

No more hiding behind politics of numbers

New study shows how widespread Covid-19 infection is in Dhaka alone

FOR months, we have been given false assurances that adequate measures are in place to contain Covid-19 infection in the country, with statistics hiding the real truth about Covid-19 cases and deaths and state officials spinning them to paint a rosy picture of our preparedness. Even during this past Eid holiday, we came across boastful claims by ministers about how Bangladesh has been "successful" in containing the virus. But nothing could be further from the truth—as a joint study by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) shows. According to the preliminary findings of the study, around nine percent—or nearly 20 lakh—of Dhaka residents could be Covid-19 positive, with roughly 78 percent of them exhibiting no symptoms. The percentage is much higher than the numbers provided by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). As of August 10, there are only 66,630 confirmed cases in Dhaka city (more than 25 percent of the total confirmed cases). The huge gap between official numbers and figures suggested by the survey shows how the virus has silently swept through not just the capital but possibly the whole country.

This is the first such study by authoritative institutions, a stark reminder of how slow and ill-prepared we have been in checking the movement of the virus in its first five months in Bangladesh. Under the cross-sectional survey, 3,227 households were surveyed in Dhaka city between April 18 and July 5, said an IEDCR press release. The study identified 211 symptomatic individuals, and 199 of them were tested for the coronavirus using the RT-PCR testing method. A total of 435 asymptomatic individuals were selected from symptomatic households. Of them, 201 tested positive for the virus. Also, 827 asymptomatic individuals were selected from asymptomatic households, with 538 of them testing Covid-19 positive. One statistical oddity has been that of the numbers from the six slums where the survey was conducted only six percent of those tested, in 720 households, came out positive.

We shudder to think what these numbers from one city mean for the Covid-19 situation in the whole country. Unless a similar survey is conducted nationwide—which has by now become crucial—we have no way of knowing how bad the situation is. Reports already suggest that divisions with higher populations like Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi and Khulna are witnessing higher numbers of Covid-19 deaths. The official response, unfortunately, still seems to be limited to testing those showing symptoms, albeit in far fewer numbers than necessary. But as the survey shows, it's equally important to track and test people without symptoms. Unless we expand our testing capacity to include all potential virus carriers and enforce a strict containment measure, the cases of avoidable deaths and infections will continue to pile up. The government must come out of its cocoon to acknowledge the reality on the ground and take measures accordingly.

Caught in their own trap!

Despicable decay of police ethics

CRIME never pays and that was what some police personnel of Pallabi Thana discovered to their great distress, once again adding to the already long list of gross police misdeeds. The details of the matter would put any criminal to shame, given the nature of the act of crookedness of these policemen. And that is how they have been described—crooked policemen, by their superior officer while commenting on the incident. These policemen wanted to implicate supporters of a local Awami League leader at the instigation and a promised bribe of Tk 2 crore, by another leader belonging to the same party of that area. Unfortunately for them, the bombs they carried inside the police station to fulfil their criminal mission exploded, giving them away, and in the process injuring four of their colleagues and a civilian.

One would be misled to take the incident as merely another case of taking bribe by the police, a culture that has come to be very deeply ingrained in the police culture. It betrays the deep influence of politics on the police. While this is a trait not unique or exclusive to any political party or regime, since such has been the demonstrated attribute from the time of our inception, the impact over the last decade of the numerous criminal and illegal acts by the police on the state of law and order have been extremely profound. While in the past we have seen the police being used by the ruling party to go after political opponents, there being no opposition at the moment worth the name, different factions of the ruling party are using the police to sort each other out. The police work for the stronger of the two groups, both in terms of money and political clout.

This incident is a fair representation of how cases are distorted, course of investigation are diverted, serious charges are diluted and the course of justice corrupted, by such "crooked" police officials. We would like to think that these "crooked" officials are exceptions, but records show otherwise. The malaise is deep-rooted, and a complete overhaul is essential in the way the police functions and how it is governed.

Major Sinha's death and the culture of excessive force



STRAIGHT LINE

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE untimely death of former Major Sinha Rashed Khan in hither to inadequately explained circumstances saddens the heart. It is sad because according to media reports the deceased not only served in an elite unit like SSF that was indicative of his professional proficiency but was also gifted with a creative bent of mind. No wonder that in post-retirement time he was working with students of a private university in developing a promotional documentary film projecting travel and tourism potentials. The life of a promising young man has been cut short in tragic circumstances.

No words of sympathy or assurances of fair inquiry and punishment of the guilty persons can heal the raw wounds of the mother who has lost her son. Her pain is massive and definitely unquantifiable. What, however, can be measured and found out is the circumstances leading to the unfortunate death and the culpability of the concerned officials.

Before proceeding into the specifics of the matter, it needs to be mentioned that the controlling authority has lost no time in forming a high-powered committee to inquire into the matter and the subordinate judicial authority has taken cognisance of the incident and issued warrants of arrest against all the nine accused persons mentioned in the complaint lodged by the sister of the deceased. All the nine accused persons have since been taken into custody. Reportedly, Rab has been directed to

investigate the complaint.

It is understood that the administrative inquiry and the criminal investigation will be conducted simultaneously and it would be quite some time before we have a factual understanding of the incident. That being the situation, this writer would refrain from making any comment on the narratives attributed to the complainant or the accused lawmen.

There are, however, certain aspects of the incident in question on which, without prejudice to the working of the administrative inquiry or the criminal investigation, observations can perhaps

hopefully unearth the facts and establish the culpability with a view to ensuring justice. While the initial steps taken by the authority are laudable, it would only be proper to once again observe on the norms and practices of the law enforcement culture to allay public apprehensions, and to also undertake corrective measures, if any.

There is no denying that effective order maintenance and law enforcement will enable people to enjoy fully their civil and political rights as well as social and economic rights. On the other hand, thoughtless and unlawful policing can

introduce police reforms advocated by various quarters.

One cannot be oblivious of the reality that the police forms part of the executive. An efficient police force provides teeth to the government. By maintaining law and order and ensuring public peace, a basic requirement for socio-economic advancement, the police facilitate the task of a democratic welfare state.

In the sphere of criminal administration of justice the police play a key role. As a crime prevention and investigation agency the police performs a supplementary role to the courts of



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

As a crime prevention and investigation agency the police performs a supplementary role to the courts of law. In spite of the pivotal place of the police in democracy, its role has not been brought to the public scrutiny and public debate so as to infuse broad based awareness about police functions and duties.

be made in public interest. This writer is aware of the requirement of a difficult balance between the right of the public to be informed as also the protection of the interests of a fair inquiry and investigation.

The foremost query that merits consideration relates to the suspected use of excessive force as law enforcers like police personnel are required to use force proportionate to the threat. In this case, one person, supposedly armed was allegedly confronting seven/eight armed police personnel. The question is, did the person pose a grave threat warranting multiple shootings from the lawmen? A reasonable suspicion would be whether to apprehend or deactivate one single individual, shooting six times was justified.

It would not be unusual to presume that the activities of the deceased retired Major was known to the local law enforcement and intelligence agency as the officer was staying in the area for quite some time; and this area, particularly the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf road, for understandable reasons, is subject to intense surveillance. It is thus very likely that he would have attracted the attention of the concerned authority, had he been doing anything suspicious.

As stated earlier, the inquiry and the investigation into the incident will

only cause suppression of those rights. Thus, one often witnesses the paradox that human rights are protected by law and yet are often at risk from the law enforcers.

Policemen's aberrations should naturally be the focus of primary concern in a democratic polity. However well the police may be performing otherwise on its professional front, the unchecked excesses will result in a progressive lowering of police image in public perception. In fact, some persisting aberrations have contributed to the building of a derogatory and anti-police mindset.

Under circumstances as above, police functions assume a critical dimension because the democratic and human rights of the people invariably interact with the process of criminal justice with which the police is directly involved. The credibility among the common man and accountability towards the society at large are the twin-tests to judge whether the police force has desirably professionalised its functioning.

The reasons why police in Bangladesh have deficits in the above two areas are often traceable from within the society itself. On one hand, the people are used to looking at the police contemptuously and on the other hand the authority displays inadequate political will to

law. In spite of the pivotal place of the police in democracy, its role has not been brought to the public scrutiny and public debate so as to infuse broad based awareness about police functions and duties.

It would not be improper to say that in our environment corrective actions have not been forthcoming in desired manner taking in view the poor state of consciousness of rights, the absence of prompt legal service and random resorting to third degree methods. Unfortunately, torture tactics have at times been revealed in police practices.

The sad reality is that unless we make concerted efforts to effect police reform, the tendency to rely more on fists than wits or on torture than culture will continue unabated. The affected members of public do not know as to when the desirable change will be felt. Therefore, the court has an important role in preventing and punishing major police deviance, particularly the custodial deaths.

It is only desirable that lawmen become competent enough to effectively demonstrate that law enforcement efficiency and civil liberty can harmoniously co-exist in a democratic society under the rule of law.

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We must build back greener from Covid-19



ALOK SHARMA

WE are at a turning point for our planet. As we recover from Covid-19, governments across the world are putting in place packages to revive their economies.

The decisions we make now will determine whether the planet builds back greener and more resilient for future generations to come. As hosts of the next United Nations Climate Change conference, taking place in November 2021, we want to raise global commitments to reduce carbon emissions, by urging all countries to invest in a green recovery which addresses the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and public health.

Since March, the UK government has taken further concrete action towards building a sustainable future. And through our COP Presidency, in addition to the primary task of taking forward the multilateral negotiations, we will focus on taking action in five key areas.

We must clean up the air we breathe by promoting "cleaner transport". The UK government is spending 2bn pounds to create a new era for cycling and walking, ordering over 4,000 new zero-emission buses, and investing 500m pounds in new infrastructure for electric vehicles.

The transition to a "clean energy" future needs accelerating. Just this month, the UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak unveiled a 3bn pounds commitment to improve the energy efficiency of homes, schools and hospitals across the UK and to create 140,000 green jobs. The scheme for

homes includes a voucher programme for lower income households so the benefits of having a greener home is not exclusive.

It's vital that our "natural environments" are restored and protected. We're putting 650m pounds towards protecting habitats through projects such as tree planting and river clean-ups, and creating new green spaces for people and wildlife.

The world needs to become more "resilient" to the impacts of extreme

resilience, ensuring the most vulnerable are protected from the effects of climate change.

And tying it all together, we must harness the power of our "financial systems" to unlock growth, create green jobs and fund essential projects. Last year the UK doubled its international climate finance commitment to 11.6bn pounds until 2025, and we encourage our international development partners to increase their support for developing

renewable energy sources over the next three years could create nine million green jobs.

And we know that wind or solar is now the cheapest source of new electricity generation for more than two-thirds of the world's population. And by 2030 they will undercut existing coal and gas production almost everywhere.

The UK has demonstrated that green growth is possible—since 1990 we have grown our economy by 75 percent, whilst cutting emissions by 43 percent.

We must continue to build on this positive progress, and we will do so using the Paris Agreement and UN Sustainable Development goals as guiding frameworks for a green recovery.

We call on other countries to join us, and we will work with our international partners to ensure these five key areas are embedded in sustainable and inclusive recovery packages across the world's largest nations. We want to ensure that the benefits of green recovery are accessible to the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change.

Together, we can use the opportunity to build back better and greener to unleash the full potential of the Paris Agreement, set the planet on an accelerated trajectory towards meeting our climate change commitments, and contribute to our economic recovery.

We must use the time ahead of COP26 to unite behind a fairer, greener and more resilient global economy for both our people and planet. We do not have time to waste.

Alok Sharma, the UK secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and President-elect of the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, UK in November 2021 (COP26) speaks on the importance of a green recovery from the global Covid-19 crisis and how the UK is championing the change to COP26.



weather. The UK is investing more than 5bn pounds domestically to improve our flood and coastal defences. Through the UN, we're simultaneously working with our Egyptian partners to lead an international coalition to take action and showcase best practice on adaptation and

countries too.

These five areas are obviously important for the health of our planet, but it's becoming increasingly clear that a green recovery makes economic sense too. The International Energy Agency has found that USD 1trn of investment in