

Reactivate UP chairmanship

Chairmen’s prolonged absence causing service disruptions, sufferings

We are concerned about the protracted leadership crisis at the local government bodies, particularly union parishads (UPs), where the continued absence of chairmen is disrupting the provision of essential services. Since the July uprising last year, UP chairpersons connected to the ousted Awami League government have been largely missing in action. Many either went into hiding or were arrested over alleged connections to criminal activities. According to the LGRD ministry, of the 4,575 UP chairmen across Bangladesh, at least 1,535 remain absent.

Although administrators have been brought in to fill the vacuum, local residents, according to a report by this daily, are still facing delays and other disruptions in obtaining vital documents, causing them various complications. The administrators who were appointed to carry out UP chairpersons’ tasks (as an additional responsibility) are still struggling to do it effectively due to various reasons, including lack of leadership experience, unfamiliarity with the job’s nature, overwhelming workload, etc. This has led to severe disruptions in several public services. For example, the beneficiary lists for the VGF and VGD programmes have not been updated as planned, causing delays in providing support to new recipients.

Union parishads are responsible for issuing birth, death, character, and citizen certificates, which are essential documents required to access many government services. UPs also play a crucial role in administering the social safety net programmes, running village courts, implementing rural development projects, and maintaining law and order. UP chairmen are best positioned to manage these tasks due to their local connections and understanding of their constituents’ needs. We cannot expect the same level of expertise or tact from administrators, but the problems and sufferings thus caused cannot continue either. Enough time has passed for any test or trial the government may have needed to deal with the UP crisis. People expect results now.

We urge the government to take more targeted measures, including mobilising necessary resources, to equip the union parishads so that essential services can be provided without unnecessary hassle or delay. However, the most effective way to resolve this crisis would be to hold fresh local government elections and properly reconstitute the union parishads. This is how this system was designed to function, with people’s representatives taking care of their needs. In our view, there is no need to wait for the national elections to conduct the local government elections. In fact, holding these elections could serve as a dress rehearsal for the national polls. More importantly, it will restore normalcy to the delivery of public services.

Remove date-expired vehicles from streets

Govt must reduce air pollution, bring order in transport sector

It is unfortunate that the interim government’s directive to remove unfit and outdated vehicles from the streets has received little response from the owners. Reportedly, in late October last year, the government decided to remove expired vehicles from the roads, setting a six-month deadline for compliance. In line with this directive, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) issued a public notice announcing the removal of buses over 20 years old and trucks/covered vans over 25 years old from Dhaka city. Yet, with the deadline expiring in May, there has been minimal interest from owners in complying with the order.

According to the BRTA, over 75,000 buses, minibuses, trucks, covered vans, and tankers exceeded their operational lifespan across the country. One in five buses operated by private companies in Dhaka have no valid fitness certificate. These figures are deeply concerning as outdated and unfit vehicles contribute significantly to road accidents, environmental pollution, and overall chaos in the transport sector. A 2019 study revealed that motor vehicles account for 10.4 percent of air pollution in Dhaka, with most exceeding permissible emission limits. Therefore, the urgency of removing unfit vehicles cannot be overstated. However, the challenge lies in ensuring compliance from transport owners and workers.

During the Awami League’s rule, we saw how similar removal initiatives failed due to pressure from transport owners’ and workers’ associations, which were largely controlled by AL-affiliated politicians. But now that a non-political government is in charge, we expect to see a positive change. The adviser to the Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges has stated that after the expiry of deadline, outdated vehicles found operating on roads will be seized and destroyed. But without the owners’ cooperation, this will not be easy. The government must, therefore, move strategically.

While its offer to assist owners in securing bank loans for new vehicles is a step in the right direction, additional incentives may be needed to encourage compliance. Also, clear directives from the Bangladesh Bank regarding easy access to loans could further motivate owners to replace their old vehicles. Moreover, given how the transport sector is run, political support will be crucial. Since July, most transport associations have been controlled by BNP-linked leaders and activists. Therefore, support from the BNP leadership is essential for the success of this drive.

Over the decades, successive governments have made lofty promises to reform the transport sector, with little meaningful action. This time, we expect concrete results. The interim government must not fail to deliver on this crucial issue.

Development is not just about macroeconomic progress



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The economy is currently dominating discussions and events in Bangladesh, which are further expanding with the imposition of huge tariffs by the United States on nearly 200 countries. People are talking about tariffs, and there is concern that Bangladeshi products, particularly its garment exports, will greatly suffer from the imposition of a 37 percent tariff by the US. The government is discussing future steps to mitigate the impacts. Besides, there are reports and analyses of economic issues in local news media on remittances from the Middle East, the country’s balance of payments, or the release of the IMF loan tranches to Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025 took place in the capital recently. Potential foreign investors have been visiting the town. Promising entrepreneurs also held quite a few events on the issue of startups. Meetings are happening on defaulted loans, banking sector reforms, and concerns of the private sector. It is clear that Bangladesh’s economy has slowly been trying to turn around. Yet, with all these happenings, it may be pertinent to make three observations.

First, most of the discussions and events are happening at the macroeconomic level with a focus on foreign exchange reserves, balance of payment deficits, foreign direct investments, etc. These macroeconomic issues are critical for understanding macroeconomic trends and achievements and they carry important implications for policy-making, resource mobilisation, and for monitoring and evaluation. However, do these pure macroeconomic notions and the associated indicators reflect the impacts on human lives and living? Do these macroeconomic concepts, data, and numbers guide our understanding of the realities at the micro level? They do not. Thus, the country’s macroeconomic picture is somehow delinked from its micro realities.

For example, the recent macro indicators show that food inflation has come down. However, such information does not tell us about the impact on the day-to-day life of a common person. For instance, during the past months, we had a good paddy harvest, coupled with imports of thousands of tonnes of rice. Yet, rice prices are not going down, affecting the food intake of people. Meanwhile, the market prices of potatoes went down beyond their production costs. On the other hand, watermelons are for sale everywhere—in shops, markets,

by the roadside, on the footpath, and by the riverbanks. Yet, a medium-sized watermelon is being sold for almost Tk 300! Do we even know from the macro indicators which prices are determined in the capital’s Karwan Bazar market and which in markets outside Dhaka?

Since governments are traditionally preoccupied with macroeconomy, they fail to understand the micro-level impacts on common people’s lives. This is unfortunate, because, in the end, development is for the people.



FILE PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Although macroeconomic indicators show food inflation has decreased, rice prices at kitchen markets remain high.

Therefore, the macro approach must be linked to the micro-level realities on the ground. While we have to ensure economic stability at the macro level, it must not be done at the cost of unbalancing the lives of common people.

Second, at the macro level, issues discussed include how many billions of dollars may come into Bangladesh’s economy as external investments, or how much foreign earnings the country would lose because of the increased US tariffs. Undoubtedly, these are critical concerns in the macroeconomic context, but attention must also be given to the qualitative

encompasses micro-level qualitative transformations along with macro-level quantitative progress. Increases in national income indicate *progress*, but its equitable distribution means development because that represents transformation.

Third, we are focusing more and more on the financial side of macroeconomy, and not so much on its institutional structures. For human development, different state institutions must be efficient, equitable, and effective. If services are to be provided for human well-being at the micro level, state institutions must have high levels of efficiency. Inefficient institutions lack focus,

a process of accountability. One way of ensuring transparency and accountability in an institution is to have regular monitoring, assessment, and evaluation of work.

Today, Bangladesh is engaged in building a new social order. Human rights, dignity, tolerance, and equity are at the core of that initiative. This transformation is not economic—or just macroeconomic. This transformation is social, political, and cultural, too. And it is not structured only on quantitative expansions, there should be qualitative transformations, not just in terms of resources, but also institutions. Thus, the issue of reforms is at the core of such changes.

Cars are killing Earth, in more ways than we think



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I was once in a gym in the US when I noticed an ad on TV. It was by a car company and talked about how many trees are disappearing due to... well, I don’t quite remember which catastrophe they acknowledged as destroying trees. Would they dare mention the climate crisis, given how much cars contribute to it? In any case, the ad involved drawings by children and happy talk about the 100,000 trees that the car producer was donating to be planted to help replace all the trees being cut down or destroyed.

But those one lakh trees... planted where? Tended by whom? And how to protect those trees from droughts, flooding, fires, and other climate-related tree-destroying chaos? While this is simply yet another example of corporate greenwashing, it felt particularly egregious given the involvement of children. (To get them

started early, thinking that cars are good for the environment!)

Think about it: should we need a reminder that the Earth is vital and we are doing a lousy job as its custodians? But when was the last time you walked on an unpaved forest path or a quiet beach? For those of us living in cities, it is hard to stay connected with the planet and remember that it sustains us. Even in rural areas, we experience less of nature and more of agriculture, the deliberate cultivation of the Earth in a way that is not natural.

And—allow me to gripe for a moment—how many Earth Day celebrations, events, social media campaigns, and newspaper articles discuss one of the most harmful products on the planet, environmentally speaking: the automobile? Cars are harmful to our health and to our environment in many ways that most people are not

aware of; too often, we just assume that buying a new, “less polluting” car is the solution.

In fact, all cars pollute, and in some ways, electric cars can pollute more than regular ones. Cars—their manufacture, use, and disposal—release all kinds of pollutants into the air, soil, and water. Cars are a major contributor to climate change. All the space and money we devote to cars also means that we have that much less available to green our cities and to ensure that water bodies exist to help prevent flooding.

All the infrastructure we build for cars, and those heavy vehicles travelling at high speeds, kill wildlife as well as people and contribute to the loss of biodiversity. Highways fragment and destroy wildlife habitat. Car use contributes to more frequent and more severe natural disasters, which in turn destroy all those trees that the above-mentioned automobile manufacturer and other companies brag about planting.

We know that car emissions cause pollution. Fewer people are aware that cars also pollute due to the friction of tires on roads and the use of brakes. Car use also releases harmful microplastics into the air.

Then there’s lead, which has been connected with several health and

behavioural issues. These days, about 75 percent of global consumption of lead is for car batteries. Lead is also found in the paint on cars and road markings, and continues to leach into our environment, harming and killing us.

Oil from cars also enters our soils and is carried into our water bodies, contributing to water and other pollution.

Most urban noise pollution is from cars and motorbikes. While we strive to convince people to honk less (or not at all) in Bangladeshi cities, there is also the noise from the engines, particularly in the case of motorbikes. Noise pollution is an aggravation; it also kills.

The batteries used in electric cars require an enormous amount of resources that need to be mined; disposal of batteries is harmful to the environment; and the heavier weight of electric cars means more friction and more chemicals released when they are driven.

It’s time to shift the focus on the terrible destruction caused by cars. And it is past time to change the focus of our transport system from catering to the car-using minority to serving all those who lead their lives and move about without causing such devastating harm to our Earth.