

Civil service needs an urgent overhaul

Its performance records do not inspire confidence ahead of elections

In mid-July, we ran an editorial on the practice of compensating "deprived" former bureaucrats through retrospective promotions, highlighting how it is creating fresh problems rather than resolving old ones, and urging the government not to make it a norm. Our comment followed news that the government was set to "promote" several hundred retired officials from non-admin cadres, after its earlier move in December to award post-retirement promotions to 764 admin cadre officers. Far from rejecting this unprecedented trend of mass promotions for those no longer in service—resulting in them getting improved benefits and pensions—the government is reportedly going ahead with it. Even the Ministry of Defence is now said to be reviewing applications from "deprived" retired armed forces officers.

Clearly, the government doesn't care about the bad optics such decisions create, nor about the criticism that retrospective promotions for retired officers—civil or military—undermine merit, waste public resources, and set a damaging precedent. This tendency to disregard valid concerns mirrors the approach of the very regime it replaced one year ago. As a new report by this daily suggests, over the past year, there have been numerous instances related to promotions, placements, appointments, and retirements across the public sector where it could have exercised far better foresight.

For example, during this period, some 1,500 officers were elevated to the ranks of deputy secretary, joint secretary, and additional secretary, which is quite staggering. Moreover, at least nine secretaries and 19 additional secretaries were sent into forced retirement, and 87 others designated as OSDs. Many of those promoted, including retired officials, face corruption allegations. Many incompetent but well-connected officers were elevated, and many retired officers were brought back. Add to that the frequent reshuffles. We understand the circumstances under which the administration had to make some of the decisions post uprising, but its manner and motive have been rightly criticised by experts citing political favouritism, lack of leadership, and poor enforcement of rules. Far from restoring order, this has only led to chaos, resentment, and indiscipline within the administration.

Meanwhile, the government's much-publicised call for wealth statements from officials remains cosmetic, with no steps taken to publish them or strengthen outdated rules against corruption. It has also made little progress in undertaking internal reforms to make civil service more efficient and people-oriented. This state of affairs, we must say, is a disservice to the uprising that installed the interim government to fulfil the aspirations of the people. With the country now set on the path to a national election come February, the question is, can this fragile and unpredictable administration deliver a free, fair, and credible election as it promised?

These concerns must be addressed going forward. We urge the interim administration to take a critical look at its present state as well as performance over the past year. It must undertake necessary reforms and initiatives to restore trust that it will be able to not only deliver a credible election but also leave behind a strong institutional foundation for the next elected government.

A gruesome tragedy behind closed doors

Woman killed by husband in Shewrapara the latest in a disturbing trend

We are deeply alarmed by the recurring incidents of women being murdered by their husbands. On April 8, a man allegedly killed his wife, child, and his wife's elder sister over a family dispute in Narayanganj. On June 18, another man reportedly murdered his wife and disposed of her body in a pond in Golapganj, Sylhet. Most recently, on August 13, Syeda Fahmida Tahsin (Keya) was allegedly murdered by her husband, Sifat Ali, in their flat in Shewrapara, Dhaka. These brutal incidents have once again exposed the deeply rooted culture of intimate partner violence in our society. They also highlight the glaring absence of adequate support systems for potential victims, as well as weaknesses in our law enforcement and legal system in preventing such crimes.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), between January and July this year, a staggering 133 women were killed by their husbands, while another 42 were murdered by members of their husbands' families. ASK reported 363 incidents of domestic violence during this time, which resulted in 322 deaths. Among them, 208 women and children were victims of murder, while 114 individuals died by suicide. Reportedly, Sifat used to beat Keya frequently, which she endured for the sake of their four children. Tragically, in the end, she lost her life. According to Keya's family, Sifat strangled her and then attempted to stage the incident as a suicide before leaving her body at the hospital and fleeing the scene. While Keya's family filed a case, the police are yet to arrest her husband.

The question is, is the state doing enough to stop such brutal fates from befalling our women, who continue to endure abuse at the hands of their husbands with no support from anywhere? While their families often remain silent about the violence faced by their daughters—as was the case for Keya—the state has also failed to establish a support system where these women can seek help. We do have a national emergency service '999' and the National Women's Protection Helpline '109' under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, which receive thousands of calls for help every day, but these have hardly been effective in reducing cases of domestic violence.

We, therefore, urge the government to build a robust mechanism through which women can seek help and find shelter when needed. Breaking the silence around intimate partner violence is equally crucial. More importantly, cases filed in connection with domestic violence must be expedited and concluded with conviction. In the case of Keya's death, the state must ensure her husband is arrested and brought to justice.

Decision on LDC graduation deferral needs careful assessment



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Bangladesh is scheduled to graduate from the United Nations' Least Developed Country (LDC) category on November 24, 2026, having met the three graduation criteria—Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, Human Assets Index (HAI), and Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI)—for two consecutive triennial reviews since 2018. A major milestone for Bangladesh, it reflects the economy's strength, achieved through decades of progress in economic growth, poverty reduction, human development, and resilience. Yet, graduation also entails significant costs, leading to the loss of crucial international support measures (ISMs) such as duty-free quota-free (DFQF) access to developed markets, special treatment under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, and concessional financing.

While the previous government highlighted LDC graduation as a political symbol of success, the data integrity was questionable. Short-term image building rather than long-term readiness drove the eagerness to graduate. Businesses, though outwardly supportive, have been apprehensive about whether Bangladesh is structurally ready to withstand the post-graduation challenges.

Recently, the private sector has been urging the government to seek a deferment of graduation for at least three years, citing both economic vulnerabilities and the precedent of other countries that successfully postponed their transition. Notably, the European Union (EU) has already committed to extending LDC-specific climate funds to rely on. The loss of such support will increase our climate vulnerability.

Besides, Bangladesh, as an LDC, currently enjoys exemptions from several WTO obligations, including the rules on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and subsidy disciplines.

Post-graduation, Bangladesh will lose these flexibilities, constraining industrial policy space when export diversification remains limited.

If Bangladesh seeks to defer its graduation, a strong case of its vulnerabilities derailing a smooth transition must be made. Although the country's inflation is slowly declining now, it has been above nine percent for about three years. Similarly, the foreign exchange reserve, despite its gradual

This implies that Bangladesh has the most to lose. Estimates show that preferential access covers 70 percent of our global exports. Therefore, Bangladesh's competitiveness in the global market will significantly erode after graduation.

LDC status also guarantees access to concessional development finance from multilateral institutions. Graduation will increase borrowing costs significantly. This is especially concerning for Bangladesh, given its already rising external debt service

increase and present stability, is much lower compared to the period when the country's reserve was equivalent to almost five to six months' import value. As of August 14, 2025, the foreign exchange reserve was \$25.82 billion, which, as per the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s benchmark, can cover about three months of imports. The government also needs to service its high external debt, borrowed by the previous government for several large infrastructure projects. The banking sector was also left in distress by the previous government. As of March 2025, the share of non-performing loans (NPLs) in the banking system had increased to 24.13 percent of total loans disbursed. Once Bangladesh Bank completes full assessment of the asset quality of all weak banks, NPL may increase further. This indicates the banking sector's constraints in providing loans to genuine businesses at a competitive interest rate. Governance failures in

achieve national economic objectives and comply with global requirements.

Several countries have been successful in deferring graduation, noting various vulnerabilities. Nepal deferred graduation after the devastating 2015 earthquake and subsequent macroeconomic challenges. Vanuatu's graduation was deferred in 2012 due to natural disasters and external shocks. Similarly, Tuvalu's graduation was postponed in 2012 for environmental vulnerabilities. Maldives' smooth transition period was extended in 2005 due to the Indian Ocean tsunami and the country graduated in 2011. The graduation of the Solomon Islands, scheduled to happen in 2024, was extended in 2023 by three years to December 13, 2027, due to various shocks disrupting its graduation process. Angola's graduation has been deferred due to the deterioration of its economy to an unspecified date. Bangladesh and Nepal were supposed to graduate in 2024, but the UN General Assembly (UNGA) extended the timeline due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, deferment is not unprecedented, and the UN Committee for Development Policy (CDP) recognises exceptional circumstances, such as climate shocks, financial crises, or political instability as legitimate grounds that can cause serious setbacks to a country's development progress. Bangladesh can make a compelling case by citing the combined effect of global economic downturns, domestic macroeconomic fragility, and climate vulnerability. The recent tariff regime may impact many economies, including Bangladesh's, negatively. To overcome these challenges, the government needs to improve institutions and governance to ensure conducive fiscal, monetary and trade policies, and the private sector should work towards upgrading compliance, technology, and productivity.

If the government decides to request LDC graduation deferment and if the UNGA grants the extension, we must not forget the hard work that lies ahead. Moreover, the preparation for a smooth transition cannot be delayed. The deferral should be considered an opportunity to upgrade infrastructure; improve human capability; reform economic sectors, including trade, investment, banking, fiscal system; reduce bureaucratic red tape; and ensure transparency and accountability. Therefore, Bangladesh's requests for a deferral of the LDC graduation period should be framed as a move towards strategic readiness. Without credible reforms, deferment would merely postpone the crisis.

WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY

The world needs humanitarians more than ever



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ALBERTO BOCANEGRA

When crises unfold, humanitarians are the first to step forward.

In Rasulpur village, Lakshmpur, waist-high floodwater has engulfed the road, blurring the lines between ponds and homes. The air is thick with the smell of wet earth and soaked clothes. Through it all, a young woman in a red vest wades carefully, calling out to families, checking if anyone needs to be evacuated, and assessing where urgent help is needed.

That woman is Suchana from the same flooded village. She is a trained community volunteer with the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS). She has been working for months, helping her own community, which is still recovering from last year's eastern region floods. Like her, thousands of trained volunteers of BDRCS work through floods, cyclones, fires, landslides, cold waves, and heat waves, including in Cox's Bazar refugee camps.

"I love helping and supporting people in need," Suchana says. "Most of the time, with even the smallest help, they can fight back and rebuild. I have

seen people survive, recover and live again. And that's my inspiration."

She remembers a mother and her two children she helped evacuate during last year's unprecedented floods in south eastern Bangladesh.

"They cried as we evacuated them, but the next day they smiled when we brought food and drinking water for them. That smile has stayed with me," added Suchana.

Like Suchana and other Red Crescent volunteers, we have millions of humanitarians worldwide, many of whom stay unseen and unrecognised, but in moments of danger step forward to protect lives, often risking their own.

The need for them is growing. In 2024, the United Nations estimated that 305 million people worldwide, including 24.5 million in Bangladesh alone, would require humanitarian assistance.

Today, the strong early warning systems save millions of lives, but the courage humanitarians workers require remains the same. From the Covid-19 pandemic to devastating cyclones and fires, humanitarian teams in

Bangladesh have faced extraordinary challenges. Unfortunately, these unsung heroes do not always come back safe and sound.

Globally, the risks to humanitarian workers are rising. By mid-July 2025, at least 143 humanitarian aid workers have been killed in 25 countries. Last year was the deadliest on record—377 lives lost, including 32 Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers. In 2023, at least 280 aid workers were killed—a 137 percent increase from 2022. More than 95 percent of those killed were local humanitarians who received far less media attention than internationals. Many more were injured, kidnapped, attacked, or detained.

Beyond physical dangers, humanitarians increasingly face risks from misinformation and disinformation. False narratives, sometimes baseless rumours about aid distribution, spread rapidly on social media and in communities. During the pandemic response in Bangladesh, aid workers were sometimes denied entry to communities due to false information and fears about vaccines. In cyclone-affected areas, rumours that evacuation shelters were unsafe delayed the movement of the at-risk community to higher ground. Such misinformation erodes trust, delays lifesaving assistance, and in some cases incites violence against aid workers. Combating this "information crisis" has become as critical as providing aid itself. Awareness campaigns can help address these difficulties.

These hostile situations also affect aid workers both physically and mentally. In Bangladesh, we remember the Red Crescent volunteers who arrived within five minutes of the fighter jet crash at Milestone School and College in Uttara. The tragedy left one IFRC volunteer in need of psychosocial support. Shah Alam, a Red Crescent volunteer with the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP), died in May 2020 while evacuating people during Cyclone Amphan.

There is International Humanitarian Law (IHL) to protect aid workers and civilians, but laws mean little if not enforced, upheld, and respected. We must confront intentions to normalise attacks on humanitarian workers and hold those responsible.

By promoting respect for international humanitarian law and the humanitarian principles, humanitarian diplomacy leverages diplomatic channels to encourage decision-makers and opinion leaders to act in the interest of people with humanitarian needs and protect humanitarian workers.

On this World Humanitarian Day, under the themes "Protect Humanity" and "Act For Humanity," let us remember that humanitarians are not just a resource to be deployed; they are people with families, feelings, dreams, and hopes, choosing to serve others in their hour of greatest need. The world needs humanitarians, including volunteers, more than ever, and the international community needs to ensure that mechanisms are in place to protect them.