

Collective action key to fight pandemic

Special envoy of WHO director general stresses adequate investment in local health system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Terming collective action the key to fight against the global pandemic like COVID-19, Dr David Nabarro, special envoy to the Directorate General of WHO on Covid-19, stressed on adequate investment in the local level public health systems for the continuation of regular health care services during the pandemic.

He made the statement yesterday while speaking as the special guest at a webinar titled "Urban Health, Multi-Stakeholder Partnership, Sustainable Development and COVID-19" jointly organised by Eminence Associates for Social Development and Bangladesh Urban Health Network (BUHN).

"We are learning every day about the strategies and perspectives of many countries around the world to control the virus. We need a worldwide campaign on Covid-19 and it should be led by the practitioners of the local level in the cities, villages,



Dr David Nabarro

communities, groups and societies," he said at the event.

He also said that the community should be strengthened, empowered and equipped with updated information and knowledge to fight the impacts of the pandemic.

Dr Shamim Hayder Talukder, chief executive officer of Eminence Associates, moderated the webinar and said that Eminence Associates for Social Development was trying to engage civil society for developing a risk communication plan for 2021-2041.

"We are also working on the development of a digital health care system in Bangladesh. We hope that we can drive the health system towards the needs of the mass people with some solid contributions to the people of Bangladesh and the world," he added.

The webinar was broadcasted live from the official Facebook page of Eminence Associates for Social Development.



A young man steps onto a makeshift bridge made out of banana trees to cross a road in Manikganj's Shingair upazila that has been eroded as a result of flooding. This photo was taken on Wednesday. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

It's India's move

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country also sent a medical team to Bangladesh to help it deal with the pandemic.

On top of these, the phase-3 trial of a Chinese company's Covid-19 vaccine was approved by Bangladesh Medical Research Council, even though the final decision for the trial was still pending.

Bangladesh and India have a few lingering issues.

The Teesta water-sharing deal could not be signed in last nine years and border killings rose in recent times. India's National Register of Citizenship (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act surprised people in Bangladesh.

Against this backdrop, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech on August 15 said India was connecting with its neighbours -- whether they are connected to India via land or the sea -- with the partnership of security, development, and trust.

Prof Delwar Hossain, who teaches International Relations at Dhaka University, said, "Indo-China relations have deteriorated significantly after the June confrontation [at Ladakh]. So, India is seeking to correct the relations with the neighbours."

Bangladesh is a close friend of India. Therefore, the first visit by a top Indian diplomat since the pandemic has been to Bangladesh, he said.

Prime Minister Modi wants to make sure that there was no misunderstandings between the two friends, he said.

The message conveyed by Modi to Hasina through Shringla Tuesday night was that India would continue to be with Bangladesh and take forward the relations.

Prof Delwar said pending issues need to be solved quickly.

For example, a number of projects under India's \$10 billion Line of Credit need to be completed at the soonest. The Teesta water-sharing deal has been left hanging for nearly a decade.

Bangladesh also has its own development plans and is not bound to rely only on India, he said.

Dhaka can obviously seek others' assistance, and this does not mean in any way that the Dhaka-Delhi relations will be affected, he told The Daily Star.

Given rising tension between Delhi and Beijing, which is expanding its footprints in South Asia, India is now realising that it needs to really work to boost its ties with the South Asian neighbours, Prof Delwar said.

In an analysis, Indian newspaper

Outlook India reported that ever since PM Hasina assumed power in 2009, she has been sensitive to New Delhi's security and strategic concerns and violence and terrorism in Assam have come down, thanks largely to Hasina's decision to hand over the ULFA leaders.

All insurgent camps were shut down and unlike the previous governments in Dhaka, Hasina made it plain that anti-India forces were not welcome. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) also got short shrift in Bangladesh, it said.

"But today, China is spreading its wings in Bangladesh, literally India's backyard. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan was on the phone with Hasina in an attempt to mend fences with her. The opportunity for China and Pakistan was provided by the ruling party's [BJP] domestic agenda," Outlook India said.

Prof Delwar said Bangladesh believes in friendship with all. "We all should follow this policy for our common good. We hope India will realise it."

Former ambassador Humayun Kabir thinks Shringla's visit carries special significance.

Connectivity is a priority for India through rail, road, and waterways and India wants the projects under the India's Line of Credit to be completed at the soonest.

Besides, the pandemic has brought a new dimension to global diplomacy and politics as the vaccine has become essential.

As India is a major vaccine producer. It is obvious that it would try to explore markets here, he said.

"India gave a good gesture by considering Bangladesh as a priority. At the same time, we also should have our options open," said Kabir, acting president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

Munshi Faiz Ahmed, former chairman of Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS), said regional and global cooperation were more important than ever.

However, tension across the globe seems to be rising. Shringla's visit, therefore, was crucial for strengthening collaboration on efforts to combat the pandemic, he said, adding: "We hope that we can extend our cooperation in conducting vaccine trials as India is doing. It can help make a better vaccine for us and ensure quick access to the life-saving drug."

Faiz said India has the capacity to lead at the global stage, but before that it needs to prove itself at the South Asian level. "We hope India realises this and acts accordingly."

HC rejects writ plea

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posting the photographs on Facebook.

In the petition, the lawyer said the action of police officers posting personal photographs of Shipra Debnath along with provocative comments on Facebook is illegal because it assassinated her character.

He submitted the writ petition based on a report published on The Daily Star on August 16 under the headline "Cyber-bullying now adds to her trauma".

On Wednesday, Shipra's lawyer Mahbubul Alam said that Shipra would decide whether to sue the two policemen and others under the Digital Security Act after yesterday's HC rules on the writ petition regarding the matter.

Contacted yesterday, Mahbubul said he was yet to discuss the matter with his client.

On Tuesday night, Shipra, a crew member of slain Maj (ret'd) Sinha Md Rashed Khan's YouTube channel, went to Cox's Bazar Police Station to file a case against two superintendents of police and 150 others under the Digital Security Act.

Cox's Bazar Police Station officer-

in-charge refused to record the case and advised Shipra to file it with either Ramu Police Station or with the cyber-crimes tribunal, Shipra's lawyer said.

On Wednesday morning, Shipra and her lawyer were going to Ramu to file the case but they stopped after learning about yesterday's HC hearing.

Shipra was accused in a narcotics case following the killing of Maj (ret'd) Sinha. She along with two other students of Stamford University and Sinha went to Cox's Bazar on July 3 to make a travel video.

Shipra was arrested at a Cox's Bazar resort for possessing liquor and marijuana and was released on bail amid widespread protests.

Since her release, she has been exposed to cyberbullying. Two police superintendents posted Shipra's photos on social media, taking a dig at her character, her family members alleged.

On Wednesday, a Cox's Bazar court directed Ramu police to hand over 29 types of items seized from Shipra, including mobile phones, laptops, hard drives, to Rab, which is investing the murder case.

School feeding for 1.41 cr students

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will bear the cost of the Tk19,280 crore project.

Ongoing school feeding programme project director Ruhul Amin Khan said cooked meals and biscuits will be provided to all 1.41 crore students of 66,000 government primary schools in phases by 2023.

Students of all government schools of 250 upazilas will avail the school feeding by 2021, students of 350 upazilas will get the benefit in 2022 and all students by 2023, he said.

According to DPP, students will get cooked meals for three days and fortified biscuits for the three other days.

The cabinet in August 2019 approved the National School Meal Policy-2019. The policy is designed to increase attendance and reduce the rate of dropouts, as well as to ensure that children get at least 30 percent of their required daily calorie intake at school, said officials.

Bangladesh currently has two school feeding programmes. Under one, the government distributes packets of biscuits, each weighing 75 grams, to nearly 3 million children at primary schools in 104 upazilas, said Ruhul.

Under a separate pilot project that began in 2013, around 34,000 students get hot vegetable khichuri meals in three upazilas -- Bamna in Barguna, Islampur in Jamalpur, and Lama in Bandarban, he added.

Project officials said they have seen attendance rates increasing by 11 percent in the areas where cooked meals were given and by 6.6 percent where fortified biscuits were given.

Besides, dropout rates have decreased by six percent in schools that provided the meals.

THE COVID-19 EFFECT
The schools have been closed since March 17 due to the Covid-19 outbreak, school feeding programme officials and teachers are facing some problems in getting the biscuits to the students' homes, said officials.

They usually distribute biscuits at schools and students are being deprived of nutrition as schools are closed.

"We have distributed 50 to 100 packets of biscuits in two phases for each student at their homes, so that they are not deprived of nutrition while schools are closed due to the coronavirus situation," Ruhul said, adding that students who used to get cooked meals are now getting biscuits.

The Directorate of Primary Education's stakeholder engagement plan on the Covid-19 situation and

government's "Covid-19 Response Plan for Education Sector" both warned of a rise in dropout rates due to the coronavirus outbreak.

In July, a Save the Children report said children in 28 countries, including Bangladesh, are at moderate or high risk of dropping out.

which is more than 58 percent of all confirmed cases.

Bangladesh is currently on the 16th position in the list of worst affected countries in the world in terms of the number of total cases.

The position is one step behind Pakistan and one step ahead of Italy, according to worldometer.info.

A total of 14,059 samples were tested in 91 labs across the country in the same 24 hours.

Seven hundred and sixty-six people were put under isolation during the same period, the release added.

Among the dead, 32 were male and nine were female.

One of them aged between 21 and 30 years, one between 31 and 40 years, one between 41 and 50, eight between 51 and 60 years, and 30 above 60 years.

Replying to a question, he added it cannot be said at the moment how much time will be needed for final disposal of the cases at the HC.

The death references on the August 21 grenade attack cases reached the HC on November 27, 2018 for examination of the trial court's verdict.

On January 13 last year, the HC accepted the appeals filed by the convicts.

The same day, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman also stayed the part of the trial court verdict that fined the convicts.

The bench passed the order as the appeals filed by the convicts, who are now in jail, were included in its cause list on that day.

A Dhaka court, on October 10, 2018, sentenced 19 people -- including former state minister for home affairs and BNP leader Lutfozzaman Babar -- to death, and 19 others -- including BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman -- to life imprisonment in the two cases filed in relation to the August 21 grenade attack.

At least 24 people were killed and around 300 injured in the grisly attack on an Awami League rally at the capital's Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004.

Sheikh Hasina, now Prime Minister and then the opposition leader in parliament, narrowly escaped the grisly attack with an ear injury.

Waiting for HC hearing on appeals

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A paper book - which contains all the details of a case, trial proceedings, statements, evidence, orders, verdict and other relevant documents -- is necessary for the HC to hear and dispose of a death reference or an appeal.

If a lower court sentences a person to death in a case, its judgment is examined by the HC through hearing arguments for confirmation of the death sentence.

The case documents and judgment reach as death references to the HC from the lower court within seven days of the latter delivering the verdict.

Supreme Court sources said the murder case filed in connection with the August 21 grenade attack in 2004, has 585 paper books containing around 10,500 pages in 13 volumes.

A total of 22 appeals have been filed by the convicts independently through lawyers while 12 jail appeals have been filed by convicts through jail authorities, in connection with the murder case.

Meanwhile, the case filed separately under the Explosives Substances Act, has 495 paper books containing around 10,000 pages in 11 volumes.

A total of 17 appeals have been filed by the convicts independently through lawyers while 12 jail appeals have been filed by convicts through jail authorities, in connection with the explosives-related case.

The concerned HC officials are currently scrutinising the paper books

and after this process is completed, the issue will be placed before the chief justice for a decision.

Then the chief justice may assign a High Court bench for starting hearing on the death references and appeals for their disposal. State defence lawyers will be engaged for the fugitive accused of the cases, according to sources.

Contacted, Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star yesterday that the government has taken necessary steps for quickly preparing the paper books of the August 21 grenade attack cases.

"I have already talked to the attorney general and requested him to move an application as soon as possible before the High Court to fix a date for starting the hearing and disposing of the death references and appeals."

The law minister also said, "Killer Ziaur Rahman's son [Tarique Rahman] and wife [Khaleda Zia] had instigated the most heinous grenade attack on August 21 in 2004 in order to kill the daughter of Bangabandhu [Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina]. Almighty Allah saved her."

"The trial court has ensured justice in this case. I am hopeful that justice will be ensured in the High Court in this case," he added.

Contacted, Attorney General Mahbubul Alam told this correspondent that his office will soon move an application before the HC for holding a hearing on the appeals and death references of the grenade attack cases.

Splinters remind it all

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Today is the 16th anniversary of the heinous attack, which also left over 300 wounded.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina, then opposition leader, narrowly escaped death with injuries to her right ear. Ivy Rahman, wife of late president Zillur Rahman, was among those killed.

"Like me, many other survivors of the grenade attack are waiting for the end of life with unbearable pain and suffering since 2004. But our sufferings and agony would have lessened if we could see completion of the trial process and hanging of the perpetrators," said Nasima.

She was only able to walk after five years of treatment and had been completely bedridden for nine months.

Mahbuba Parvin, another survivor, has about 1,800 splinters in her body, including two in her brain, and also wants quick completion of all the procedures to pave the way for execution of those involved in the grenade attack.

"When I was taken to the hospital, everyone assumed I was dead and I was kept with the dead bodies at first," she said.

"Even 16 years after the incident, it's hard for me to accept that I have become a physically disabled person," Mahbuba added.

Talking to this correspondent, she

said that every year on the eve of the grenade attack anniversary, the survivors express their agony stemming from the delay in completion of the trial process.

"This year, we are also doing the same. I don't know if I will be able to see implementation of the verdict in my lifetime," lamented Mahbuba.

She said several survivors of the grenade attack, including veteran AL leader Suranjit Sengupta and former Dhaka city mayor Mohammad Hanif, already breathed their last without seeing justice.

In an emotion-choked voice, she appealed to the government to take measures to complete the trial process to give peace to the departed souls.

Asked about her physical condition, Mahbuba said living has become a curse for her.

"Those who were injured in the grenade attack feel like dying every moment," Mahbuba, now a vice-president of Dhaka North Swechchhasebak League, said.

In photos that appeared in newspapers after the attacks, Mahbuba was seen in a blood-stained sari lying among the dead on the spot.

She first moved her limbs after three days in a coma, and regained full consciousness after 25 days.

Kazi Shahana Yasmin, who carries 134 splinters in her body, said,

"I don't know when I will die but I want to see implementation of the lower court verdict before my death and punishment of the perpetrators."

A lawyer of the Supreme Court and vice president of Awami Swechchhasebak League, she added, "I will never get back what I lost. I will never be able to get a normal life as it was before 2004. But now I want justice. If the culprits are punished, I will get some relief."

Bazlur Rahman, who is carrying 58 splinters in his body, said after 16 years of the grenade attack, he no longer has severe pain in his body. But the delay in completing the trial process causes him much pain.

"My agony will lessen only when I will see perpetrators being hanged. I will die in peace if the culprits are punished," he told this correspondent over the phone.

A special court in Dhaka delivered the verdict on October 10, 2018.

BNP's acting chairman Tarique Rahman and 18 others were sentenced to life in prison while former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and 18 others were given the death penalty on charges of murder through criminal conspiracy.

All 38 accused were also sentenced to life in prison for causing grievous injuries to the survivors.

Govt body

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-- assistant sub-inspector Shahjahan and constables Razib and Abdullah. The three were arrested in the case later and subsequently placed on remand.

The home ministry's Public Security Division had formed the committee on August 2 to probe the murder and recommend ways to stop any recurrence of such incidents.

The committee was asked to submit its report within seven working days.

Headed by Additional Divisional Commissioner of Chattogram Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, other members of the committee are Lt Col SM Sazzad Hossain representing the Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh Army, Additional Deputy Inspector General of Police (Chattogram range) Zakir Hossain Khan and Cox's Bazar Additional District Magistrate Shahjahan Ali.

SEVEN SENT TO JAIL

A Cox's Bazar court yesterday sent seven accused in the case to jail after Rapid Action Battalion produced them before it on completion of their seven-day remand.

Briefing reporters in Cox's Bazar on Wednesday, Rab Director (Legal and Media Wing) Lt Col Ashik Billah said if the investigation officer deems it necessary to quiz the seven accused further, they might request placing them on remand again.

The seven accused are suspended ASI Liton Mia and constables Safanur Karim, Kamal Hossain and Abdullah Al Mamun and villagers Nurul Amin, Nizam Uddin and Md Ayash of Marishbunia, Teknaf.

Ashik said the IO has got a clear picture about the Sinha murder by interrogating the accused, analysing statements of witnesses and scrutinising evidence.

NO FOOTAGE FROM TEKNAF POLICE STATION

The Rab director said when the investigating officer contacted the authorities concerned to provide him with the CCTV footage from July 25 to August 6, they asked the IO to contact the higher authorities.

Ashik said the IO then appealed to the court to issue an order in this regard. The court ordered the authorities to hand the footage to the investigator. The police station later informed the IO that the footage was recorded on two hard disks. One of those was missing and the other developed technical glitches.

The IO wanted to collect the CCTV footage to see the activities at the police station on July 31 and some other following days as part of his investigation, he added.

Replying to another question, the Rab official said 29 items, including a laptop, a camera, hard disks and other electronic devices of Sinha, Shipra Debnath and Shahedul Islam Sefat, would be collected by the IO as evidence. The items were seized by Ramu police.

On July 31, Sinha was going to Cox's Bazar from Teknaf when his car was stopped at a police check post on Marine Drive road in Shaplapur. He was shot dead at the check post.

Sinha's companion Sefat was arrested in a murder and a narcotics case by Teknaf police while Shipra in a narcotics case. They were released on bail.

Sinha used to make travel videos for a YouTube channel titled Just Go. He went to Cox's Bazar with Sefat, Shipra and another filmmaking student to shoot a video for the channel.

Railway allows

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Meanwhile, a BR circular said it would resume operations of 18 more pairs (up and down) of trains from August 27. Of the 18 pairs, 14 are intercity, three commuter and one mail. With the 18, a total of 48 pairs of trains would resume operations.

In a public circular issued on August 13, the ministry said ticket, return ticket and periodic ticket for train journey is not transferable and only the passenger, for whom the ticket would be issued, would be allowed to travel.

"If any person hands over or sell their ticket, return ticket or periodic ticket to another person, they could face up to three months in jail or be fined or both. Similarly, if anyone uses other's ticket, they have to pay a fine, which would be the same amount of the actual fare," read the circular.

"Bangladesh Railway is requesting its passengers to buy tickets online or through mobile app on their own and refrain from journey with tickets purchased by others," it added.

Although the circular did not mention when the authorities are going to enforce the measures strictly or whether all trains would be brought under the measures, Bangladesh Railway Director General Md Shamsuzzaman said the new measures would be applicable for intercity trains only.

While visiting Kamalapur Railway Station on August 15, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said, "I want to make it clear that you will have to show four NIDs for buying four train tickets. You can't buy four tickets by showing only your NID."

The BR made national identity card mandatory for buying tickets for some intercity trains from March last year to stop ticket scalping. Currently, the railway authorities are selling all tickets online to maintain physical distancing during the coronavirus pandemic.

It resumed operations of trains on a limited scale from May 31 after suspension of services for over two months to contain the spread of Covid-19.