		E	R	S
G	I	R	L		G	E	N	R	E	
		E	E	L		D	O	C		
	S	N	O	U	T		H	O	W	L
A	C	E		T	A	M		O	H	O
V	A	M	P	I	R	E		K	I	N
A	R	I	E	S		S	E	I	N	E
S	C	E	N	T		A	R	E	E	L
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