The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Repair broken hospital inspection system

Six newborns' death at Ad-din, a test of our healthcare oversight

The death of six newborns in the same room at Ad-din Medical College Hospital in Dhaka, within a couple of hours on May 27, points to institutional failure. What the health minister found during a visit to the premises on Saturday evening was something close to a scandal. On the top floor of the medical college building was a bakery with two electric ovens. But no electrical engineer was present. Water had pooled in one area while waste was piled up in another. More troublingly, an unusual smell lingered inside the very post-operative room where the babies had stopped breathing.

Additionally, the post-operative room was located on the first floor of the hospital, while the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) was on the fifth. The DGHS later described this arrangement as "problematic." Yet, the distance existed long before Wednesday's tragedy, and nobody acted.

According to accounts of the night, a guardian complained at around 2:00 am that the post-operative room was too cold. The air conditioning was switched off for an hour. Around 4:00 am, one newborn's condition deteriorated, and the baby was transferred to the NICU, but was later returned to the post-operative room when its condition improved. By 6:00 am, a nurse found another baby lying motionless. As the condition of the remaining newborns rapidly worsened, all were rushed to the NICU. Within the next two to three hours, all six were dead.

An investigation is underway to determine the cause of the deaths, along with the source of the unusual smell detected in the post-operative room. The building will also be scrutinised, which, according to insiders, falls short of the standards expected of a healthcare facility. These are appropriate lines of inquiry. But the investigation must be equally rigorous in examining the human and regulatory failures that allowed such conditions to exist.

Ad-din Foundation, which runs the hospital in Moghbazar, is not a marginal institution struggling with limited resources. This is an organisation with resources, influence, and access. What this case exposes, therefore, is something larger than the failures of a single hospital. Over the past two decades, Bangladesh's private healthcare sector has expanded rapidly, absorbing patients that the public system could not accommodate. Yet, regulatory oversight has not kept pace. Licensing, accreditation, and routine inspections have often been inconsistent and weak. The government must do more than determine the immediate cause of death. They must fix a broken inspection system, examine the links between well-connected private hospital groups and their regulators, and ensure genuine accountability for the deaths of these infants.

Passenger services must improve

BR's income must not be the only goal of private sector involvement

The Bangladesh Railway's decision to lease out the operations of six more trains in its Eastern Zone to private companies could have been a welcome move had it significantly improved passenger service quality. It has been nearly three decades since the BR began involving the private sector to run some of its commercial activities. Through competitive bidding, private companies obtain the contract to sell tickets (at prices set by the BR) and check those on board. A portion of the proceeds is then returned to the railway authority.

According to the railway officials, this arrangement has improved ticket collection, which the BR staff were not able to manage properly due to severe manpower shortage. But the entire process of bidding and awarding the contracts for ticket collection and other services to a handful of private companies has raised questions in the past. Allegedly, during the Awami League regime, several companies under common ownership bribed ministers and unscrupulous BR officials to secure and retain four-year leases for more than a decade without any fresh bidding. In November 2024, the railways ministry cancelled the lease of 24 trains, allegedly for violating the conditions of the contracts.

We hope for a more transparent process under the new government. However, increasing the railway's revenue by outsourcing some services should not be the only goal of this endeavour, because in the past, such revenue increases have not been enough to prevent the organisation from incurring losses. According to a 2025 *Bonik Barta* report, repairs, maintenance, and welfare programmes consume much of the railway's operating margin. Without increasing its internal efficiency, the BR will achieve little and will enrich a few private interests by outsourcing on-board services, ticketing, cleaning, and passenger management.

Passenger rights activists have said if the government is investing crores in the BR, it should be capable of providing all the services it is expected to deliver to passengers without fail. On this point, we agree with them. The BR should not need a third party to perform these functions. While we are not opposed to private sector involvement in rail transport, such involvement must result in better services for passengers. A mere increase in BR's revenue is not sufficient justification for outsourcing train operations. Instead, the government should encourage genuine private sector investment. We urge it to review the draft Bangladesh Railway Bill, 2024, which would allow private companies to own locomotives and carriages rather than merely manage services—effectively doing BR's job for it.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Czech Republic passes 'dark sky' law

On this day in 2002, the Czech Republic approved the world's first national law aimed at limiting light pollution, and the legislation went into effect. The so-called "dark sky" law required outdoor lighting to be more efficient: fixtures should be shielded or directed downwards to prevent light from travelling towards the sky. Fines could be issued to both organisations and members of the public who disregarded the measures.

Not a verdict, but a possibility

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The rule of any government is difficult to judge within 100 days, but it is enough time to observe and learn about the instincts of the new leadership. One may observe whether a particular group of people is celebrating a victory or turning it in a certain direction. When discussing the newly formed government in Bangladesh, we may speak of both assurance and alarm. Assurance, since the administration has so far demonstrated initiative, confidence, and determination in addressing neglected issues. On the other hand, one should bear in mind that the country's problems are deep, systemic, and politically compromised, and so need more time to be fixed.

The new administration, making it to the office through the 13th parliamentary election on February 12 this year, had the unusual combination of pressure and opportunities. Bangladesh had been facing hard times due to political conflicts, social mistrust, and financial instability. Nevertheless, the election resulted in a victory that gave the BNP a solid mandate and extremely high expectations from society. People supported the party not just because of the electoral process but because they wanted to see normalcy, security, lower prices, jobs, safety, and respect for citizens.

From this perspective, one may observe another victory achieved by the BNP government—psychologically. After a long break during the transition period, Bangladesh returned to its constitutional government. It is crucial for the country as it faces constant alternation between political triumphalism and fear. Even the process of return to democracy should be perceived as a remarkable step forward. From this perspective, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has sought to demonstrate calmness, determination, and statecraft, rather than revenge, street rhetoric, and drama.

It goes without saying that the prime minister has demonstrated another side of himself. Over the years, he became one of the most controversial political figures in the country, trusted by his supporters while distrusted by the others. Moreover, he spent many years living in exile; thus, he faced difficulties returning to political life. However, the first 100 days showed a more humble leader than people were used to.

The prime minister has demonstrated patience and restraint in his public speeches. Diplomatic meetings revealed that he chose a milder attitude rather than harshness. Politics in Bangladesh is usually marked by loudness, confrontation, and aggression; the prime minister, however, decided to adopt humility. For a country exhausted by constant enmity, humility may also bring benefits.

A positive aspect of this government's strategy is that it chose a more sensible way to deal with the political opposition. As for policies, the government demonstrates its activity. Firstly, the focus has been on inflation, energy, employment and law enforcement, as expected by the people. Secondly, there are initiatives designed to assist farmers and poor citizens. Thirdly, this government understands that, to be successful, it must prove its ability to govern the country effectively.

In international relations, the BNP government seems to act reasonably as the country is unable to afford adventurous policies. Today, Bangladesh should find a way to maintain good relations with the neighbouring countries, major powers, donor countries, and regional players at once. So far, the government has succeeded in this matter.

However, the challenges that the BNP government is likely to face in the coming months are huge.

Today, the most difficult aspect of political life in Bangladesh is its culture. Ruling parties traditionally fall victim to patronage systems and overconfidence in their own loyalty, as well as the idea that a victory gives the right to dominate. Should the government make the same mistake, its popularity is likely to decline rapidly.

Another problem relates to the level of expectations from the government. As the ruling party has won the election, myths have emerged about its political return, resilience, and the country's correction. However, symbols should lead to actual change.

So, the following question arises: will the government manage to improve democratic institutions? Can they tolerate criticism? Is there any chance to fight corruption? Will they show professionalism despite political preferences?

These questions are crucial because their answer will determine this government's fate.

Nevertheless, some may agree that the new government has behaved well in its first 100 days. Compared to expectations, it seems much more mature, restrained, and reasonable.

It may be explained by either personal experience of suffering from politics or the understanding that the country has changed.

Bangladesh no longer wants endless confrontation. People want to live normally, with working institutions. Moreover, they want to hear the voice of reason.

One hundred days is far too short for a full assessment. But they are enough to judge its direction. The first 100 days do not yet offer a verdict. They offer something more important: a possibility.

FILE PHOTO: **REUTERS**

Bangladesh President Mohammed Shahabuddin administers the oath-taking ceremony of Tarique Rahman as the country's prime minister at the South Plaza of the parliament building in Dhaka, on February 17, 2026.

Our corporate sector needs a cultural reset

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Over the last three decades, Bangladesh's private sector has become one of the strongest pillars of the national economy. Industries such as ready-made garments, banking, telecommunications, logistics, pharmaceuticals, and information technology have transformed the country into one of South Asia's fastest-growing economies. Millions of people now depend on private-sector jobs for their livelihoods, and countless families rely on the stability of these professions.

However, behind this economic growth lies a reality that many professionals experience every day but hesitate to discuss publicly. The crisis in Bangladesh's corporate culture is not limited to low salaries or job insecurity alone. There are deeper issues in the workplace environment like excessive working hours, office politics, favoritism, lack of transparency, and other psychological pressures.

One of the most frustrating issues for job seekers is the lack of transparency. Many companies publish job circulars without mentioning salary ranges, benefits, or clear job responsibilities. Candidates often attend multiple interview rounds without knowing whether the offered salary matches expectations. Many also spend time and money travelling for interviews, only to receive no feedback afterwards. In some cases, positions are informally filled through internal references before the recruitment process begins.

This perception of "reference culture" has weakened trust in merit-based hiring. Many professionals believe that mid-level and senior-level recruitment is often influenced more by personal relationships and lobbying than by competence. Promotions and salary growth are also widely seen as dependent on loyalty to individuals rather than performance. As a result, many capable professionals feel discouraged and undervalued, and this also creates long-term inefficiency in organisational performance and talent retention.

Another major concern is working hours. In many organisations, employees are expected to remain available long after official hours. Late-night calls, extended meetings, and weekend work have become normal, especially in operational roles such as supply chain, sales, and administration. Many employees report being contacted even after midnight, while overtime compensation is often not provided. At the same time, companies may strictly deduct salary for minor delays, creating an imbalance that reduces motivation and fairness while gradually building frustration among employees.

However, some multinational companies demonstrate better practices by paying overtime fairly and respecting working hours. This shows that balanced and humane workplace systems are possible when organisations prioritise professionalism, structured policies, and employee well-being instead of only output.

Office politics is another growing issue. Many employees feel that honesty and straightforward communication are sometimes treated as weaknesses. Those who avoid internal lobbying or favouritism often face limited career growth opportunities. Many professionals also believe that organisational decisions are sometimes influenced by internal groups or informal networks rather than merit, which reduces trust, weakens teamwork, and discourages long-term loyalty.

Communication culture in some workplaces can also be a concern. In certain organisations, strict hierarchy discourages employees from sharing ideas, asking questions, or providing feedback. This limits creativity and creates a fear-based environment where obedience is valued more than innovation or open discussion.

Mental health has become an increasingly serious issue. Long hours, job insecurity, toxic competition, and constant pressure are affecting employees' psychological well-being. Many report stress affecting family life, sleep quality, and social relationships. Over time, such conditions reduce productivity, creativity, and long-term employee engagement, and also increase burnout and resignation rates across industries.

Leadership quality is another area that needs improvement. In some cases, promotions are based on loyalty rather than managerial skill or proven capability. This results in leaders who may lack communication ability, emotional intelligence, or strategic thinking. Such gaps often lead to unnecessary complexity in decision-making, delayed approvals, and inefficient work processes, which ultimately affect organisational performance and employee morale.

Despite these challenges, Bangladesh's private sector still has strong potential for growth. However, sustainable progress requires more than economic expansion; it requires ethical leadership, transparency, structured systems, and healthier workplace environments that respect human dignity as much as productivity.

Several reforms could significantly improve the situation—mandatory salary range disclosure in job advertisements, transparent recruitment and promotion systems, stronger enforcement of labour laws, fair overtime compensation, reduced workplace favouritism and political grouping, better work-life balance policies, leadership development and accountability training, and greater emphasis on mental health and employee well-being would collectively create a more transparent, fair, and supportive corporate environment.

Corporate culture directly influences national productivity, economic stability, and human development. A country cannot progress sustainably if its workforce remains overworked, undervalued, and mentally exhausted. Bangladesh's next stage of development must therefore focus not only on economic indicators but also on building fair, transparent, and humane workplaces. Open discussion of these issues is essential, not to weaken the private sector, but to strengthen its future.

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