

Shocking rise in BSF border killings

India must deliver on its promise of "zero deaths" at border

WE are outraged at the recent rise of border killings along the India-Bangladesh border despite India's repeated promises of bringing down the number of such deaths to zero. Reportedly, seven people were killed at the Bangladesh-India border only in January this year. In July 2019, our home minister informed the parliament that a total of 294 Bangladeshis were killed by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) along the border over the last 10 years, while also assuring the house that the number of such deaths had dropped in the previous three years. However, according to Ain O Salish Kendra, the number of border killings tripled last year compared to 2018—at least 43 Bangladeshis were killed by the BSF in 2019 while it was 14 in 2018. We note with frustration that the BSF has been violating the 2018 accord under which both countries agreed not to resort to lethal weapons in dealing with cases of border crossing.

After every incident of border killing when our government expresses its concerns, the Indian side routinely makes promises of stopping the killings. But surprisingly, the killings persist even after the issue has been discussed in different forums by the two governments. It is also disturbing that at the meetings held between Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and India's BSF, the Indian side always terms these killings as "undesirable deaths" and comes up with the same excuse—that they have killed our citizens in self-defence. According to various media reports, however, the BSF indiscriminately shot Bangladeshis who were unarmed and defenceless on different occasions. There are also many reported cases of BSF's torture on innocent Bangladeshis, including children.

Clearly, border killings continue because the BSF personnel are never held accountable for their action or their excessive use of force. Under the circumstances, the Bangladesh government should take a strong stance and make India answer for the killings committed by its border security force. It is reassuring that our foreign minister has raised his concerns about the issue and reminded India of the promises it made to bring down such deaths to zero. Now the government should mount its pressure on India and ensure that its promise is kept.

Election posters still strewn all over

Mayors should clean up their mess

IN the run-up to the Dhaka city corporation polls, candidates were criticised for their indiscriminate use of laminated posters that seemed to cover every inch of this city, especially in the final two weeks before the February 1 election. This occurred despite a High Court order in mid-January that asked all concerned to immediately stop the production and display of these posters, which clearly fell on deaf ears. All mayoral aspirants promised their voters a clean and beautiful city, all the while enveloping the city with a potentially toxic material that will never biodegrade and is almost impossible to recycle.

It is extremely disappointing, to say the least, to see such a flagrant disregard for the environment displayed by the candidates including our newly appointed mayors even before they stepped into office. Now the question is: are we, the taxpayers, responsible for clearing up this clutter? Or, will the DSCC and DNCC authorities take responsibility for this situation and do what they should have done long ago?

We urge the mayors to prove their commitment to their voters and uphold their pledges by immediately cleaning up the mess that they have created along with others. However, since it was their personal decision to cover the city with laminated posters, they should use their own resources—not that of the mayor's office—for the purpose. We urge the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to take the lead on this and collaborate with them so that the posters can be cleared up in the least harmful way.

The most obvious fear is that these posters will eventually find their way into the drains of Dhaka and create waterlogging, but even if this is dealt with, there is still the question of how to dispose of the plastic itself. It will not degrade in landfills, and burning plastic is extremely hazardous for health and therefore out of the question. Whatever route of waste management is taken, the damage to the environment has already been done—now the only thing to do is to try and minimise it.

We strongly recommend that in future elections, the Election Commission outlaw the use of laminated posters to prevent such unnecessary damage being done to the environment. We also ask our mayors and all other political aspirants to be mindful of the consequences of their actions in the future, especially since we are already living in one of the world's most polluted cities. Earning votes is one thing, but if the new mayors want to earn and keep the trust and respect of the people of Dhaka, they must immediately take responsibility for their actions and make sure such mistakes are not repeated again.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Regular parent-teacher meetings good for students

Parents in Bangladesh are often unaware of their children's out-of-class activities that are harmful for the environment as well as their school's reputation as a whole. Students sometimes end up getting involved with politics, or the local offshoots of political parties. Some even get involved in crimes. One may recall the disturbing reports that emerged in recent months highlighting how many school-age children and students got caught up in the web of teen gangs.

Although parents generally do the best they can for the betterment of their children, it's important that they are aware of the many social and non-academic influences they get exposed to as they grow up. This is why there should be regular parent-teacher meetings. It will help remedy such behavioural issues.

Mardia Khan, Rajbari

Coronavirus: the psychology of those quarantined

MEHTAB GHAZI RAHMAN

AS the coronavirus epidemic continues to rage and threatens to become a pandemic, the world remains in a state of paranoid vigilance. The coronavirus outbreak has taken the world by shock and surprise, and all nations are rightly fearful of the consequences of the threat due to the increasing number of deaths and the lack of an effective vaccine as yet.

Countries across the world have commenced the repatriation of their citizens back to their homelands. Repatriated citizens are being nursed under quarantine conditions to minimise the spread of the virus. This Saturday, February 1, saw the first contingent of around 300 Bangladeshi citizens being repatriated back from Wuhan, China; these individuals will remain under quarantine at the Ashkona Hajj Camp for 14 days, under the supervision of the Bangladesh Army. During this period, according to *The Daily Star*, individuals quarantined will not be allowed to meet their family members or any others.

In view of the virulence of the coronavirus and in the interest of public protection, it is entirely appropriate that repatriated individuals remain under quarantine for the 14-day observation period to minimise the risk of the virus spreading. However, it is important that we remember our duty of care towards these quarantined individuals; this duty includes looking after their mental health alongside their physical health, which can otherwise be easily overlooked. When under quarantine, individuals are likely to suffer from significant psychosocial difficulties that need to be addressed from the very start of their quarantine period.

Currently, many of the 300-plus individuals who remain quarantined are likely to be suffering from anxiety and fear—they will be anxious that they could be harbouring the coronavirus in their bodies, or that they may be in close proximity of another who may be infected with the virus. They would suffer feelings of guilt and the shame of being alienated from society. They are highly likely to be suffering from boredom due to isolation from their families and social networks. They would be harbouring feelings of frustration and possibly anger that they are under constant watch round the clock. Some are likely to be preoccupied with anxiety about how society would respond to them when their quarantine is terminated. They are unlikely to have adequate access to resources that provide them comfort, such as books, music and television, the lack of which will certainly add to their feelings of frustration and boredom. Indeed, the mental strain the quarantined patients are going through will be immense.

Try to put yourself in the shoes of a quarantined person. These individuals will have been greeted by healthcare workers—fully covered in Hazmat suits—unable to see their faces properly. They will be subject to rigorous daily clinical

examinations and tests; they will have to anxiously wait for the test results to return, and be constantly aware of any signs or symptoms that may indicate they are infected. They will be constantly hyper vigilant and on the lookout for other quarantined individuals who show symptoms suggestive of a coronavirus infection, and want to isolate themselves from the person in a state of panic. They are likely to be intensely praying that they do not become the next victim of the deadly virus. And this would certainly not be the end of their mental trauma.

Research from the last SARS outbreak revealed that even individuals who were quarantined during the epidemic developed symptoms suggestive of a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or clinical

For those in quarantine, recognition of the stress and the fear they go through is tremendously important. They should be assured that their feelings of fear and anxiety are a normal response to the situation they are in. They should be allowed a confidential space to speak about their stressors with trained mental health professionals competent in dealing with high-pressure situations. Clinicians should avoid labelling these emotions as being pathological at the first instance, and instead attempt to provide psycho-education and teach coping strategies to allow them to deal with their intense feelings in a therapeutic manner. Given the finite resources and time, healthcare professionals should try their best to provide emotional support and spend

epidemic. The provision of clear, factual information to the public is therefore paramount. Campaigns should be consistent and easily understandable, and be clear about the risks of exposure and the actual threat of the virus on the population. Certain quarters of Bangladeshi media have the propensity to fear-monger by exaggeration of news reports that perpetuate panic within people. The public health department should, therefore, work in close alliance with the media to stop sensationalisation of the epidemic and disperse scientifically accurate and precise information to the public to maintain calm whilst the prognosis of the virus still remains uncertain. Public education about good hygiene to minimise the risk of infection



Bangladeshi returnees from China's Wuhan idle away their time in Ashkona Hajj Camp, where they are being kept in quarantine.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

depression as a result of the emotional trauma of being isolated from society for a prolonged period of time. The study showed that the longer the quarantine period, the more likely a person was likely to develop a diagnosable mental health condition in the future. When under the restrictions of quarantine, individuals undergo periods of high emotional stress secondary to the uncertainty they face about their health, which makes the need for mental health support during this period of isolation essential.

Once quarantine is terminated, individuals may face societal stigmatisation; their social support structures may become avoidant towards them due to fears of contracting the illness, which in extreme cases can lead to isolation and ostracisation from society.

time with these individuals to reduce fear and the sense of isolation. Interventions should be put in place to enable access to the outer world through the provision of Internet and teleconferencing facilities, such as access to Skype, Viber and WhatsApp, to allow them to stay in regular touch with friends and family. Access to television and newspapers would help them maintain a sense of connection with the outside world.

It is the government's responsibility to provide accurate and evidence-based information about the coronavirus to the public in a timely manner to avoid mass panic and emotional distress. Any delays or secrecy in launching a public health campaign would undermine the belief people have in the government's credibility in dealing with the coronavirus

should be done in a detailed, step-by-step manner using a variety of visual formats, such as infographics.

The provision of mental health support to those under quarantine is not a choice but an essential component of their clinical care. Clear communication, regular updates and provision of interventions to reduce isolation whilst in quarantine will reduce emotional distress and instil hope for the future among these individuals. Timely, accurate public health communication by the government is key to reducing fear, eliminating mass hysteria and controlling the spread of infection if a positive coronavirus case emerges in Bangladesh in the future.

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DHAKA 4.0

In a hyper-competitive world, Dhaka needs to think big

ARIJIT CHAKRABORTI

ABOUT two and a half years ago, a global e-commerce company published its plan to set up its second headquarters, and invited proposals from cities that would be interested to collaborate with them in setting this up. More than 200 cities from multiple countries submitted their proposals for the intended collaboration. The company shortlisted a few cities and finally chose a location to build the headquarters.

Hyper-competitive cities are fast emerging to attract investors and residents, becoming preferred choices for living, working and investing. With half of the world's population living in urban areas, this trend of cities becoming big-ticket investment destinations is going to become more common. Under these circumstances, it is important to understand Dhaka's position with respect to the emerging trends, and the challenges and opportunities ahead. In the near future, will Dhaka stand a chance to submit a proposal to a multinational corporation for its second headquarters plan? If Dhaka gets chosen by a global corporation for setting up its global or regional headquarters, what would be the reaction of the city's stakeholders be? If a Bangladeshi company becomes a multinational company, will it shift its headquarters from Dhaka to some other international location?

Dhaka has a population of more than 20 million people today. The city area covers more than 300 square kilometres and is administered by two large municipal corporations—Dhaka North City Corporation and Dhaka South City Corporation. With rapid urbanisation, the

The ambition of becoming a smarter city (Dhaka 4.0) in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution comes with many challenges. At the same time, there will be opportunities for improvement in many areas, which could be utilised towards becoming a more competitive city.

city's population is growing continuously. According to data published by the United Nations' World Population Prospects, the urban population of Bangladesh has been increasing by 3.17 percent annually during the last five years. However, Dhaka's ability to provide contemporary urban services to such a large number of people is not growing at the same pace.

The ambition of becoming a smarter city (Dhaka 4.0) in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution comes with many challenges. At the same time, there will be opportunities for improvement in many areas, which could be utilised towards becoming a more competitive city. To maximise the benefits from these opportunities, the city should adopt a technology-led transformation of the services provided to citizens. Such a transformational journey should address the issues around several areas including

transportation, environment, citizen safety and information communication.

The Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL), a government agency responsible for the development of a mass transportation system for Dhaka, has embarked on developing the metro rail system in the city. The work is in progress and the first route is expected to be operational by 2021. At the same time, a smarter city should also build an inclusive transportation framework. The residents should have enough spaces to be able to walk and ride bicycles safely and comfortably. Such facilities will reduce pollution in the city and help its residents become healthier. Additional emphasis on the adoption of electric vehicles will further help in reducing the environmental pollution.

With the change in urban lifestyles, the nature of urban crimes is changing as well. The incidence of crimes committed inside households and on the internet is increasing. Incidents of domestic violence, child abuse and elder abuse are reportedly taking place in the upper floors of multi-storeyed buildings. Along with technological advancements, cybercrimes are increasing at a high rate and cybercriminals are often difficult to apprehend, as many of them operate from outside the country. Accordingly, urban policing needs to change. While patrolling the streets is important, it is equally important to monitor and prevent crimes from happening indoors and online. These situations create new challenges for law enforcement agencies. A technology-led crime prevention framework should enable the law enforcement agencies to deal with such varying kinds of crime effectively.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police

(DMP) has set up a website with extensive information for its citizens. The DMP website also allows citizens to apply for a police clearance certificate online and track the status of the application. They also maintain a page on Facebook and have a mobile app to communicate with the public. As the next step, the department may focus on expanding digital interfaces for citizens by introducing online crime reporting, online status updates of investigations and providing a platform for secure digital interactions with individual citizens regarding their individual issues.

For a city to become smarter, it must create a plan to upgrade its communications infrastructure and foster an environment in which private enterprises can participate in the upgrading task. Adoption of next-generation technologies such as 5G will foster innovation and collaboration among stakeholders to build value-added services for the residents of the city. According to a news report, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) is planning to roll out 5G services in the country by 2021.

Dhaka 4.0 needs to prepare itself for fulfilling its development ambitions and evolving into a hyper-competitive city. Progress has been made in many areas, resulting in the overall development of the city in recent years. A transformational goal towards becoming a hyper-competitive city will make it ready for competition in the region. Becoming a smarter city will make Dhaka ready for regional-level competition, and this preparation will be an important factor for success in the future.

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