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

A tragedy born of negligence

Hold those responsible for newborn deaths at Ad-din hospital to account

The findings of the DGHS probe into the deaths of six newborns at Ad-din Medical College Hospital in Moghbazar, Dhaka are quite distressing. According to the investigation, six healthy newborns born through C-section lost their lives not because of any unavoidable medical complication, but because those entrusted with their care failed. The probe found that the infants' deaths were caused by a chain of failures, including severe overcrowding in a poorly ventilated post-operative ward, several hours without air conditioner, absence of an on-duty physician, and serious negligence by nurses and the hospital staff. These findings point to a catastrophic breakdown of basic standards of care.

Reportedly, around 50 people were crammed into a room of just 900 square feet with no access to ventilation. Investigators believe that the air conditioner being switched off for four crucial hours at night may have caused oxygen levels to drop and carbon dioxide to accumulate in the enclosed space. More alarmingly, when the newborns' condition began to deteriorate, no doctor was called and no timely medical intervention was provided. Repeated appeals from guardians went unheeded while nurses delayed action. The probe further found that the hospital's infrastructure is unsuitable to operate as a 700-bed facility, while reports have also pointed to serious deficiencies in fire safety measures. If the building was fundamentally unfit to provide safe healthcare services, why was it allowed to continue to operate without being flagged by regulators?

Patient safety should be the foremost priority at any hospital. While the healthcare facility in question may have provided services at relatively lower cost, that can never justify any compromise on safety standards. Unfortunately, this is not the first time that serious questions have been raised about the standard of care and regulatory oversight in our healthcare system. Time and again, investigations into medical tragedies have revealed negligence, poor compliance with safety protocols, inadequate staffing, and weak supervision. Still, meaningful reforms have yet to take place.

The health minister has promised the "toughest action," while the DGHS has issued a show-cause notice asking why the hospital's licence should not be cancelled. We welcome these steps and demand that all those whose negligence and mismanagement contributed to the deaths of the newborns be held accountable through a transparent legal process. Equally important is a thorough review of the hospital's licence and operational standards. We saw during Covid how the government acted against non-compliant clinics and diagnostic centres. The relevant provisions of health services laws and regulations must be enforced in the same manner now. The authorities should also conduct comprehensive inspections of all private healthcare facilities to identify similar risks before another tragedy occurs. Most importantly, the health sector needs stronger regulatory oversight, routine safety audits, and effective enforcement mechanisms. No family should ever have to lose a child because a hospital failed to provide basic ventilation, supervision, or timely medical care.

Don't let history crumble

Letting Mathurapur Deul become another victim of neglect is unacceptable

It is disheartening to see a historically significant archaeological site like Mathurapur Deul slowly wasting away due to administrative neglect and a lack of political will to preserve historical sites. The almost 400-year-old structure, located in Faridpur's Madhukhali upazila, is widely regarded as a rare example of medieval temple architecture in Bangladesh. Such structures can often provide deep insights into a region's vibrant social, cultural and political history. Yet, government efforts to preserve them remain woefully inadequate. This raises an important question: do we not feel pride in our ancestry and a desire to learn from those who came before us?

Believed to have been built in the 17th century, the Deul is a unique piece of architecture, distinguished by its linear design, which was rare among structures from that time. The temple has 12 corners, another unusual feature for a structure from that period, which makes it look like a star when viewed from above. The outer wall of the temple is decorated vertically with beautiful terracotta paintings. The origin of who built the temple is shrouded in mystery, which makes its deterioration all the more tragic as we may never know for certain the true history behind it.

According to a recent report by this daily, parts of this historical structure have already collapsed, while the roots of a banyan tree growing on the monument have compromised its structural integrity, posing a risk to both locals and visitors. Recent rainfall has further widened existing cracks in the structure. There has even been an incident of a visitor pulling on a loose brick when taking photos that caused several bricks to crumble. This alone should have raised enough concern for the authorities to temporarily close off the site to visitors and begin urgent preservation work. However, no such efforts have materialised so far. If anything, concerns over the site's condition have been met with bureaucratic ambivalence.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated example of a historically significant site falling into disrepair. Several archaeological and heritage sites across the country continue to suffer from neglect, which is made worse by inadequate budgetary allocations and a lack of preservation efforts, regardless of whether the sites are listed heritage sites or covered by legal safeguards. We call upon the authorities to act with urgency to preserve all historical monuments incorporating knowledge from local and global sources. After all, these structures are more than just a grand mixture of lime, lead, and terracotta; they bear the testament to stories, identities, and traditions that have shaped us.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Israel invades Lebanon

On this day in 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and subsequently defeated the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Syrian armed forces, and assorted leftist Lebanese groups.

More time for reform doesn't mean more time for delay

Dr Mohammad Abdur Razzaque *is an economist and chairman at the Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID). He can be reached at m.a.razzaque@gmail.com.*

MOHAMMAD ABDUR RAZZAQUE

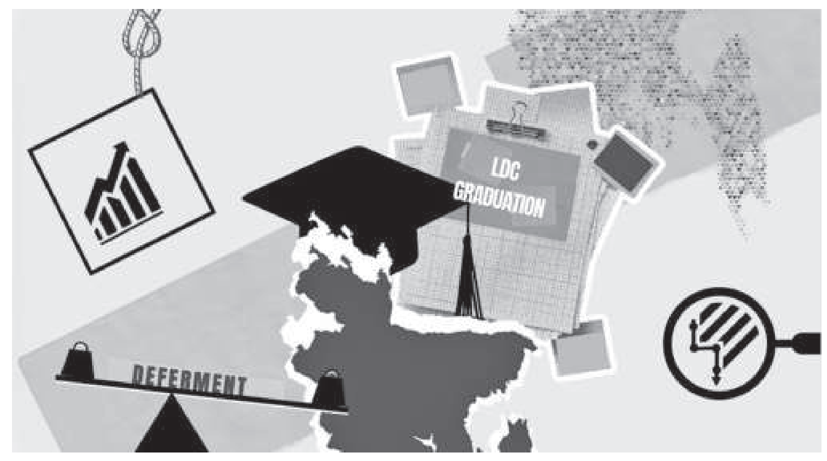
The United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP)'s recommendation to consider an extension of Bangladesh's preparatory period for LDC graduation is a highly significant development. It is also consistent with the findings of the Graduation Readiness Assessment earlier commissioned by UNOHRLLS at the interim government's request. Overall, these assessments strengthen the case that the extension request is a justified appeal to manage a complex transition under exceptional circumstances.

The CDP's assessment confirms two things. First, Bangladesh continues to meet the graduation criteria by a wide margin. Second, it has faced a combination of shocks including the lingering effects of the pandemic, global economic instability, geopolitical tensions, supply chain disruptions, and a major domestic political transition, all of which have constrained the implementation of critical preparatory measures. The recommendation, therefore, gives its request stronger legitimacy within the UN process.

The next step will be to secure support at the UNGA. Bangladesh should not assume that the CDP recommendation will automatically translate into approval. The government will need to engage with UN member-states, explain the evidence behind the request, demonstrate that the extension will be used for concrete reform actions, and reassure partners that the country remains fully committed to graduation.

At the same time, the country must navigate the process with care. In the current global environment, geopolitical considerations have become a serious development risk. While support should be sought from all relevant partners, the LDC graduation extension should not become a bargaining chip in ways that compel the country to make costly concessions to major powers. Therefore, diplomatic engagement should be broad-based, principled, and carefully coordinated, with the extension framed as a transition issue rather than one of geopolitical alignment.

The CDP recommendation gives Bangladesh a credible basis for arguing that additional time is warranted on developmental, institutional and transition management grounds. However, this extension must be treated as a time-bound window for accelerating long overdue reforms and strengthening graduation preparedness, not as a justification for delaying difficult policy decisions. Immediate priorities must include urgently securing post-graduation trading arrangements with the European Union, which absorbs nearly half of the country's exports and where its RMG sector will face intensifying competitive pressure in the aftermath of the EU's free trade agreements with Vietnam and India (signed in 2026). Failure to secure favourable market access could significantly erode Bangladesh's export competitiveness.



FILE VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

At the same time, it must strengthen export resilience by accelerating diversification beyond traditional products and markets, reducing the anti-export bias still embedded in domestic policies, enhancing productivity and compliance standards, and fast-tracking the implementation of key measures identified in the Smooth Transition Strategy (STS) for LDC graduation.

This is where foreign direct investment (FDI) becomes central. Bangladesh's limited progress in non-RMG exports shows that export diversification cannot be achieved through domestic production capacity alone. The missing link has been FDI. While the country has developed a large and competitive RMG sector, its non-RMG sectors remain weakly connected to global value chains, international buyers, quality control systems, design networks, and distribution channels. FDI can help close this gap by bringing technology, managerial capability, global sourcing relationships, and access to established markets.

Bangladesh must now treat FDI as a core instrument of export transformation. This requires a more focused investment strategy. Rather than spreading policy attention thinly across too many economic zones and sectors, a few selected special economic zones should be prioritised and made fully functional for export-oriented investors. These zones should offer reliable power and gas, customs facilitation, serviced land, duty-free input access, compliance infrastructure, labour skills support, and fast-track regulatory services.

If needed, generous but disciplined incentives should be offered to attract a small number of large multinational export manufacturers. Securing a few credible anchor investors can have a demonstration effect: once global firms begin producing successfully in Bangladesh, suppliers, logistics providers, buyers, and other investors are more likely to follow. As multinational firms seek to reduce excessive dependency on geopolitically risky production hubs, Bangladesh can position itself as a competitive, non-aligned production base for global exports.

Several actions that are long overdue require urgent attention. Foremost among them is fixing the Central Effluent Treatment Plant in Savar and ensuring environmental compliance in the leather sector. This would restore credibility and signal seriousness to investors. Other priorities include creating affordable export-support financing for man-made fibre-based apparel, improving product quality and compliance standards in agro-processing and other promising export sectors, reducing logistics and trade-related costs, and preparing for emerging regulatory requirements such as the EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

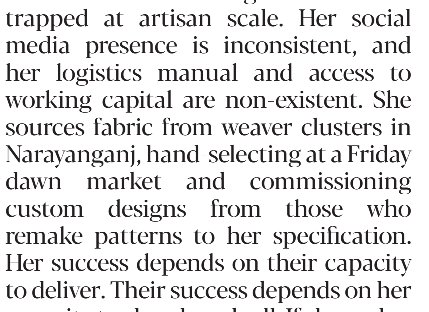
The issue of export incentives also deserves special consideration. While many broader policy reforms have stalled, the reduction of export incentives appears to have been placed on a much faster track. This sequencing is questionable. The resurgence of industrial policy globally as well as recent experience from export success in various economies suggest that carefully designed support for exports remains important for building supply-side capacity and strengthening competitiveness. With the possibility of an extension of the graduation timeline, Bangladesh must use any available policy space strategically. Export support should not be indiscriminate, but it should be targeted and linked to export expansion, diversification, technology upgrading, compliance, and new market entry.

More fundamentally, the success of any extended preparatory period will depend on domestic economic management. Tackling inflation, restoring macroeconomic stability, addressing banking sector weaknesses, and strengthening implementation capacity remain critical. Without progress in these areas, an extension may provide temporary relief but not a stronger transition.

The government's ongoing effort surrounding a new five-year strategic framework presents a timely opportunity to embed LDC graduation preparedness within a broader national development action plan. Rather than treating graduation-related measures as a parallel exercise, the plan should explicitly align its priorities, targets, and implementation mechanisms with the requirements of a successful transition.

In this regard, Bangladesh already possesses a valuable foundation in the STS, which contains a comprehensive set of actions covering macroeconomy, export competitiveness and diversification, productive capacity, institutional strengthening, and international partnerships. Many of these measures can be incorporated directly into the forthcoming development framework. The new strategic plan should, therefore, establish clear priorities, assign institutional responsibilities, define implementation timelines, and allocate the necessary resources to ensure that the most critical graduation-related reforms are carried out within the available window of opportunity.

The structural flaw in how we support entrepreneurs



Rahat Ahmed *is founder and managing partner of Anchorless Bangladesh.*

RAHAT AHMED

A woman in Mirpur sells jamdani bags of a quality that would hold their own on shelves in London or New York. She completed a World Bank-backed entrepreneurship programme to reach the next stage but remains trapped at artisan scale. Her social media presence is inconsistent, and her logistics manual and access to working capital are non-existent. She sources fabric from weaver clusters in Narayanganj, hand-selecting at a Friday dawn market and commissioning custom designs from those who remake patterns to her specification. Her success depends on their capacity to deliver. Their success depends on her capacity to absorb and sell. If she scales, their market scales with her. She and the producers behind her are the kind of non-tech entrepreneurs who are central to inclusive growth. They don't need another training programme. They need a buyer—and a system of intermediaries around that buyer—with the capital and infrastructure to formalise the demand running through them.

This is the structural condition of Bangladesh's informal economy. Millions of entrepreneurs sit outside formal markets not for lack of drive or product quality but because the support architecture has a foundational design flaw: it does not listen.

For decades, development institutions, bilateral donors, and government agencies have approached entrepreneur support through a template. They identify a beneficiary category—women, youth, artisans—allocate capital, and launch "entrepreneurship" programmes. The jamdani bag seller is one such beneficiary. The World Bank programme trained her but did not map the friction points in her supply chain, customer acquisition, or access to logistics. Neither did it connect her to the agencies, SMEs, or startups capable of solving those problems at scale, treating her as an endpoint rather than as a node in a supply chain whose upstream participants depend on her growth. The limitation is the absence of information. Development programmes and entrepreneurs operate in separate intelligence vacuums.

The result is waste at scale. Marketplaces multiply in categories where long-term profitability is improbable. Training programmes produce confident entrepreneurs pursuing ideas that are neither necessary nor financeable with the capital the market can realistically supply. Most programmes underestimate how difficult it is to access funding or working capital. Intermediaries capable of solving real problems never get funded, because no one has identified those problems through structured stakeholder dialogue.

The deeper inefficiency is resource allocation. Development capital should flow to entrepreneurs capable of becoming intermediaries themselves—tech-enabled SMEs sourcing from smaller producers, startups solving problems for hundreds of thousands of artisans at once. When such an entrepreneur scales into a functional e-commerce and logistics operation, every producer they buy from is lifted with them, because their revenue depends on localised supply. Yet, the startups and SMEs equipped to serve these entrepreneurs—logistics platforms, digital marketing agencies, working capital fintechs, B2B marketplaces—remain capital-starved. A grant to an artisan produces marginal improvement. The same capital deployed into a logistics startup serving artisans across three districts builds durable infrastructure that lifts hundreds of operators at once. Funding the growth of high-potential startups and SMEs is inclusive development, executed through the channel with the highest multiplier.

BRAC and H&M's Stitch for RMG programme, run once in 2021, began with listening. Stakeholders across the garment supply chain were interviewed, critical problems identified, and entrepreneurs capable of scaling solutions were funded. Agroshift emerged from that single cohort and today reaches a substantial network of farmers and rural supply chain participants. That a single cohort produced a venture-backed company serving the informal economy is strong evidence for the approach and a reminder that no donor, government agency, or development institution has replicated the programme since. The system did not learn from the model.

Bangladesh's informal economy can follow the same trajectory, but only if government agencies and development institutions invert their current approach. Support programmes must begin with structured stakeholder research to identify specific friction points: supply chain gaps, digital literacy barriers, logistics costs, and credit access. Then, the focus must shift to intermediaries: which startups, SMEs, or agencies can solve those problems at scale, and what funding, regulatory clarity, or customer acquisition support those solvers require.

Done at scale, the second-order effects compound, and non-tech entrepreneurs become the largest beneficiaries. Intermediaries that absorb informal output formalise the producers behind them, pulling households into recorded employment, taxable income, and access to credit. Tech-enabled SMEs and high-growth startups, properly capitalised, become the largest non-public source of jobs in the country. Bangladesh stops exporting its most ambitious operators to Dubai and Singapore and begins retaining the talent that builds the next generation of intermediaries.

The informal economy does not need to be dragged into formality. It needs intermediaries with the capital, infrastructure, and market access to make formality the more profitable option. That is the architecture worth building.

The Daily Star
Reg. No. DA 781

EDITOR & PUBLISHER: Mahfuz Anam
Printed by him on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd at Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon Industrial Area, editor@thedailystar.net

Registered & Head Offices: The Daily Star Centre
64-65 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Dhaka-1215
Phone: 09610222222

Newsroom: Fax- 58156306
reporting@thedailystar.net

Advertisement: 01711623910
advertisement@thedailystar.net
GPO Box: 3257

Subscription:
01711623906

thedailystar.net
bangla.thedailystar.net/