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SARS epidemic and lessons to learn

Epidemic of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is raging; it seems to be far from being over. Though much is already known of its causative agent (a corona virus), its symptoms, possible mode of spread, and rate of observed fatality (deaths) so far, much also is yet to be determined. There is

elusive thorough mutation (changing its structure) characteristic of some other viruses. Even though the virus is known, a preventive vaccine may be years away.

Now about the lessons. At this stage of our knowledge, few lessons are becoming clear. SARS con-

involved, sharing all valid information, coordinate control steps), and develop evidence based treatment guidelines and standards, and finally, disseminate knowledge and information to the health workers, public, and the media to arise awareness and state of alertness.

In Bangladesh the public health resources are relatively limited and public awareness and capacity for individual action may not be high. Given our limited resources, the SARS lessons could be a stimulus to test the strengths and weaknesses of present epidemiological surveillance. More and following that, it is an opportunity to raise the baseline capacity of epidemic intelligence not merely for SARS but for overall prevention and control of any epidemic outbreak of existing communicable disease of high public health significance (malaria for example).

Above all, though there is a temptation to publicise and take some highly visible and drastic steps when an international epidemic like SARS occur, the best practice to follow would be to avoid one time efforts but preferentially put in place sustainable improvements in surveillance, containment, prompt co-ordinated exchange of valid intelligence and collect internationally accepted best practice solutions.

Dr. Zakir Husain
Dhaka



now more evidence to suggest that SARS spreads mainly through droplet aerosol (in confined space) and through close contact. SARS is likely more fatal (likely to kill) in the elderly; the virus is identified but is

tainment, in the absence of specific treatment, rests on: search and find, contain (confinement, quarantine, protective barrier), communicate and co-ordinate communication networking of agencies

"Launch capsizes and people's protest"

I am as surprised as Mithun (May 15) by the lack of enthusiasm amongst us to solve our own problem and protest our malpractice, corruption which is eating the core of Bangladesh.

Instead we go out to burn and destroy properties for external events. We do not think of the consequences of our action. I am of the firm opinion that these activities are not spontaneous - but orchestrated for political gain. We, as citizens of Bangladesh should know what is good for us and what is bad. The hot-headed actions of wanton destruction will affect our economy, our export and will hurt us most, not America.

We should be careful not to be a pawn of political interests.

Alamgir Khan
UK

Of crimes and criminals in uniform

It was indeed not a good day on May 15, 2003 for those who woke up to read the headlines of *The Daily Star*. The major news item was Sutrapur double murder in which 16 were sentenced to gal-lows. There is a serious lack of investigative journalism in the country otherwise people would have learned that the gruesome murder could have been avoided had the Sutrapur PS acted at the time upon being informed of the abduction of the murdered boys.

Why the then OC of Sutrapur PS and the SI who was sent to investigate upon the complaint filed by the victims' family were not on the dock? I personally would think that the crimes of these police officials were more grievous than the crime that was perpetrated. First, they did not act to save the victims and secondly by doing nothing they became accessories to the murder. So, the justice remains incomplete until the accessories are also sentenced for their crimes.

This is where the tragedy lies for Bangladesh, the real facilitators of crimes are never punished. We read a huge number of reports on police crime but never see justice done to those police officials who commit crimes rather they get transferred, perhaps a transfer to a place of choice!

So, how can we expect a diminishing rate of crimes until some real punishment is handed down instead of this "transfer" business? For law enforcing agencies, the punishment for perversion should be nothing less than immediate termination and exemplary punishment.

Khandaker R Zaman
Dhaka

"A diplomat's letter"

HE Mr. David Carter (May 7) justifies the latest Iraqi war referring to resolutions SCRI441, but it is not a clear-cut approval of the UNSC to

go for war unilaterally by only two countries ignoring views of other countries as well as their people. Is there any scope of saying that Saddam or Saddam's government is illegal by any international law? It is the people of Iraq who will decide on that matter. Is here any legitimacy when the Anglo-American forces fail to recover any mass-destruction weapons so far? Now it is obvious that a powerful country may invade any country at any time on the pretext that "one of my thieves is hiding in your country and I've come to arrest him and as you are denying his presence, Mr. Govt., you are illegal!"

Mr. Carter denounces Saddam's brutality and his long span of ruthless rule as well as his holding or hiding of illegal mass-destruction weapons. Will Mr. Carter be humble enough to justify the position of Israel who has been

It is more appropriate to opine, what is done erroneously correct it immediately and make a fair judgement on that.

Another thing is- USA and UK are not appointed as the police of international community in any way. To many, Saddam is still the President of Iraq and he is not a war criminal but Mr. Bush and Blair are.

Monju
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

Killing of DB inspectors

After reading different newspaper reports, it appears that the DB team of eight persons including a good number of junior and senior officers have been there at the hotel just to get their share from the drug traffickers and traders. The follow-

ing three clues are good enough to try these DB men and to unearth the whole gangs in drug operation:

1. Why did the DB team include so many officers?

2. Why were they inside the hotel room?

3. Why wasn't the controlling officer unaware of the operation?

Drug trafficking and selling is a serious crime as it cripples the future generation and involvement of police in it is more serious. The government must take quick and effective action regarding this

incident. The punishment for crime committed by any law enforcing or crime-preventing organisation should be doubled as enacted in many countries to control such crimes. So, we want to see an investigation into this matter by a fourth organisation-- DFI and a fact-finding report submitted by a judge of the High Court.

Nazmul Islam Khan
Lansdale, PA, USA

Fiscal irresponsibility

A very crucial issue has been raised that is being almost ignored by the press. This relates to the floating of our national currency. What this means is that instead of the national bank Bangladesh Bank deciding what the value of our currency is with relation to the dollar, it will be up to the international currency traders to decide. Now the argument that this will have a very salutary effect on our exports is criminally fallacious. It is very apparent that our bankers and merchants are misleading their fellow citizens as to the real reasons behind this step. When the currency is floated on the international market, the value of the taka will drop like a stone.

The two main reasons for this are, firstly, we have a huge trade imbalance considering both formal and black-market international trade and, second, the sheer incompetence of our financial houses. The latter is important because whereas all countries have financial experts trained to stop the free-fall of currency, we do not.

Now let me give you the real reasons for the floating of our currency. The one thing that is true is that floating the currency and the massive devaluation that will follow will lower very greatly the price of labour and, possibly, also land. What this means is that the people with dollars in their hands now can vastly reduce, in dollar terms, the cost of production and the cost of investment into expansion. Thus this greatly enhances their profit margins and not that of their poor and middle-class workers. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. Another important reason is that with an increase in the value of the dollar, many merchants will have the excuse to raise prices by a significant margin even above that which has resulted from the devaluation of the taka.

Ahsanur Rahim
Dhaka

Bomb blasts in Saudi Arabia

It is of great interest to read *The Daily Star* and find no comments from other readers on this dreadful event. It seems that when the Western country people die, there is no sentiment. I remember seeing the many letters, most of them meaningless babble, accusing the allies of horrendous crimes during the Afghan and Iraq campaigns.

Of course, when Americans and British people die, nothing is written. What a shame! Who are the hypocrites now?

S. Khan
USA

The music of war is on

Even the euphoria of 'winning' the war in the region has not started waning, terrorist attack on US interest has jolted the world. This time the venue is the KSA capital

recent resignation of British Cabinet Minister (Clare Short) only further confirms the ongoing deceit of Bush-Blair team, as the contracts "awarded" to the US multinationals without rival bids are clear examples of theft of Iraq's oil resources. Hence a response from the Muslim/Arab population no matter how is perfectly moral and justified, since all civilisations accept the legitimate right of defending ones land from illegal occupation and theft of its own resources by foreign forces. Therefore given the facts on the grounds we must distinguish between legitimate just retaliation and "terrorism".

M. U. Chowdhury
Dhaka

Bothering about the budget (2003-2004)

Of late, it appears that our Finance Minister is busy with pre-budget meetings with different trading associations, chamber bodies including FBCCI etc. Obviously, listening to the leading industrialists and business elite have almost been a tradition before shaping the budget or doing homework for the same. The tradition by itself cannot be termed as pointless, but has the Finance Ministry ever come out with a correct statistics as to whether these trade bodies also include those who had usurped millions from the exchequer? Would the Finance Secretary answer as to what steps have so far been taken by his Ministry to realise over Tk. 5000 crores from the said bank defaulters? If the national budget fails to address this national question, the entire budget would be no better than a futile exercise. Well, it may turn out to be a so-called elite's budget, never a national one.

However, if the Minister really bothers to present a viable budget to the nation, he may find it worthwhile to listen to the men and women of remote villages who are working in the fields and cottages and are struggling day after day to repay the sky-high interests on loans from the so-called "NGOs" or other money-lenders. These are the people who are actually running the wheels of our economy. A budget cannot be fruitful if it fails to address the silent moans of these feeble millions.

The minister may also get meaningful information from the broad spectrum of people, namely, different professionals like the agriculturists, engineers, physicians/surgeons, advocates, journalists, economists, small traders, major employees' association of government and non-government bodies and so on. It is these people who have much wider stakes in the budget than any other groups or bodies.

Hafeezul Alam
Dhaka

This is just retaliation and not terrorism

Terrorism is universally understood to be acts of violence perpetrated against civilians or non-combatants, the recent attacks upon the civilian population in Iraq and Palestine are the most appropriate examples of the highest form of terrorism, emanating from an organised military force as opposed to the retaliatory actions of disgruntled groups or individuals. If civilian casualties is the distinguishing factor, then why is it that when B52s, Cluster Bombs, cruise missiles used on urban population, and including the recent shooting of children in Iraq and Palestine are somehow categorised as anything else but terrorism? Is "terrorism" then a matter of using certain kinds of weapons, well what is more lethal and indis-

cent resignation of British Cabinet Minister (Clare Short) only further confirms the ongoing deceit of Bush-Blair team, as the contracts "awarded" to the US multinationals without rival bids are clear examples of theft of Iraq's oil resources. Hence a response from the Muslim/Arab population no matter how is perfectly moral and justified, since all civilisations accept the legitimate right of defending ones land from illegal occupation and theft of its own resources by foreign forces. Therefore given the facts on the grounds we must distinguish between legitimate just retaliation and "terrorism".

Yamin Zakaria
UK, London

"What is done is done, lets move on". Really?

God knows how many times I have read this insulting and ignorant phrase. This universal phrase is used and abused by the guilty to cover up their dirt and give false impression that they intend to make a fresh start. When people point to all the dirty weapons dealing, political interference, senseless killing of Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, we are being told "What is done is done, lets move on".

Well, I couldn't agree more. Let's do exactly that. And on that note, can we forget Bin Laden, Saddam and all the other hoodlums and stop bombing innocent Muslims who have nothing to do with them? Can we forget all the bloodshed of Mid East, end occupation and give the Palestinians their home back? Of course not! If the Muslims are killed, their security is threatened and their land looted, then let's just forget all that. But, if "our" people are killed and if "our" security is threatened, then we can't forget. We have to "go and get em"!

One of the biggest mistakes the Muslims have been making is in fact, they have been forgetting too much for too long. There are still a lot of Muslim countries run by the so-called "leaders" who forgot who their true friends are. They collude with their enemies and openly boast "oh no, we have a very friendly relationship"! Really? They forget all the humiliations and lies. They have spectacularly managed to forget their culture, their history and even the teachings of their parents. They have also forgotten their wealth and resources. Because if they truly understood the values of God-given resources they have, they would never have provided their countries as launch pads to the murderers of their people. They wouldn't have stood idle while people are busy looting their countries.

It is funny that people still want us to forget more! Is there anything left to forget?

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

Teledensity in Bangladesh

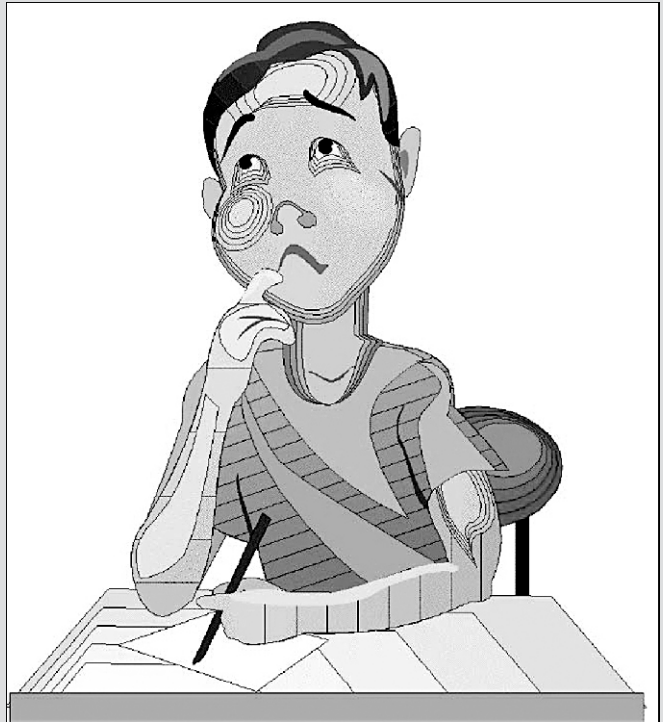
I write in response to an article published on May 18 "Bangladesh has world's lowest teledensity: ITU", which I found of great interest.

In 2001, I was in Bangladesh where I prepared an "Initial Market Assessment" for the former Government's plans to procure a Telecommunications Satellite to assist in a dramatic increase in

Exam hazards

When I gave my O level exams five years ago I remember walking down the rather narrow ally of the British Council in Fuller Road feeling most nervous because I did not have my parents nearby to tell me that 'it is just an exam'. Five years later, when my sister is appearing for hers, I see a big change. The British Council is not accommodating the exams; rather they are being held at the most inconvenient places. Although exams have been previously held in NSU, IBA, ICMA Auditorium side by side with the British Council, the new venues like AIUB, HURDCO International School, etc are most discommodious.

I accompanied my sister to her exam the other day, and the scenario was a total mess. At nightfall, around 400 students were appearing for their English Paper because the schedule was shifted for yet another unnecessary hartal. HURDCO International School situated in Baridhara seemed to be at the far end of the world to us from Dhanmondi. Passing through most unbearable jams with the most inefficient sergeants placed meaninglessly to control the traffic; there was more to agonise me. Parents accompanying their children crowded round the notice board where all the candidate numbers and room numbers were given. Latecomers successfully failed to check theirs, and those who were standing near the boards would not move an inch from their rather secured position. I almost fought to let my panic struck sister have a decent view of her room number. That finished, we stood at one corner patiently waiting for the gates to open.



Worried about exam

There was no discipline as to where would candidates or their parents wait. Worse, there was no proper lighting and it was most difficult for a four-eyed person like me to search in the dark. Once the exam was over, coming out of the place was like getting out of hell because it was 10:30 and the road was fully jammed.

My question is to the British Council authorities that claim to take full responsibility of the exams. Could you not select some better venues if it is still not safe to sit in the British Council? If accommodations are improper, a candidate cannot be expected to perform his/her best. Moreover, don't you have any responsibility towards all the guardians who rush to the exam halls with their children?

Arani Siddiqi
IBA, DUS

ged governments to recognise basic telecom facility as a "human right".

It's important to note that even if Bangladesh were to own and operate its own telecommunication satellite or have access to an underwater fibre optic cable connecting it to the rest of the world, this would have little effect on improving national communications infrastructure since the network is totally congested and is in immediate need of serious and concerted investment.

I do hope that the present government takes heed of this urgent necessity.

Abdul M. Ismail
Mossley Hill, Liverpool, UK

"Mobile phones"

This is in reference to the curious letter "Mobile phones" from Ms Rahman (May 17). Interestingly, the leading mobile company, in their ad of the very same day (my letter went to *The Daily Star* before that), gave note for "connection" per "Mobile to Mobile" which was after a long time and after they had dropped it in many ads in-between. Another coincidence-- the 13th May DS Lifestyle has coverage feature titled "the hell of cell". But, Ms Rahman says, "Mr CNR is framing charges ... many losing concern ... he is simply not bothered about those" while I feel sorry for those genuinely losing concerns, I can't accept profiteering by those who hold the common people hostage.

I do try to keep abreast of the "achievements" of this country. But, I'm sorry to say much of our progress is unbalanced. We simply didn't see development of land-lines which was our prime necessity. These 10,00,000 mobile subscribers aren't foolish; they were simply helpless. I know of people who "opted" for a mobile and kept them on tables as home-phones (in places such as Uttara). Some of them had to buy in pairs when land-line connectivity was exhausted and only "Mobile to Mobile" were available.

Lastly I quote from 17th May DS Business page: "Against the backdrop of huge unmet and growing demand, the telecom regulator ... for installation of land phones ... BTB recognises that the underlying demand level is significantly higher and the waiting time for a phone can be up to 13 years (!) ... installation fee- Tk. 10,000 ... one of the highest in the world, which works as a mechanism of controlling demand (!) ... current unsatis-

fied demand for fixed telephones is likely to continue to grow ...".

CNR
Chittagong

Pride cometh before the fall

I am not a supporter of any particular political party. However I am an admirer of our honourable Finance Minister for his shoot-from-the-hip style when it comes to criticising various functions of our government.

However, I am amazed by two things that have come up in the news regarding him. The first was the dismissal of the fact that BTB is a thoroughly incompetent and corrupt organisation. The second is the program to bring ALL professionals under taxation. Is someone trying to tell me that there are many 'professionals' who do not pay income tax already?

The problem with reforming the taxation system is that the reforms have to be actually implemented. What happens is that the people who would actually spend the money on local goods and services get the short-end of the stick. Their disposable income dwindles by a significant degree due to increased taxation. Those who are already rich and do not pay much taxes will benefit even more. The latter is possible because of massive corruption. The more revenue the government gathers, the more it wants to spend on public projects. The latter is done with every good intention.

However, due to the pervasive corruption, what it really means is that more money winds up in the pockets of those particular individuals who already benefit from embezzlement of public funds. Thus they get richer. Of course these people have no real intention of using this money to invest in Bangladesh or to buy local goods. The whole concept may be well intentioned but I have no doubt the results will end up hurting more than it will heal the financial crisis.

Regarding BTB, I don't think I need to comment. We all know what BTB is and do, even if our Finance Minister doesn't.

Ahsan, Dhaka



Our nation, our history

criminate than Daisy Cutters, Cluster Bombs, JDAMS, or "tactical" nuclear weapons dropped in Baghdad or Kabul?

Yet many continue to accept and apply the label of "terrorism" in an inconsistent manner, i.e. only when Western interests have been targeted. Even if there were no civilian casualties in Iraq and Palestine recently, one thing is very clear, US, British and Israeli forces are occupying Arab/Muslims lands; they have been doing this for the last two hundred years. The

teledensity. During the course of this study, I read one research paper which stated that "telecommunications is referred to as both an industry and an infrastructure, which helps other infrastructure to grow", which in my view epitomises the definition of the benefit of a modern telecommunication network. In my report, I pointed out that the lack of low cost and reliable communications has been a major deterrent in encouraging foreign investors to establish their business in Bangladesh. The ITU stated some time ago that it

violating more resolutions of UN since 1948, holding illegally invaded lands and killing peoples of Palestine and openly continuing heinous activities of intelligence (MOSAD) all over the world and holding weapons of mass-destruction with no doubt. If UK-USA declare war against Iraq then why not on Israel who is more a criminal than Iraq and Saddam as well.

"What is done is done" by saying this Mr. Carter cannot sanctify the illegal activities of his country.

ing three clues are good enough to try these DB men and to unearth the whole gangs in drug operation:

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Riyadh. Undoubtedly the target was the US citizens. After the blast the US did not delay to find a correlation with Al-Qaeda. Again, this is without any evidence. One can easily question the competence of highly paid intelligence network of the US which gave fake documents of non-conventional arms of mass destruction to the UN arms inspectors as Mr. Hans Blix told afterwards.

This time the KSA is under threat which has been shifted from Syria and Iran (North Korea is con-