

## Open drains continue to claim lives

Why is such gross negligence being tolerated?

The body of a six-month-old baby was recovered on Saturday from a canal in Chattogram after the child had gone missing on Friday. A woman and her baby were travelling in a rickshaw when the baby fell into an open sewer, which had a strong current after rainfall. This story has tragically become one that plays out every now and then in Chattogram, notorious for its open drains and canals, where many have perished while others have been severely injured. A significant number of the victims were children. Despite lofty—and expensive—projects by the authorities to fix the city’s drainage system, something as basic as closing all the open drains and canals to prevent people from falling into them has not been completed. Why such apathy for public safety?

In the last several years, there have been innumerable reports of people falling into open drains or canals, with some of the bodies never found. People have been expressing their fear, as most drains do not have protective slabs or retaining walls, which make them deadly after rainfall. The media has been relentlessly reporting on these incidents. Yet these deaths continue, robbing families of their loved ones.

The Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) and the Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) are the agencies responsible for maintaining and repairing the drainage system. They are therefore the main government bodies that should be held responsible for such criminal negligence. In 2021, the CCC found 5,527 risky spots along the drains, canals, and footpaths of the city. While around 80 percent of these spots have been covered and 70 percent of retaining walls built along the canals (according to a news report), there are still many vulnerable spots that are potential death traps—which is why a six-month-old baby had to die.

It is well known that these open drains and canals become clogged with silt and waste during the rainy season, causing them to become submerged, making it impossible to see them on the flooded roads. Thus, pedestrians or rickshaws falling into the drains, or people getting swept away by the open canals, has become a common occurrence. Yet the four projects worth Tk 14,389 crore initiated by the Awami League government could not complete the renovation of these canals and drains.

We expect the interim government to immediately take steps to demand answers from the CCC and CDA, and instruct them to cover the remaining risky spots on an urgent basis. Deaths caused by official negligence can no longer be tolerated. With the upcoming rainy season, they cannot afford to waste any more time.

## A father’s death and the state’s failure

Authorities must arrest and hold the perpetrators accountable

It is outrageous that a father had to lose his life for protesting against his daughter’s harassment in Rajshahi City’s Talaimari area on April 16. Reportedly, the victim’s daughter was returning home from private tuition that day when a local youth named Nantu verbally harassed her on her way back. After she informed her parents of the incident, her father, Akram Hossain, complained to Nantu’s parents about the harassment. At this, Nantu became furious and, along with his gang, attacked Akram Hossain and his son. One of the attackers struck him on the head with a brick, causing critical injuries. The man later died at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

This incident highlights the miserable state of women’s safety, and the security of people in general, across the country. While harassment and stalking of adolescent girls are common occurrences, these incidents mostly go unreported unless they escalate to more severe forms of violence such as rape or murder. According to the Human Rights Support Society (HRSS), at least 11,758 women and girls have fallen victim to torture and violence, with 6,305 of them being raped between 2020 and 2024. During this time, a total of 2,624 women and girls have suffered sexual harassment.

Parents of girls do not always protest such incidents for fear of retaliation from the harassers. Since the perpetrators are often powerful and politically connected, victims often lack the courage to go to the police, file cases, or seek protection. In many instances, parents stop sending their adolescent daughters to school and marry them off at a young age to prevent cases of stalking and sexual harassment. While it is the state’s responsibility to ensure the safety of our women and girls in educational institutions, workplaces, and public places, it has failed us miserably in this regard, emboldening the perpetrators to continue their crimes with impunity.

The situation is so dire that anyone attempting to stop harassment and violence often becomes a victim themselves. For instance, earlier in April, a man was stabbed for protesting against the harassment of a schoolgirl in Netrakona’s Atpara upazila. Several similar incidents have been reported in recent times.

We must ask: why should a father lose his life for standing against his daughter’s harassment? Why doesn’t the state take decisive action to ensure such crimes are never repeated by holding perpetrators accountable under the law? In the Rajshahi incident, the victim’s family filed a case against Nantu and his associates. We hope the police will swiftly arrest all the accused and ensure they are punished according to the law. Only by ensuring justice can such violence be curbed.

### THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## Deepwater Horizon oil spill

On this day in 2010, the largest marine oil spill in history occurred due to an explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig located in the Gulf of Mexico.



## DEATHS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

# Our aspirations and Europe’s contradictions



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On April 17, 2025, two stories unfolded in Europe, each a mirror to the other. In Amsterdam, the “Best of Bangladesh in Europe 2025” event began with fanfare, celebrating the nation’s economic dynamism, its booming ready-made garment sector, and its aspirations to become a \$1 trillion economy by 2040. Meanwhile, in Italy, the United Nations revealed that 2,589 Bangladeshis had arrived by sea in the first two months of 2025, a 115 percent increase from the previous year. Many more Bangladeshis were lost to the Mediterranean’s unforgiving waves. This duality—a nation lauded for its progress even as its citizens perish in pursuit of a mirage—demands a reckoning.

Bangladesh’s economic narrative is one of resilience. From a war-torn nation in 1971 to the 35th largest economy in 2022, its growth has been fuelled by export-led industrialisation, digital innovation, and a youthful population. The Netherlands event showcased this success: 32 exhibitors from sectors like apparel, IT, and agro-food promoted “Made in Bangladesh” as a symbol of ethical production and opportunity. The European Union (EU), Bangladesh’s largest trading partner, praised the country’s “skilled workforce” and pledged support for labour rights and green energy transitions.

Yet, beneath this veneer lies a darker truth. While the elite negotiate trade deals in Amsterdam, young men from Madaripur, Cumilla, and Sylhet pawn ancestral land to pay traffickers Tk 5–16 lakh (\$4,500–\$14,500) for a seat on a rickety boat to Italy. Their desperation is not born of ignorance but of systemic failure: unemployment, wage stagnation, and a culture where migration is seen as the only escape from poverty.

The Mediterranean has long been a mass grave. In 2024 alone, 10,457 migrants died attempting to reach Spain, while UNICEF estimates 3,500 children perished on the Central Mediterranean route over the past decade. For Bangladeshis, the journey begins in Libya, which is a “false gateway” where 93 percent endure torture, extortion, or indefinite detention. Survivors describe boats

capsizing, fuel tanks suffocating passengers, and families drowning together.

The EU’s border policies exacerbate this carnage. By outsourcing migration control to states like Libya and Tunisia, which detain migrants in warehouses and push them onto riskier routes, Europe has turned



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Young Bangladeshi men pay huge sums of money to traffickers for a seat on a rickety boat to Europe.

the Mediterranean into a “kill zone.” Spain’s aerial surveillance and Italy’s refusal to rescue distressed vessels epitomise a regime that prioritises deterrence over humanity. As Shariful Hasan, head of programme of migration at BRAC, notes, “This is not a dream journey; it’s a death journey.”

### The hypocrisy of EU-Bangladesh relations

The EU’s “Talent Partnership” with Bangladesh, aimed at promoting legal migration, rings hollow against this backdrop. While Erasmus+ scholarships and renewable energy projects are commendable, they pale

year of exploitation in Libya. Titu, 19, suffocated in a fuel tank, betrayed by a broker who promised a work permit. These are not isolated tragedies but symptoms of a global order that commodifies hope.

Survivors like T. D., a Malian man who watched his brother drink seawater to death, recount horrors that defy comprehension. For every body recovered, countless others vanish into the Atlantic unidentified, unmourned and, erased from history. As Rayhan Kabir, a migration specialist at BRAC writes, “The wrong ship does not take you to Europe. It sinks you in the deadly sea”.

about the realities of the journey is a must.

Europe cannot claim moral leadership while its shores are littered with corpses. Bangladesh cannot celebrate “growth” while its youth drown in despair. The Mediterranean, a sea that once connected civilisations, now symbolises our collective failure. The Amsterdam event should not be just another photo op but a catalyst for change. For every garment displayed, let us remember the hands that stitched it, and also the hands that grasped at a lifeboat, only to sink into darkness.

The dead have no use for elegies. But the living owes them action.

# Economic lessons from the tariff war



### AN OPEN DIALOGUE

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The first round of Trump’s tariff war has ended in a stalemate. China and the US, the two key players, are contemplating the next move. President Xi Jinping is visiting Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia to shore up support for the next round of the war. Before President Trump declared the 90-day pause, the global financial market was jittery, and many developing countries, including Bangladesh, were scampering for a countermove or a response to offset the damage to their respective economies.

The current tariff war offers some important lessons for economists as well as the practitioners of statecraft. In this age of artificial intelligence (AI), one wonders why the small group of US policymakers, including the Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent and the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers Stephen Miran, sign off on the so-called Liberation Day tariff package, which marked the beginning of a global trade war and triggered a global stock market crash?

During my studies at the Dhaka University and the graduate school at Boston University, we were reminded that tariffs can be harmful to the domestic economy, but developing

countries may use tariffs to protect an “infant industry” only for a temporary period. However, US President Trump is using tariffs to achieve some of the economic and political goals he promised during his election campaign. For months, his team has worked on the policy package, particularly its timing, target commodities and countries. However, we now know that some of the resultant fallout has surprised his core team of advisers.

What can policymakers and the next generation of economists take away from the first round? I will answer these questions and add some notes for economics professors.

First, in most textbooks, economic models are based on the assumption of free trade, perfect competition, and “small country.” It can be shown that tariffs harm the consumers and should be avoided since they reduce economic welfare. However, in real life, gains from trade are distributed unequally between trading partners. Some countries, particularly the rich and the strong, have the upper hand in trade negotiations. Therefore, the discussions on trade theory in economics must be part of a broader discussion, touching upon political

science.

Second, tariffs, once introduced and codified, leave their marks on the markets. If US introduce tariffs to re-shore manufacturing on a large scale, the next administration will find it difficult to reverse it. In other words, the assumption of a “frictionless world” in the textbooks is a myth.

Third, new textbook authors and researchers need to consider “international trade theory” in the context of Game theory. The Game theory model is better equipped to take into account the realities of the modern world where one country (the US) is the world’s largest debtor and its enemy (China) is the largest creditor.

Fourth, undergraduate students must be made aware of the importance of the “model” or assumptions behind each theory. For example, the existing “Pure Theory of International Trade” is based on the theory of comparative advantage stating how two countries evolving from autarky can experience gains based on comparative advantage after they open up for trade.

Former World Trade Organization Director Pascal Lamy in one of his speeches talked about a paper by pioneering economist Paul Samuelson which was published in the Summer 2004 issue of the Journal of Economic Perspectives. He said that the paper theoretically showed “how technical progress in a developing country like China had the potential to reduce the gains from trade to a developed country like the United States.” He added that the paper, “appeared to be a dramatic about-face against the idea that open trade based on comparative advantage is mutually beneficial.”

Harvard’s Greg Mankiw wrote, “I

agree with Paul Samuelson..., who has recently spoken and written about how comparative advantage as it is classically understood may not be descriptive of the 21st century economy in which we find ourselves.”

Fifth, countries use tariffs today for reasons other than protection. As discussed in my previous column in this newspaper, tariffs can be used for retaliation, as the US is now doing. However, politicians who use tariffs as a tool of statecraft, which is the skillful management of state affairs, should be conscious that issues of statecraft require great deliberation.

The next generation of economics professors should review and remove some prevalent misconceptions about tariffs. For example the assertion that higher tariffs strengthen the value of a country’s currency is not totally correct.

As we saw, Trump’s tariff announcement sent the value of the US dollar plunging. One of the goals of Trump’s tariff war is to weaken the dollar. By weakening the dollar and imposing strategic tariffs, Stephen Miran believes that the US could correct long-standing imbalances in the global system. He outlined his idea in a 41-page essay titled “A User’s Guide to Restructuring the Global Trading System.”

If students of economics are taught that tariffs are bad, they should take it with a grain of salt. If civil servants, businesspersons, or policymakers face export tariffs, they should consider the current environment, assess the situation, and then negotiate a deal with their opponent or trading partner.