

Refrain from partisan appointments

Govt must show it is true to its commitment to fight corruption

If manifestos are visions, the steps that a ruling party takes in its first weeks in government signal its mission and the direction it intends for the country. Therefore, it is crucial for the BNP, which formed the government two weeks ago with a large mandate through a credible election, to be mindful of its actions and assess if they align with its election manifesto, the 31-point programme, and the July charter commitments, as well as what Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said in his first address to the nation.

Good governance and measures to restructure "all constitutional, statutory and public institutions" to "reinstate transparency, accountability, and credibility that transcend parochial political lines" are an integral part of BNP's manifesto and 31-point programme. However, some of the recent decisions by the BNP government appear inconsistent with these pledges. The appointment of the new central bank governor is one: it raises concerns that political considerations may have influenced the choice since he was a member of BNP's election steering committee during the 13th general election.

As the country's key financial regulator, the central bank should have been headed by a non-partisan professional with solid experience in formulating monetary policy. Its autonomy and independence are more crucial now when the global economy stands at the brink of a major disruption because of the war in the Middle East. Sadly, the government's decision seems to lack foresight. In fact, the recent changes in another key institution send a similarly worrying signal. Last week, the chairman and two members of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) were allegedly asked to "step down voluntarily," with immediate effect. This is incomprehensible because the former ACC leadership took uncharacteristically bold steps to crack down on the nexus of oligarchs, politicians, and phantom corporations that were involved in complex financial laundering operations during Sheikh Hasina's regime.

There is also a lack of transparency in the way the above incidents unfolded. To fight corruption, the government's first priority should have been to keep these two key institutions, as well as other oversight bodies including the National Human Rights Commission and the Election Commission, depoliticised. As the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) recently pointed out, appointments to these institutions must be based on competence, not political consideration. Therefore, we urge the government to practise what they preached and ensure that appointments do not simply follow party preferences. Also, in line with TIB's recommendation, it should enact a new law to establish a truly independent police commission. These initial days of the government are also the time for BNP to set standards in the fight against corruption by taking hard decisions, rising above party interests, even if that requires retracting previous actions.

A school that has no toilet!

Govt must ensure proper sanitation facilities at all education institutions

It is difficult to imagine how students and teachers can spend their entire day in a school without access to even a basic toilet. Yet, this has been the reality at a government primary school in Habiganj for nearly two years. With around 180 students and four female teachers, Olipur Government Primary School in the district's Shayestaganj upazila has been operating without usable sanitation facilities on the campus, forcing children to seek access to the houses nearby when they need to. While there is a toilet at a nearby mosque, it is in a dilapidated condition and not usable. This has become a matter of embarrassment on a daily basis for the school's students and teachers.

The situation has gotten to the point where regular classes are getting disrupted, and attendance has reportedly declined as many students are reluctant to come to school. In a country where retaining children in primary education still remains a challenge, such a situation undermines years of effort to improve enrolment and attendance. The problem is even more serious for female students, for whom the absence of safe and private sanitation facilities create significant physical and psychological discomfort. Absence of a basic sanitation facility can severely hinder girls' education as many are compelled to miss school during menstruation due to stigma and inadequate infrastructure.

Reportedly, the construction of a wash block by the local public health engineering office began two years ago. However, it remains unfinished due to prolonged negligence by contractors. Such delays raise serious questions about oversight and accountability in public infrastructure projects, particularly when the beneficiaries are schoolchildren. That the relevant authorities have remained oblivious to this critical matter for so long is equally concerning. This is just one example of how the absence of basic sanitation facilities can hamper academic activities. Many schools across Bangladesh continue to lack clean and hygienic sanitation facilities, undermining a proper learning environment.

We, therefore, urge the authorities to complete the wash block at the school and make it fully functional without further delay. At the same time, they must investigate why construction was stalled for so long and hold those responsible to account. More importantly, this incident should prompt the authorities to review the conditions nationwide to ensure that all government schools have adequate and properly maintained sanitation facilities. Authorities must also ensure gender-friendly toilets that can improve attendance, comfort, and confidence of female students.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Attack on Alabama civil rights protesters

On this day in 1965, US state troopers used nightsticks and tear gas to attack American civil rights activists as they crossed a bridge in Selma, Alabama, during their attempted march to the state capital in Montgomery.

When our indifference breaks our children



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza
is vice-chancellor at the University of
Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

The posthumous Swadhinata Padak for Maherin Chowdhury, a teacher who died saving at least 20 students from the burning remains of Milestone School and College after it was hit by a fighter jet last year, brought back sad memories of losing children and teachers in a single tragic blow. Her heroism gave us hope in a world that remains oblivious to the pain and sufferings of children. Last week, we saw how a reckless attack by US-Israel killed 160 children in a school in Iran. These children had nothing to do with the war game or geopolitical interests of the grown-ups. Yet, they fell prey to our rivalry, greed, lust, ego, whim, and political machinations. We approach an apocalyptic future where, in the words of WB Yeats, "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned."

However, our reflection on helpless and hapless children seems to have a blind spot. Far from the headlines and battlefield smoke and rubble, there is an emotional battle that our children are waging daily. They suffer and choose harm's way as they fail to match the expectations of the adults or peers, as they feel misunderstood, underappreciated or ignored, and as they yearn for space to ventilate their anger or frustration or to love and be loved.

This harm is slow and invisible. They were made visible by a recent survey conducted by Aachol Foundation, a mental health awareness platform, which showed a spike in the number of student suicides in Bangladesh: 403 cases reported in 2025, up from 310 in 2024. The actual figure could be higher as there are many unreported incidents. But what these figures will not tell us is that, behind each number, there is an absent figure who has left a deep hole in the lives of the ones they have left behind.

The figures will not tell us of the blank stare of the parents with which they feel the empty room, the reading desk, or the seat at the dining table. The folded school uniform that will never be worn will keep on posing questions: why did we not see it coming? Why did we not listen to them when they reached out? The education-level distribution of



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

students who committed suicide presents sobering data. Out of the 403 reported incidents, 190 students are from school (47.4 percent), 92 from colleges (22.8 percent), 77 from universities (19.1 percent), and 44 from madrasa (10.7 percent). The adolescents and pre-teens are clearly among the most vulnerable groups.

The survey, based on media reports, identifies depression, emotional stress and resentment as the main causes. It's about time we identified the indifference and ignorance of grown-ups as one of the major contributing factors behind the failure to protect children's emotional health. Often, albeit unknowingly, we expose children to our own frustrations, anxieties and stresses. We try to distract them with gadgets and devices and thereby expose them to ideas foreign to them. We exert undue pressure to perform and excel in a competitive academic world. We expect them to live our dreams instead of nurturing their own. At school, they feel added peer pressure. Bullying, harassment,

insensitive teachers, beatings and public humiliations are common in many education institutions. Many do not have trained psychosocial counselling services or proper orientation to deal with young minds. Teachers, already overburdened with workload normally, work overtime to supplement their main income with second jobs or coaching. They perhaps

curated and perfected, or a perverted reality where the dark and primitive side of humanity is on full display. The algorithms are designed to capture the users' attention, which can eventually cause screen addiction. Children in a fragile state may not have the maturity to sift the imagined from the real. Their self-esteem is compromised, often leading to depression. The

do not have the headspace to deal with each student with the required personal care and attention. Since students share their time at both home and school, both institutions need proper orientation of mental health.

Losing around 30 students in a plane crash or 160 students in a missile attack is shocking. But losing 400-plus students through a slow process of death is no less tragic. Most of these deaths probably had an ordinary beginning. Grown-ups often say things in front of children, not even realising how they are impacting them. "Why don't you die?" is a common phrase that adults use to express their frustrations. But for a child, this may sound literal. In our culture, suicide is also presented as an emotional blackmail. "You should think of your family?" can act as a trigger for a troubled mind who might think the priority is being shifted from the individual to the rest.

Then there's the overexposure to social media, where our children enter a bubbled reality where everything is

other atrophy of early exposure to digital media is an unrealistic attitude towards love and intimacy, which adds confusion with a toll on their emotional health.

The use of narcotic substances is becoming normal among teens and young adults. Gateway drugs like tobacco and weed as well as hard synthetic drugs can impact the decision-making process of individuals. Consequently, many decisions are taken impulsively. Instead of investing in or engaging solutions, many young ones find death as an easy way out.

Emotional health is a complex and nuanced issue. It should be dealt with by trained professionals. All education institutions must come up with awareness campaigns for both parents and teachers. Losing 400 students to self-harm can never be a good sign for a country. This is a ravaging blow, more than an air crash or a missile attack. We must stop the system that kills our children slowly and softly from within.

We must collectively stop tolerating preventable deaths



Dr Sabbir Ahmad
is a researcher and expert in project delivery
and engineering. He can be reached at
sabbir@teece.org.

SABBIR AHMAD

On October 26, 2025, Abul Kalam Azad was walking through the Farmgate area of the capital when a 150kg bearing pad dislodged and fell from the overhead metro rail track. The massive component knocked Azad down and killed him instantly. About 30 minutes later, I walked on the same stretch of pavement after a routine check-up at the nearby Islamia Eye Hospital. Had my appointment been slightly more efficient, or had I skipped the post-check-up wait at the pharmacy, it could have been me under that bearing pad. In Dhaka, survival isn't a right guaranteed by the state; it is a game of chance where the odds are increasingly stacked against citizens.

The Farmgate tragedy reveals a landscape where systemic flaws and inefficiency built into the nation's operational framework have created an environment of constant encounters with death. We also apparently built a society that has mastered the art of looking away. The data from 2025 alone reads like a grim register of preventable catastrophes, yet we treat these events with a horrifyingly high tolerance and acceptance.

On July 21 last year, a military training jet malfunctioned and

plummeted into the Milestone School and College campus in Uttara. Thirty-six people were killed, 35 of them schoolchildren and teachers. Flight paths cutting directly over densely populated residential zones and schools are not due to a lack of space; it is due to a lack of accountability. Our inefficiency in zoning and safety planning turned a school into a crash site.

On October 14 of the same year, 17 people died in a chemical warehouse fire in the capital's Mirpur. They didn't die because the fire was unquenchable; they died because the emergency exits were padlocked from the outside—a choice made by warehouse owners who value inventory over human lives. Only two days later, another 16 perished in Chattogram EPZ. These industrial zones are touted as regulated, yet they operate with a culture of neglect.

If our infrastructure is a threat, the ground beneath is a ticking clock, too. On November 21, a leisurely Friday morning turned terrifying when a 5.7 magnitude earthquake shook the country. Ten people died that day, not due to the quake itself, but because our buildings are structurally compromised by either systemic negligence or corruption. Rajuk

continues to oversee a capital where almost all high-rises fail basic fire and seismic safety standards. When a building in Dhaka collapses during a tremor, it is more likely the result of negligence rather than an "act of God."

The state seems to have perfected a theatre of accountability designed to pacify the public until they inevitably forget or accept the tragedy as "fate."

As a society, we have developed a mental armour that allows us to witness horror yet turn around to our daily routines. Tolerance is what empowers a negligent authority. Our focus must shift to cultivating a citizenry that refuses to let the state bury its failures in a committee report.

The script appears the same every time: a disaster followed by a public and media outcry with numerous related discussions, talk shows, and newspaper articles. Then, the government announces a committee to "probe" the incident. Often, a sum of money is handed to grieving families as compensation. Within weeks or even a few days, public outrage subsides, the media moves on, and the committee fades into the background, or its report collects dust.

Since the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, many committees have been

launched. Their recommendations—mandatory fire exits, electrical overhauls, the relocation of chemical warehouses, and seismic retrofitting—remain largely untouched. In this country, safety is not a standard but a commodity to be negotiated. This culture of negligence is subsidised by people's desperation. Workers accept jobs in firetraps because the alternative is starvation. Families move into seismically unsound apartments because the system has failed to ensure safety standards.

We must also confront our own apathy. As a society, we have developed a mental armour that allows us to witness horror yet turn around to our daily routines. Tolerance is what empowers a negligent authority. Our focus must shift to cultivating a citizenry that refuses to let the state bury its failures in a committee report. Bangladesh's new leadership faces a fundamental choice: continue the ritual of "probing and paying" or dismantle the systemic rot. We need conscience and accountability in the form of criminal liability, independent oversight, transparency and regular national audits of major infrastructure.

Standing outside that eye hospital, watching the chaos that followed Azad's death, I realised that we are all living in a state of near misses with a profound, systemic disregard for human life. Instead of continuing to accept easily and forget quickly, we need to demand a system that values our lives. The cost of a functioning state is high, but the cost of the current culture of apathy is higher. We must overcome our collective will to accept the unacceptable.