

Don't drop oversight from the ACC

New ordinance raises fears of weakened accountability

We share the dismay expressed by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) over the exclusion of a crucial reform provision in the new Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Ordinance 2025, disregarding the national consensus on this issue. The ACC Reform Commission, it can be recalled, had recommended establishing an oversight mechanism through a "Selection and Review Committee" to ensure accountability alongside independence and to prevent the ACC from being used as a tool for politically motivated harassment. By removing this strategically important provision, the government has once again opted for a half-hearted reform, which is unlikely to achieve meaningful results.

Drawing from past experience, the reform commission rightly argued that restoring public trust in this long-discredited institution will require not only formal independence but also transparency and accountability in its operations. This includes half-yearly reviews, as well as periodic public hearings and consultations conducted by the proposed Selection and Review Committee. The interim government's justification for removing such a vital safeguard—that an oversight board would complicate operations and undermine independence—is simply untenable. Institutions wielding significant power without effective accountability rarely serve public interests; instead, they risk being weaponised against the very people they are meant to protect.

What makes this development particularly disappointing is that the oversight provision was part of the July Charter, which the interim government presented as a collective national pledge endorsed by all political parties. Its removal now risks setting a damaging precedent, encouraging political parties and other stakeholders to disregard their commitments on reform initiatives as well. TIB's allegation that many other reform proposals have already been undermined by "anti-reform circles within the government" only deepens these concerns.

It is also troubling that little visible progress has been made in implementing recommendations from other reform commissions covering the media, health, women's rights, local government, and public administration. This inertia highlights a broader systemic stagnation within the bureaucracy, which has become painfully evident since the 2024 mass uprising. Now, as the country approaches the election phase, doubts are mounting about whether reforms marked for prompt implementation will even be initiated, let alone completed. It increasingly appears that the interim government, led by Professor Muhammad Yunus, is allowing yet another rare opportunity for meaningful reform to slip away, reducing the state reform agenda to mere rhetoric.

The consequences of this missed opportunity to strengthen institutions may be felt for years, if not generations. For a government championing state reforms, this represents a deeply contradictory and profoundly discouraging precedent.

A building regulator is long overdue

Govt must act swiftly before another earthquake strikes

The 5.7-magnitude earthquake that recently shook parts of Bangladesh was a geological warning shot, a prelude to a catastrophic rupture that experts fear is nearly inevitable. In a deltaic land with extreme urban density, this is an existential gamble where lives, livelihoods, and entire communities hang in the balance. Unfortunately, as we have been warning for years, the country's shield against any earthquake-induced devastation is weak, with a relatively modern building code that is comprehensive in theory but largely ignored in practice.

Five years ago, according to a report, the then government gazetted the Bangladesh National Building Code. On paper, it is a robust document, prescribing rigorous standards for seismic resilience, fire safety, and structural integrity. It mandates the creation of a Bangladesh Building Regulatory Authority (BBRA) to police runaway construction. But half a decade on, the BBRA remains a fiction. In its absence, the country's urban sprawl—a chaotic mix of glass and steel towers and precarious masonry—has been left largely unregulated.

Admittedly, this failure is one of bureaucratic design. Rather than establishing an independent body of engineers and planners, the previous administration handed oversight to deputy commissioners. Asking district-level civil servants with no technical background to audit shear walls or soil liquefaction potential was a bizarre idea that, perhaps to no one's surprise, created a regulatory vacuum. In major cities, enforcement of the building code remains porous. In upazilas and rural areas, it is effectively nonexistent.

The stakes, as the recent earthquake has shown, could not be higher. Rajuk, Dhaka's development agency, estimates that a 6.9-magnitude quake could flatten 865,000 buildings and kill 210,000 people in the capital alone. Its old quarters, with narrow lanes and century-old structures, are particularly vulnerable. In Chattogram, three-quarters of buildings are deemed "at serious risk." Without a central authority to enforce soil testing and structural compliance, these and other cities are effectively building their own tombs.

The current administration has rightly flagged this as an emergency. The chief adviser has reportedly ordered an inquiry to create a dedicated authority to approve all construction, and an interim committee expects to form the BBRA by December. Building a regulator from scratch takes time, but it must be done, and done right and fast.

Going forward, all relevant government departments must stop treating construction safety as a general administrative task and recognise it as an inviolable technical line. The "building officials" designated by the code—executive engineers from the Public Works Department—must be empowered properly, bypassing the sclerotic district committees. A culture of third-party vetting, standard in the West but foreign to Bangladesh's corner-cutting construction sector, must also be enforced. Given how grave the threats are, we must do everything necessary to ensure that when the earth moves, our structures, and the people inside them, can survive.

COP30, profit over people, and growing climate threats



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The United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP, held its 30th session in Brazil. It was quite lengthy and expensive, yet at the end of it, the central problem remained: the much-needed transition away from fossil fuels still seems unachievable. Powerful entities continue to place obstacles in the way.

There is no denying that we are living through the harsh reality of climate change. The very existence of the Earth, and the livelihoods and security of its inhabitants, are under serious threat. Instability is now visible everywhere, with extreme cold in some places, unbearable heat in others, intensifying forest fires, increasingly frequent natural disasters, etc. Scientists continue to urge action in every possible way, especially through reducing temperatures and carbon emissions. Yet COP unfolds in an almost repetitive cycle every year: delegates from countries and blocs attend, promises are made, and concrete action is stalled.

We need to understand why this keeps happening. The causes of climate change are not mysterious. It is neither a divine punishment nor an unknown force. We know exactly why it is getting worse, and foremost among these reasons is the indiscriminate use of fossil fuels including oil, gas, and coal.

Beyond this lies the problem of overconsumption in some countries and among small, affluent segments of populations worldwide. The demand and supply driven by such consumption patterns damage the environment and destabilise ecological systems. This is the second major factor. The third is the fetishisation of capitalist growth, which is being treated as synonymous with development. To sustain this profit-driven model, investments are directed towards activities that destroy ecological balance: deforestation, toxic pollution of rivers, and massive increases in commodity production that raise both environmental and social costs.

Global consumption fuels production and growth but also generates enormous quantities of dangerous waste. Plastic has become a major threat, contaminating rivers, canals, ponds, soil, and ocean floors. Chemical and nuclear waste continue to accumulate. The production of armaments, driven by competition and wars, adds even more.

This waste severely disrupts the world's natural systems: forests, water bodies, air quality, food sources, and ecosystems. Food production has

increased significantly worldwide—in Bangladesh, for example, it has risen four to five times in the last five decades—but this has come at great cost. Chemical fertiliser use has multiplied, groundwater extraction has surged, pesticide use has grown alarmingly, and genetic modification technologies have expanded. So while yields have increased, much of this food is not genuinely safe, and the enormous socio-environmental costs make it all very unsustainable.

But aggressive advertising continues to make it difficult for people to distinguish between safe and unsafe food. Consumerism driven by marketing creates a frenzy to buy unnecessary products. Commodity



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fetishism is taking on a frightening dimension. As a result, production and waste increases, and GDP rises, but few seem to be bothered by the growing threats to human and non-human life caused by this trend.

This suggests that the problem of climate change is inherent to the type of global capitalist development we are witnessing. This problem cannot be resolved without questioning the "profit over people" anti-environmental logic at the heart of capitalism. A crucial part of any solution is moving away from fossil fuels. But fossil fuel corporations are immensely powerful and wield

scope for research and development in renewable energy. But funding is not directed there.

Where does the funding flow? To armaments and war. More than a trillion US dollars is spent annually on weapons. A tiny fraction of this could ensure clean water, safe food, or renewable energy for millions. But capitalism invests where profits lie. To ensure profit, it destroys the environment, produces weapons, fuels wars and occupations, and even commits genocide. Climate change is very much tied to these actions.

Representatives from countries

struggles and domestic challenges as interlinked problems. Globally, we must challenge fossil fuel corporations, profit-driven multinationals, and war-prone states, including the US. Domestically, we must adopt a development vision that restores river flows, expands afforestation, protects coasts from coal plants, and ensures safe food. Only then can we move towards real solutions.

Otherwise, COP may continue for another 30 sessions, spending billions and offering occasional feel-good moments during gatherings, but what is necessary to protect the Earth and its people will remain out of reach.

Beyond apparel: How Bangladesh can develop new exports

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Bangladesh urgently needs to diversify its economy. The country has a limited ability to produce and export sophisticated goods. It ranks low (128th out of 145 countries) on the Economic Complexity Index, which measures the diversity of a country's exports. Except for some petroleum-based economies, the country is one of the most narrowly concentrated economies in Asia. Exports remain largely focused on the apparel sector, which constitutes over 80 percent of exports. The apparel industry earns \$40 billion in exports, while no other sector brings in more than \$1 billion in an economy worth nearly half a trillion dollars.

Historically, Bangladesh has shown its ability to diversify its export base. In the late 1970s, goods made from jute fibre accounted for around 70 percent of total merchandise exports when the apparel industry's share was less than four percent. The share of the apparel industry increased to 75 percent in the early 2000s, a remarkable feat in transforming an agrarian economy towards a labour-intensive, export-

oriented manufacturing country. This success led to export concentration in the apparel sector.

The rise of the apparel industry reduced the share of traditional exports like jute and leather, which have stagnated at around one billion dollars for decades. With over 85 percent of the labour force in informal jobs, Bangladesh needs job-centric and export-driven manufacturing growth to diversify its economy and create more formal employment.

A key to diversifying Bangladesh's export basket lies in replicating the success of the apparel industry.

Partnerships were crucial to the apparel sector's stellar success. In the late 1970s, a Bangladeshi apparel manufacturing company, Desh Garments, created a joint venture with the Republic of Korea's Daewoo Corporation, combining local cheap and trainable labour with its foreign counterpart's technological expertise and market access. More than one hundred Bangladeshi technical staff were trained at Daewoo's factory for six months, enabling the transfer of essential technical expertise and contributing to the development of the apparel sector. Some of these workers later became entrepreneurs.

To be a major player in chip manufacturing, the Indian conglomerate Tata is sending hundreds of staff overseas to its technical partner for training in semiconductor fabrication. Training and technology transfer occur most

efficiently and effectively when both parties in a partnership have a shared business interest. Partnerships—government-government, private-private, or public-private—are vital for sector development in developing economies.

For instance, Chile was historically known as a copper exporter. Its transformation into a global seafood exporter, thanks to the Japan-Chile Salmon Project, is an example of a successful partnership. This project transferred advanced aquaculture technologies and provided crucial market access, with public-private partnerships making the knowledge widely available.

To bring economic diversification to fruition, Bangladesh's government and development partners can focus on developing partnerships based on sound economics and honest intentions. This is a crucial element in the country's diversification efforts. Bangladesh's world-class non-governmental organisations can unite communities, disseminate technologies, and train the workforce. This is a unique advantage for Bangladesh which is not currently used in the economic diversification initiatives.

Governments and their development partners often work with many industries at once to address shared policy or regulatory challenges. While this broad approach has benefits, it can make it harder to scale up emerging industries. Focusing resources on a few key sectors, backed by a long-term

plan with clear goals, is usually more effective.

Development finance institutions can assist. They have experience in developing partnerships by managing geopolitical challenges, ensuring equitable returns, supporting public-private cooperation, and above all, supporting economic benefits. They should focus on one sector at a time, providing comprehensive support across the value chain to mobilise investments and achieve measurable export goals.

The country needs to diversify into new sectors and simultaneously strengthen the apparel industry through innovative products and access to new markets. With approximately five percent of global export share, Bangladesh's apparel industry continues to present growth opportunities. The country can diversify its economy by replicating the apparel industry's successful model of international partnerships, technical training, and targeted long-term planning.

Bangladesh's economic diversification has remained a goal rather than an outcome for decades. A focused approach built on transparent partnerships and targeted industrial development can convert these long-discussed possibilities into real progress. International partnerships, targeted training, and long-term planning offer a practical path to developing new industries and expanding the country's economic base.