

## Corruption remains a significant concern

### Take stern measures to ensure hassle-free service delivery

We are concerned to learn of the latest findings of a survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) that paints a troubling picture of public service delivery in the country. The survey period covered both the tail end of the now-ousted Awami League regime and the first few months of the interim government, thus requiring its findings to be read with nuance. But the fact that 31.67 percent of respondents, or nearly one in three, reported having to pay bribes for essential services is a stark reminder of how entrenched corruption remains. The massive sample size—with 84,807 respondents from 45,888 households interviewed—also makes the data a fair representation of the experience of ordinary citizens. Although by now we would have appreciated a survey exclusively focused on the interim period, what has emerged still makes a case for why we should worry.

For that, we just need to look at some of the details. For instance, according to the BBS data, the worst offender among public service agencies was the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), where 63.29 percent of citizens reported being forced to pay bribes, followed closely by law enforcement agencies (61.94 percent), the Department of Immigration and Passports (57.45 percent), and the Directorate of Registration (54.92 percent). These institutions have long been synonymous with corruption, and the latest data suggests that the situation has not improved significantly despite the change in government. Another sector with a notable incidence of corruption is education where, as noted by the planning adviser at the BBS ceremony, the bribery rate for transfers is very high.

These findings more or less align that of other reports on corruption in Bangladesh. One may recall a December 2024 assessment by the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)—based on six household surveys conducted between 2010 and 2023—that an estimated Tk 1.46 lakh crore was paid in bribes for services during the rule of Awami League. According to the most recent of those surveys, covering the period between May 2023 and April 2024, some 70.9 percent of respondents had collectively paid Tk 10,902 crore in bribes while seeking services. It is no surprise that the same institutions identified by TIB as the most corruption-prone have also been identified as such by BBS. Clearly, things have changed little.

The level of access and affordability in public services may have improved of late, but the quality and timeliness of service delivery still leave much to be desired. Just over half of the BBS survey respondents have expressed satisfaction with how long services take to process. While the interim government has taken some notable steps in recent weeks, such as replacing the BRTA chairman and conducting anti-corruption raids at BRTA offices, these actions are not enough to curb corruption unless systemic reforms are undertaken to support full automation of services, elimination of middlemen, de-politicisation, and rigorous trials and punishment of corrupt officials. Corruption must be confronted not with token measures but with genuine political will and long-overdue institutional changes.

## Why is HSC absenteeism so high?

### Huge number of students not sitting for HSC exams this year

We are alarmed by the sheer number of students who are not taking this year's HSC and equivalent examinations, scheduled to start on June 26. Reportedly, a total of 14,83,689 students registered as regular candidates under the 11 education boards—including the madrasa and technical boards—for the 2023-24 academic year. Among them, just over 10,50,000 filled out forms to appear in the exams. The remaining students—more than 4,25,000—did not. The reasons for such a large number of students dropping out at this critical stage of their academic journey must be addressed. If these students falter now, it will not only be detrimental to their individual futures but will also result in a substantial loss for the nation.

While student dropout after SSC, HSC, and equivalent levels is common in Bangladesh, the situation is more severe this year, as the number of HSC examinees has dropped to the lowest in the past three years. Understandably, poverty is a major driver of absenteeism, while child marriage also plays a significant role: 51 percent of girls in Bangladesh are married before the age of 18, according to a recent UN report. Many students join the workforce immediately after passing the SSC exams. A recent survey on this year's absent SSC candidates has highlighted these issues. A similar survey should be conducted to identify the causes of absenteeism at the HSC level. Educationists say the rising cost of education could also be a factor behind dropouts.

According to a report by the Dhaka education board, 40 percent of girls who failed to appear in this year's SSC exams had been married off before the exams, despite having completed exam registration. Over seven percent of students were absent due to entering the workforce because of financial hardship, while others missed the exam for reasons such as illness or lack of preparation. A similar situation appears to be contributing to absenteeism at the HSC level. The recent protest by some HSC candidates in Rajshahi also suggests that some students are unprepared to sit the exams.

We urge the authorities to address the root causes of students' exam absenteeism through effective measures. Ending child marriage, of course, should be at the top of the list of priorities. Equally important is ensuring that financial hardship does not force parents to withdraw their children from education. The government must keep education within everyone's reach by implementing meaningful reforms in the sector. No student should be forced to abandon their education under any circumstances.

# We're witnessing the barbaric face of a global (dis)order



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Although Israel attacked Iran last week, a sense of trepidation about the possibility of that happening had gripped the public psyche for a long time. Yet, when it happened, there was this disbelief: surely Israel wouldn't go that far, or be that reckless or horrific?

And of course, people thought about the US, Israel's main supporter and greatest source of power. Donald Trump's return to the Oval Office brought with it a deep fear of instability—economic and political—around the world, fuelled by the chaos he created through sudden tariffs and the relentless attacks on immigrants. That the same administration would be willing to support Israel, no matter how extreme a step the latter took, should not come as a surprise.

But what would be the consequences of such an act? The US has think tanks, military strategists, and institutions that surely understand the implications. That's why people had hoped that the US would exercise some restraint, and would not give its unconditional blessings to Israel. But the dread was always there. Particularly after Benjamin Netanyahu's return to power in Israel—a man accused of corruption, who by all means should be in prison—there were concerns. His personal motive to avoid jail by whipping up nationalist crises, to stir up conflict and distract the public, became evident.

But it's not just about Netanyahu's personal ambition. There is a right-wing government behind him—military forces, think tanks, ideological and strategic backers, both inside and outside Israel. His actions reflect their collective agenda. Netanyahu has consistently created unrest. The ongoing genocide in Gaza has claimed nearly 60,000 lives, most of them women and children. It's relentless. Even hospitals aren't spared. Children running for food are bombed by Israel in Gaza. It's a horrifying reality that no sane person can stay unaffected after learning about.

It was the responsibility of the US, as the leader of the so-called global order, and its ally, the European Union, to stop this, but they completely failed to do that. Not only did they fail, but

they ended up offering full support to this reckless, monstrous aggression. They justified it. Their media repeated the justifications. They sent weapons using which Israel is carrying out its genocidal campaign in Gaza.

This is the situation Israel has created—by launching one attack after another. Palestine is next door. Lebanon is nearby. The whole region has been destabilised. To build support for its actions, Israel and its allies have played destructive roles in



Fire and smoke rise from the Sharan Oil depot in Tehran, Iran following Israeli strikes on June 15, 2025.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Iraq, Libya, and Syria. Islamist groups, some of whom are known to act as proxies for the Israeli-US agenda, have contributed to this chaos.

Then came the attack on Iran. This shows the nature of the current global (dis)order and those running it.

And we see the international institutions—the United Nations, global human rights groups and conventions, and the International Court of Justice—being completely ineffective in stopping this madness. They remain in their posts with zero accountability. They should be ashamed. If not resign in disgrace, they should at least acknowledge their failure.

When Israel attacked Iran, many of these institutions still tried to defend it. In recent European meetings, reports show that Israel's oppression

population lack access to food, water, shelter, jobs, yet more money is spent on weapons than anything else. It's a race to develop the deadliest technology—to kill more people more efficiently. That's the current face of global capitalism.

Meanwhile, as Israel continues its genocidal campaign against the Palestinians, the silence of the Arab world remains deafening. Saudi Arabia, during a recent visit by US President Donald Trump, signed the largest-ever arms deal, worth \$142 billion. They have given Israel indirect support. Qatar, too, welcomed deals and summits.

If the Arab world had stood united, raising a common voice against Israel and its chief patroniser, it could have shifted the course of events. But the Arab world chose silence.

Worse, many aligned themselves with the perpetrators. This silence and complicity are part of what empowers Israel.

The US is Israel's main source of strength. But so too is the EU, which has never taken an independent stance. The EU drags on the war in Ukraine, failing to stop it, echoing the US policy at every turn.

Another source of Israel's strength lies in how sectarian divisions are exploited. Because Iran is a Shia-majority country, some groups—religious leaders even in Bangladesh—now argue that Iran is just as much an enemy as Israel. This is dangerously absurd and irrelevant. Iran has citizens of many faiths, including Sunnis. But that's not the point. The point is that Iran is being subjected to an unjustifiable assault, and nuclear accusations are being used to justify sanctions and aggression that are not applied to other countries with nuclear weapons.

This hypocrisy—where the guilty accuse others—is driving the world towards catastrophe. If this trajectory continues, the consequences could be beyond imagination.

This militarised global capitalism requires war. It survives on it. Even if war pauses due to global outrage, it resumes either in a different form, in a different region, or more intensely than before. And its impact falls on all of us.

It weighs on the mind—wars, genocide. And then come the economic and political consequences.

In Bangladesh, we rely heavily on imports of fuels, and any disruption or rise in prices due to global conflicts immediately leads to a crisis and inflation. Remittances, one of our main economic lifelines, can also be affected. If workers lose jobs abroad and have to return, we will face rising unemployment and a deeper economic pressure.

What we're witnessing is the barbaric face of global capitalism, emerging from within the system itself—militarised, profit-driven, indifferent to human lives.

It is the duty of every individual, in Bangladesh and across the world, to speak out, to resist, to build global public opinion against this war machine. This is not about religion, ethnicity, or nationality. This is about humanity, about civilisation, about this planet. If we don't raise our voices collectively against the destruction of life, nature, and the future of our children, then we risk surrendering to a system that thrives not on creation, but on destruction.

We must respond. From Bangladesh and beyond, we must do whatever it takes.

# Reintegrate the 'forgotten workforce'



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After receiving the redundancy notice from my international non-profit employer in March 2025 due to the USAID fund cut, I applied for more than 20 development jobs and consultancy opportunities aligned with my experience. Surprisingly, I never heard back from any of them. The development professionals in Bangladesh, like me, had a higher mobility within the sector due to our extensive skill sets. But the scenario changed after January 20, 2025, when the US government announced a 90-day review period and paused USAID grants globally. Many USAID projects let go of their staff without any appropriate notice period. We don't know how many there are in Bangladesh, apart from a newspaper report that estimated the number of job losses to be 30,000-40,000 based on the assumptions sector insiders. We, the forgotten workforce in Bangladesh's development sector, have not received any official statement or statistics about the extent of this joblessness.

Regardless, the workforce still needed to make ends meet for themselves and their families. Out of desperation, they aggressively jumped into searching the job boards.

Globally, USAID alone was the source of around 50 percent of development funds. With the cancellation of USAID grants, many

development organisations have gone through termination and furlough of direct staff under USAID grants, and some not directly funded by USAID grants.

The development organisations could not provide any solution for the job seekers due to a severe financial crisis. While the corporate and private sector requires specific industry-relevant skill sets and are unaware of how to utilise the abandoned skill sets, where should this forgotten workforce seek support?

With the current climate of foreign aid by donors, it is predictable that the development sector won't be back to its original shape or scale soon. Under these circumstances, the Bangladesh government must take steps to prevent a future disaster in the shrinking development sector. Foreign aid has long played a critical role in various sectors of the country, including education, health, environment, democracy, human rights, humanitarian assistance, and many more. With the priority of the donors shifting globally, the country must focus on building a self-reliant economy supported by the business and private sector.

The Bangladesh Investment Summit 2025 showcased the country's potential as a prime investment

destination in Asia. The World Bank signed a \$850 million loan to create new jobs and enhance trade in the country. The National Special Economic Zone in Chattogram alone is expected to create jobs for around eight lakh individuals. The latest Bangladesh Country Private Sector Diagnostic (CPSD) report reveals that with the right policy actions, Bangladesh could generate up to 23.7 lakh jobs annually within the construction sector by boosting the development of new housing projects. In addition, expanding the country's domestic production of paint and dye could create over 664,000 formal jobs. Furthermore, reforms in digital financial services might open the door to anywhere between 96,000 and 460,000 new employment opportunities. The government can integrate the high-skill redundant workforce from USAID projects, and utilise our expertise in this transition process for the country's economic growth. This is the time to acknowledge that the job loss of a section of development workers is not a short-term crisis and could affect the country's economic growth in the long run. We should prepare for it with clear course corrections by following new policy pathways.

To mitigate the impact of job losses in the development sector, the government can survey the number of unemployed workforce due to the fund cuts, followed by an economic impact assessment. The government should also implement a national talent retention programme to address the skill gaps in the economy and mitigate the impact of job losses. This initiative will help the development professionals transition into the

newly growing sectors like renewable energy, IT, and green manufacturing, wherein there is a demand for a skilled workforce.

Bangladesh's expanding infrastructure and renewable energy sectors present a great opportunity to create jobs and reintegrate the displaced workforce through public-private partnerships (PPPs). As an incentive, the government could offer the private sector grants, tax breaks or subsidies, reduce their regulatory burdens of doing business to encourage them to hire these skilled professionals.

A national reskilling and upskilling initiative could play a critical role in the transition of the displaced workforce. Partnering with key industries, the government could design specialised, subsidised training and mentoring programmes. It should also incentivise entrepreneurship and small business creation by an entrepreneurship support scheme for the displaced workforce. Seed funding, mentorship, and access to markets for new businesses could be offered. Government-supported schemes and accelerators would assist development professionals in setting up businesses in high-growth sectors, including agriculture, e-commerce and information technology, which would also create new jobs.

Wherein a large unemployed workforce created by the fund cuts is facing an immense challenge to survive, this situation presents a unique opportunity for Bangladesh. This is a call to action from the "forgotten workforce" of the development sector of the country to the government to reintegrate them strategically into the economy.