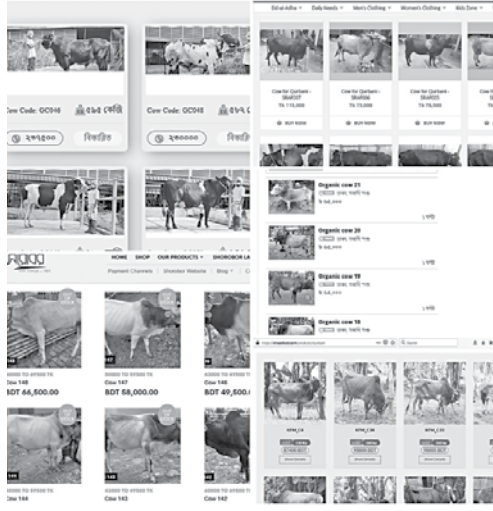


Qurbani in the digital era

SHYKH SERAJ

Sacrifice is an important act in worship. Eid-ul-Azha represents the true essence of sacrifice. Amid the coronavirus outbreak, the threat of contagion is there at the Qurbani Haats (markets). We are assuming that social distancing would not affect people, but how much we have worked in this regard? Personally, I don't want to see the cattle farmers face loss at this peak time of selling. If the sacrificial animals are not sold, farmers will be the worst sufferer, anyone would agree with this.

In this digital world, anyone can open online markets to sell their livestock, especially sacrificial, and it is praiseworthy that some are already in operation. Eleven years back, a farmer called me and requested to buy a cow from him. I said, since I haven't seen the cow, how can I buy it? He then requested me to give him my email address and right away I received couple of photos of the cow from different angles, which made me convinced to buy the cow. As technology has improved, we are also moving onward in selling the sacrificial animals at the online platforms, supported by



Amid the coronavirus outbreak, digital Haats are becoming popular for selling and buying sacrificial animals ahead of Eid-ul-Azha this year.

PHOTO: HRIDOYE MATI O MANUSH

Germany's Guterleslo town, during the third week of June. Lawrence Young, a professor of molecular oncology at the University of Warwick, said, "Cold and damp places have the ideal environment for long-term survival and spread of coronavirus."

Last year, the two city corporations arranged animal sacrifices at a total of 75 in Dhaka. Apart from this, 400 more places were identified. Since 2015, the city corporation has been trying to get the city dwellers accustomed to animal sacrifice at designated places. The online platform for selling sacrificial animals initiated by the government has a list of names of butchers, located at the upazila level. As I said, I have learned that an initiative has been taken to test corona of those butchers three days before Eid. Using the local government structure, an assessment can be made of the amount of sacrifices to be made in each ward. Individuals can be made aware of hygiene in advance to conduct sacrifices and sacrificial activities in ward-based designated places. We must ensure that people who will be physically travelling to the cities to sell sacrificial animals should be tested prior to their visit to the cities.

I am certain that well-planned measures for cleaning after the sacrifice has already been taken by the city corporation. We know that Qurbani and the cattle market has a great bondage with the rural economy, as well as our emotion. Let the digital Haats keep most of us connected to this bondage this year. Our leather industry also depends a lot on this sacrificial event. Therefore, in order to protect every related sector and people involved with it, emphasis should be laid on this aspect. Meanwhile, the flood situation is getting worse day by day. It has been reported that cattle are being forced to be sold at a very low price due to rise of floodwaters in Haor areas. Different online shops have come forward to solve the problem of selling sacrificial animals. These websites have started selling cows at different prices as per demand of the customers. Dhaka North City Corporation has launched a platform called 'Digital Haat' to sell cows online, along with the government's ICT division, e-commerce association of Bangladesh and Bangladesh Dairy Farm Association. According to media reports, three ministers of the government have already bought sacrificial cows from the online platform 'Gorur Haat'.

Dear readers, in this perilous time of the pandemic, let us all make an extra special effort to be kinder, more compassionate and attentive to the needs of others than ourselves. The pandemic itself is a sign, a wider avenue for us to be empathetic in a meaningful way. Eid-ul-Azha, amid the coronavirus outbreak, not only brings forth a light of celebration, but also amplifies the logistical challenges in the process of Qurbani. It will take the true meaning of sacrifice this year. A sacrifice that must ensure purity, good intention and holiness. A sacrifice that will be illuminated by maintaining safe distancing, proper handling and disposal, and test our strength as a community.

Pirojpur boat sellers in utter despair

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

The fall in production of guavas and hog plums has affected the sale of boat significantly, leaving the boat sellers in utter despair amid coronavirus outbreak in Nesarabad upazila of the district.

Locals said every year during monsoon, floating markets on canals crisscrossing hundreds of guava and hog plum orchards in Kuriana and Jolabari unions under Nesarabad upazila become alive with visitors, buyers and traders from different parts of the country.

But this time, the production of guava and hog plum in the area has fallen drastically due to the havoc wreaked by cyclone Bulbul and Amphan. The storms have damaged a large number of orchards in the unions. The guava trees have also been attacked by the disease anthracnose this year. Apart from this, the sale of guava and hog plum falls drastically in the markets due to coronavirus outbreak.

Local people of Nesarabad upazila in Pirojpur and nearby Barishal and Jhalakathi districts mainly use small boats to collect guavas and hog plums from the orchards and carry them to the floating markets.

They buy the boats from the age-old Noukar Haat (boat market) on Atgar canal in Nesarabad upazila. The weekly haat is held on every Friday for three months from mid-May to mid-August every year during

the rainy season. The price of each boat is between Tk 3,000 to Tk 6,000 depending on wood quality.

Boat seller Faruq Hossain from Chami village in the upazila said almost all the guava and hog plum farmers buy at least one boat every year to collect, carry and sell guavas and hog plums that grow in abundance in the area during monsoon. But this year the scenery is totally opposite.

"I am involved in selling boat for over 40 years. But I have never faced such acute shortage of buyers like this year," said another boat seller Nadir Hossain of Banaripara upazila in Barishal.

He further added that around 200 boats would be sold at every haat during the previous years. But the number does not cross over 50 this year.

Md Shakib Hawlader, a leasee of the boat market, said now people are not showing interest to visit the market due to fear of getting infected with coronavirus. It is another reason behind the falling sales.

Sukhlal Halder, sub-assistant agriculture officer of Nesarabad upazila, said the production of guavas has fallen as mostly farmers did not spend extra money for pesticides or fertiliser during the peak season of harvesting the fruit. As a result, its price has fallen drastically.

This year, guava has been cultivated on 657 hectares of land while hog plum on 350 hectares of land, said the officer.



Boats are kept in a row for sale at Noukar Haat on Atgar canal in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila. Boats of different sizes are sold at the haat every Friday during monsoon. Farmers buy the boats to collect, carry and sell guavas and hog plums in the floating markets. But this year, the sale of boats falls drastically due to coronavirus outbreak.

PHOTO: STAR

Shykh Seraj is Bangladesh's pioneer development journalist. He received country's two highest civilian honours, Swadhinata Puroshkar and Ekushey Padak, respectively. He is a BIDS, Ashoka and Bangla Academy Fellow. He also received highest award for agricultural journalism from the United Nations, FAO A.H. Boerma Award, Gusi Peace Prize (Philippines) and many other prestigious accolades at home and abroad. At Channel i, he's the Founder Director and Head of News. He's also Director and Host of Channel i's popular agro-documentary, Hridoye Mati O Manush.



the public-private initiative.

We are currently witnessing the world's deadliest pandemic ever. Keeping the risk of COVID-19 infection in mind, the government has planned properly to work it out. I have talked with the ministers concerned and government officers regarding how digital platform could work perfectly for sellers, buyers, butchers and cleaners. In the past few days, the situation has changed a lot with support from the government regarding the Qurbani Haat (market for sacrificial animals). The government has taken a very effective initiative. Each district administration has been given the responsibility to create an online market based on demand and supply of the respective district. Most of the district has already created online platforms and those who could not create a website have opened a page on Facebook. Sales have also started. Besides, names and addresses of butchers, based on areas, have also been

added there. The government is also concerned about running coronavirus test for the involved people, three days before the Eid-ul-Azha.

A few months back, I said the Union Digital Centres (UDCs) could play a vital role. There are 5,875 of them and they could be a local hub for the online haat. The Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Tajul Islam said sacrificial animal haat will be set up ahead of the holy Eid-ul-Azha, maintaining all health rules and ensuring social distancing. After my discussion with Tajul Islam and ICT State Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak, couple months back, government took the recommendations very seriously and took the right measure. With the introduction of online animal market and regular haats, maintaining social distancing and hygiene, this would be a wonderful venture, if the plan really works out, as said by the minister. I believe this would be the greatest digital achievement for the farmers, traders, pious buyers, butchers and all related people, during the time of COVID-19. We know that if these plans were taken at least four months back, things could have been way different, but still at a rapid pace, government has very efficiently worked it out, which is really praiseworthy.

Coronavirus infections are more common among workers in various meat processing factories and slaughterhouses in Europe, America and Australia. Coronavirus infections have been reported in such organizations in various European countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Spain. During the last week of April, 50 people were found infected with the coronavirus at JBS SA Beef Facility in Colorado, USA. At the Cargill Inc. meat packaging plant in Pennsylvania, 160 people were infected. The virus was found in bodies of more than 1,300 workers at a slaughterhouse at North Rhine-Westphalia in

ROUNDTABLE

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2020 AND YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

The Daily Star in association with Citizen's Platform for SDGs and Plan International Bangladesh organised a virtual policy dialogue titled "Voluntary National Review 2020 and Youth Perspectives" on July 16, 2020. Here we publish a summary of the discussion.

PANELISTS:

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Convener, Citizens Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh and Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and the Moderator of the Session

There are three major motivations for countries in joining the VNR process. Firstly, countries want to showcase their development success in front of the global community and learn from their peers. They want credit for their efforts in implementing the SDGs. Secondly, they want to encourage the global community to support their efforts. Finally, some countries look for political and developmental legitimacy.

We need to reach the disengaged youth in certain ways. This disengagement has been aggravated due to COVID-19 and the digital divide. Women and girl children in particular have been affected gravely. Small ethnic groups, Dalits, and the third gender have been very visible as groups left behind. The government has quite a lot of facilities and initiatives regarding these issues so we must take full advantage and make them more effective.

Mahfuz Anam, Editor and Publisher, The Daily Star and the Chair of the Session

How closely the non-state actors are involved in the SDGs and VNR process depends on the environment in which the non-state actors operate. The non-state actors are supposed to give a different perspective from the state actors, but this cannot be possible if the environment is such that different perspectives are not welcome and those with different perspectives have their work deemed problematic, or their activities do not get as much support as before. Non-state actors are fundamentally expected to echo the overall view of the state actors. The fundamental prerequisite of the non-state actors' effective involvement in the SDG process is an environment of acceptance, tolerance of divergent views and the assurance that the different perspectives ultimately get incorporated into collective thinking.

Orla Murphy, Country Director, Plan International Bangladesh



Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya

Mahfuz Anam

Orla Murphy

Saber Hossain Chowdhury

Dr Shamsul Alam

Md Rashedul Islam

Asa Britta Torkelson

Kashfia Feroz

Reneka Ahmed Antu

Mishal Bin Salim

In the VNR process, transparency, accountability, and effectiveness are crucial and are at the core of the process. It is essential for young people to be involved at every stage. Their voice needs to be heard and acted upon.

We will not achieve the SDGs unless we achieve gender equality. If we look at SDG 5 as a multiplier, we see in Bangladesh, the government has established a strong policy framework. But policy frameworks are not enough; robust and monitored implementation is central. Globally, over the last four months, which is the period of COVID-19, we have seen a decline in gender equality. This only further highlights the importance of a whole-of-society approach, to deliver on our commitments to the SDGs.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, MP, Honorary President, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Being on the right track with the SDGs while also responding to the pandemic will be difficult. There is a massive gap in financing within the dimensions of the SDGs. Financing the gap is now more critical than ever.

I have already created a draft bill to defunct the Evidence Act. According to the current act, if a woman, who is a victim of rape, goes to court,

her character and her past can be questioned. The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs want to amend many parts of the Act, and the changes I have mentioned will be included as well.

I believe Agenda 2030 should be presented to the youth as their agenda. Since the fourth industrial revolution is centred on AI, Information and Communications Technology is involved here. The ministry can have a combination of youth and ICT since the entire ICT process will be youth-driven.

Our parliamentary system, standing committees, and planning commissions are fora that should be used to amplify different voices and NGOs.

Dr Shamsul Alam, Member (Senior Secretary), General Economics Division (GED), Bangladesh Planning Commission From the Prime Minister's Office, 17 dedicated ministries in collaboration with NGOs have been given the responsibility to collect information on specific SDGs.

The government's commitment to social protection is clearly evident in the enhanced budget allocations this year. Vulnerable populations, such as women, children, and people with disabilities, have been given priorities under our National Social Security Strategy (NSSS).

The 8th Five-Year Plan will have

increased allocations in health, education, and social protection for two reasons. Firstly, if we spend more on education, health, and social sectors, it will reduce social inequality. Secondly, this is required for human development. Spending on these sectors will benefit the youth more.

Md Rashedul Islam, Director General, NGO Affairs Bureau, Prime Minister's Office

We have a goal to achieve the 2030 Agenda alongside which we are also expecting to transform our nation into a developed one by 2041. Political commitment is essential for the implementation of any plan. We are fortunate that our Honourable Prime Minister has given us the scope to do whatever is necessary to bring our dream of a Digital Bangladesh into fruition. The importance given to the youth of our country is clearly reflected in the 2018 election manifesto and even in the national budget.

Asa Britta Torkelson, Country Representative, UNFPA Bangladesh We are concerned that the impact of COVID-19 will further put a halt to the opportunities available to our youth. Therefore, the recovery process from the pandemic must have a strong focus on the youth.

We must empower the young girls so that they can achieve their full potential and actively contribute to

the country's development. Practices such as child marriage and adolescent pregnancies cannot continue. We need to engage young people as community leaders who can shape the future for the better. It is only by putting youth at the centre of our work that we can achieve the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

Kashfia Feroz, Head of Influencing, Plan International Bangladesh

The youth aged between 18 and 35 years represent 33 percent of the total population. Therefore, it is not possible to achieve the SDGs without their contribution and participation and without addressing their needs and challenges. Therefore, in collaboration with Citizen's Platform for SDGs and other civil society organisations, Plan International Bangladesh undertook a series of initiatives focusing on youth positioning. Last March, in National Consultation, we, the CSOs and youths, presented some recommendations and we pursued them to be addressed by government report. It is time to explore to what extent the recommendations the youth are reflected in the VNR report of Bangladesh.

Reneka Ahmed Antu, National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (PNGO-GAA) Section 155 (4) of the Evidence Act, 1872 states: "When a man is prosecuted for rape or an attempt to ravish, it may be shown that the prosecutrix was of generally immoral character." This law has already been amended in India and Pakistan and I believe, it should be amended in Bangladesh as well so that we can attain more in terms of gender equality.

In 2015, 14 percent of women used sanitary napkins, which has increased to 20 percent now. We can achieve further growth not only through policymaking but also by raising awareness since topics such as menstruation are still considered taboo. I would request both the public and private sectors to help raise awareness to increase the usage of sanitary napkins.

Mishal Bin Salim, National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (PNGO-GAA)

The National Youth Policy 2017 states that our youth will be involved in decision-making at local, national and international levels and also take part in the SDG implementation processes. Since the VNR report states that youth are the prime movers, we need to give more recognition to the youth. We require separate policies for the underprivileged children to safeguard their education. Besides, we

are aware of the increasing violence against women. Further steps need to be undertaken to ensure the safety of the victims. To ensure that our young people can secure jobs in the future, we must take initiatives to improve their extracurricular skills. This can be done through online training programmes.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS:

Halima Akhter, EDUCO Bangladesh We need a separate Department of Children. Another important recommendation is to create a space for the vocational training of women.

Ferdousi Begum, Uddipon Although vocational skills training is being provided to youths, their business start-up costs after the training are not being considered. Some steps should be taken to bring down these costs to a more affordable range for entrepreneurs.

Kothok Biswas, National Children's Task Force

The pandemic has made the trial processes more difficult. For incidents of child abuse, the complaint process must be made easier and the government needs to ensure swift justice.

Swapan Kumar Guha, Rupantar When the education system returns to normal after the pandemic, we will notice a large number of these students dropping out. These dropouts will become labourers, victims of child marriage and child trafficking, etc. Therefore, psychosocial care for people below 18 years old is crucial.

Mahmudul Hasan, UNDP In 2017, our government had accepted the National Youth Policy 2017. It was supposed to be converted to a National Action Plan but that has not happened yet.

Reefat Bin Sattar, Save the Children Bangladesh We need to create a space for the political development of youths.

Asif Ibrahim, Core Group Member, Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh Even after countless efforts, there is still a lack of data from the private sector.

Rafiqul Islam, Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB)

The government can work with the NGOs to ease the conditions of the youth, especially in the remote areas.

Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Distinguished Fellow, CPD and Core Group Member, Citizen's Platform I want to emphasise on the representation of youth leadership in the government's high-level SDG implementation committee.