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

Ensure speedy trials for women, children

Monitoring cell urgently needed to ensure timely justice in violence cases

At a time when violence against women and children is on the rise in the country, failure to ensure speedy justice for the victims remains a serious concern. According to a report by this daily, as of June 30 this year, 1,16,392 cases were pending before 101 Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals across the country. Of these, 26,249 had remained unresolved for more than five years. Although the backlog has declined from 1,42,575 cases in September last year, the number of pending cases remains too high. Equally worrying is the failure to implement a High Court directive issued a decade ago to monitor whether tribunals are completing trials within the time limit set by law. What is the point of having laws and judicial directives if the institutions responsible for enforcing them fail to act?

Under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, trials must be completed within 180 days of the framing of charges. But this deadline is frequently missed. In a judgment delivered on December 5, 2016, the High Court directed the Supreme Court registrar general to establish a monitoring cell to oversee compliance with the deadline. The cell was supposed to include representatives from the home and law ministries and submit periodic reports to the Supreme Court and the government, enabling action against those responsible for unexplained delays. The law also requires tribunal judges, public prosecutors and investigating officers to submit separate reports explaining delays when trials cannot be completed within the stipulated period.

However, speeding up trials must not come at the cost of proper investigations. As we have previously argued in this column, faulty investigations and delays in obtaining forensic reports can undermine the pursuit of justice. Hence, the authorities must both procedural delays and the weaknesses that prevent cases from being properly investigated and prosecuted.

However, a decade later, the monitoring cell remains non-existent; leaving no mechanism to track compliance with the deadline. An official at the Supreme Court Registrar General's Office argued that the 180-day provision is directory rather than mandatory. Even so, this should not be an excuse for allowing cases to remain unresolved for years. Such delays deny survivors of rape and sexual violence, as well as the families of murder victims, timely justice and can undermine public confidence in the justice system.

However, speeding up trials must not come at the cost of proper investigations. As we have previously argued in this column, faulty investigations and delays in obtaining forensic reports can undermine the pursuit of justice. Hence, the authorities must both procedural delays and the weaknesses that prevent cases from being properly investigated and prosecuted. The aim should be to ensure both timely and fair trials.

We urge the Supreme Court administration to implement the High Court's 2016 directive without further delay. The monitoring cell must have clear responsibilities and a regular reporting mechanism to identify the causes of delays and hold responsible officials accountable. The authorities must also address other obstacles to timely trials, including difficulties in securing witnesses' attendance and obtaining forensic evidence. Setting deadlines alone will achieve little unless the institutions concerned have the capacity and commitment to meet them.

Dhaka needs a plan that's implementable

The capital of the country seems to have been built to fail

Socioeconomic inequality, waterlogging and frequent flooding, poor traffic coordination, broken public transport, and pollution of natural elements define Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. Amid all this, citizens struggle to secure basic necessities and essential services. Meanwhile, as experts pointed out at a recent discussion, undeterred population growth is putting pressure on housing and driving the expansion of informal settlements, while weak enforcement of urban plans has allowed unauthorised buildings to emerge even on designated water bodies.

What we face now in Dhaka can be traced back to poor or irresponsible planning over the past several decades. Only three and a half weeks ago, in regard to a writ petition submitted by a human rights and social development organisation, the High Court issued a ruling asking the chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha and other relevant authorities why the capital's Detailed Area Plan (DAP) has not been properly implemented and why the authorities' failure to do so should not be declared illegal. The plan for Dhaka itself has undergone a number of revisions since it was formulated in 2010. But it remains merely on paper while the city continues to rank as one of the world's least liveable cities.

Dhaka's rapid and unplanned urbanisation, alongside the lack of rural development, is to blame for this. Water bodies have been filled up with sand and concrete, and the city's boundaries are pushed further while lack of adequate government support for traditionally rural professions fuels in-migration. Even a small amount of rainfall causes its major roads to flood, directly impacting citizens' mobility, productivity and overall quality of life. With the effects of climate change being felt more strongly each year, heatwaves and non-seasonal rainfall hit Dhaka's concrete jungle hardest.

Every government over the last two decades has presented plans for Dhaka, but none have been implemented effectively, if at all. The current housing and public works minister's pledge to strengthen urban planning with a 10-year initiative (five years beyond his government's tenure), including regulations for buildings constructed without approved plans or in violation of approved designs, is commendable. But it will achieve little if the DAP remains unimplemented or the capital does not visibly improve in terms of liveability. It is high time the authorities realised that buildings are only one element of urbanisation, not the whole point of it.

The right to belong should not depend on moral policing

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND



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

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

A sportsman sporting his shorts in the field is no news. But it becomes one when he is stopped at a metro station for his attire on his way to the field. A woman clad in a veil in a university classroom of a Muslim country is no news. But it becomes one when allegations are raised that a teacher asked her to change seats out of the supposed fear that she might be a terrorist. Three adult women travelling to Nepal with valid travel documents is not newsworthy. But it becomes one when they are barred from boarding the plane because they are not married. Three incidents involving public spots—a metro station, a classroom, an international airport—became newsworthy when public accessibility to physical space became socially conditional. Entry depends on looking respectable, harmless or appropriately modern. Ironically, this "normative" look depends on the observer or onlooker; their judgement about clothing carries the power to restrict another person's movement, dignity or participation.

The idea of dressing for public participation to comply with institutional norms made me reflect on its complexities. A strictly religious family may demand wearing a hijab as a sign of modesty, and then the same conspicuous modesty may be treated as threatening in a different setting. The person has not changed. The attire has not changed. Simply by moving from one location to another, the interpretation of the dressed individual has changed. Individuals are within their rights to dress how they want. But such dressing is connected to practices, commitments and circumstances. We should not simply assume that freedom must take a particular visual form.

The allegations against the university teacher were raised by the students and were yet to be independently verified as of this writing. If found true, then the teacher's suspicion is circumstantial without any immediate evidence. Amid protests, the academic responsibilities of the teacher concerned were withdrawn. Hopefully, she will get a chance to tell her side of the story to make us understand why the situation nearly paralysed DU's English department.

The metro station incident also sparked controversies. Many men boarded trains in shorts to protest the authority's moral policing. But the height of such policing was evident when immigration officers questioned the clothing, finances and marital status of the Nepal-bound women. They contacted their parents and one woman's university dean and prevented their departure. Their complaint has now become the subject of a High Court order. These incidents, albeit different in terms of setting and seriousness, invite an uncomfortable question: how does someone's judgement about another person's appearance become the authority to delay, exclude or humiliate them? I wish I had a reliable sartorial solution. Why should an individual's choice of outfits have to conform to the expectations of others?



VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

I have talked to many students about their clothing choices. The reality is far from what it seems. Female students don't always wear hijabs out of religious convictions. In some cases, they may wear them to protect themselves from the male gaze. Some women may wear hijabs to avoid receiving judgemental looks. Some may not have adequate changes of clothes or may feel pressured to look a certain way. Donning the veil might be a way, for some, to hide all these concerns.

Here, the question is about belonging. Public space is shaped by expectations about who belongs there, for what purpose, and under whose supervision. A public space may be open to all, but its gatekeepers may make some visitors feel unwelcome. A student wearing a veil may feel her attire is the only reason her parents will allow her to pursue higher education. Another woman can pursue the same mission while choosing to wear something completely different. We need to respect the choices of both these women. Clothes should not necessarily be the ready-made marker of respectability. The situation becomes more nuanced when a woman engages in leisure activities outside of work or education. Work or study may supply an explanation that leisure apparently cannot. We have seen several instances of harassment women were subjected to because they were "guilty" of wearing Western clothes. Why should women have to explain what they wear in a city they inhabit?

One of the women who were barred from travelling to Nepal was reportedly asked how she could travel abroad when her father was a farmer. If true, that remark would reveal an assumption about who is entitled to aspiration. Some travellers are recognised immediately as tourists; others must explain how they acquired the means to become one. Is it acceptable for an "upper-class" woman to participate in a beauty pageant, while a farmer's daughter is deemed unacceptable for merely visiting a foreign country? The male athlete's experience reminds us that men's bodies are also regulated.

It is time we tried to understand the mindset of the social force that uses its "affective economies" to circulate feelings around signs and bodies to brand particular people as appearing to embody danger. Western outfits can be feared as a virus affecting patriarchal and religious morale. Similarly, conservative attire can be feared as a sign of enslavement to patriarchy and ideological bondage, thereby throttling individual freedom. For a society to progress, we need to make our citizens responsible enough so that they control and examine their feelings before acting upon them. The question of freedom cannot be answered in the name of protectionism. We should ask whether an intervention enables participation or makes withdrawal the price of security.

As a university leader, I consider the classroom dimension especially troubling. Education should cultivate the ability to encounter differences without immediately converting it into a verdict. That responsibility applies to teachers, students and administrators alike. Protecting a complainant and hearing the person accused are both necessary to a credible inquiry. The sensible thing to do is to make the rules of the place transparent and accessible. Private individuals sharing public spaces must respect the space they are in. But their choices should not be curated by a selected few who assume moral authority to craft a preferred image of respectability or modernity.

The real solution to our garbage problem lies in governance



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ABDULLAH A DEWAN

Bangladesh's urban garbage problem has been addressed by many. The problem has become so dire and persistent that even foreign diplomats have felt compelled to comment. Denmark's ambassador, Christian Brix Møller, and Maria Stein Knudsen, in an article published on September 29, 2025, appropriately highlighted technology, storage, public awareness and international cooperation in addressing waste and food loss. The complementary issue is whether Bangladesh has the institutional and incentive structure needed to make such measures work. That is where the problem becomes a matrix: outcomes depend on how the elements interact. A central principle of systems thinking is that improvements in one part of a system may achieve little if weaknesses elsewhere continue to undermine its overall performance.

Waste management begins before the garbage truck arrives. Households decide whether waste is separated. Restaurants and markets decide how food waste is handled. Manufacturers determine how much packaging enters the system. Municipal authorities oversee collection, contractors influence where collected waste ends up, informal pickers recover recyclables, and recycling firms depend on receiving commercially usable material.

Mixed waste makes recycling difficult. Irregular collection encourages dumping in open spaces and drains. Weak recycling markets leave separation unrewarded, while minimal producer responsibility allows hard-to-recycle packaging to proliferate. Contractors paid without performance standards can absorb higher municipal spending without producing cleaner streets.

Dhaka's two city corporations account for about 6,500 tonnes of solid waste daily, roughly 75 percent organic and high in moisture. Community collectors transport it by rickshaw vans to secondary transfer stations, and hundreds of trucks carry it to the landfills at Aminbazar and Matuail. Official estimates of waste generation and collection vary considerably, making it difficult to assess the system's performance and hold those responsible accountable. Informal pickers recover recyclables along the way, largely unrecorded and unprotected.

Technology matters, particularly because Bangladesh loses food during production, transportation and storage. But a refrigerated supply chain requires reliable electricity, financing, maintenance, trained operators and commercial scale. Digital platforms work only if producers and buyers have incentives to use them and the infrastructure to complete transactions. Standards require monitoring and enforcement.

International partners can provide knowledge, equipment and technical assistance. Bangladesh must supply the institutional environment where these can function; otherwise, it imports the visible part of a foreign system while leaving behind the institutions that made it succeed.

Waste must therefore be examined across multiple dimensions: household behaviour, collection, municipal finance, regulation, producer responsibility, recycling markets, technology, informal labour and enforcement. Plastic discarded on the streets enters drains; blocked drains contribute to waterlogging, damaging roads and disrupting transportation. Accumulated waste and stagnant water also create conditions favourable to mosquito breeding, adding to public health risks.

Food waste follows the same pattern. Losses at farms and markets reduce farmers' incomes. Inadequate storage increases spoilage, shrinks effective supply and may push up prices. Food that has consumed land, water, labour, transportation and energy is discarded before providing nutrition. Its economic cost extends well beyond its market value.

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Bangladesh should resist the search for one dominant solution. Awareness cannot substitute for reliable collection, collection without segregation limits recycling, and recycling cannot be commercially sustainable without markets for recovered materials.

Technology attracts policymakers because it is visible: waste-to-energy plants can be inaugurated and smart bins photographed, while institutional reform is less visible and slower. However, a sophisticated waste-to-energy facility cannot compensate for unsuitable waste composition or weak contract management, particularly where waste is overwhelmingly wet and organic. Sensors accomplish little if overflowing bins are reported electronically, but collection remains irregular.

Before adopting any technology, Bangladesh should ask what conditions must exist for it to work. That shifts the focus from procurement to performance. Officials usually count the plants built; the better measure is streets that stay clean month after month.

Bangladesh needs a waste management system that fixes responsibility across the entire chain. Households and businesses need practical source-segregation arrangements. Municipalities need measurable collection and cleanliness standards, with contractor payments tied to performance. Producers should gradually assume greater responsibility for packaging and hard-to-dispose products.

Informal waste workers, who already perform much of the country's recycling, should be brought into safer and more productive arrangements. Formal recognition would allow their contribution to be counted, supported and protected.

Financing, service obligations and accountability must move together. Citizens cannot reasonably demand services comparable to wealthier countries without adequate municipal capacity. Spending without accountability will not solve the problem either. Governance must establish who is responsible, how performance is measured, and how the system is financed. Technology should then be selected to serve that system, rather than substitute for it.

Cleaner cities will not come from another appeal not to litter, smarter equipment or a new project. They will come when every participant knows what must be done, who pays, who benefits from doing it properly, and who is accountable when the system fails.

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