

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali
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Dengue Danger Still Underplayed!

THE Prime Minister sees no reason why people should take fright of Dengue when the government 'is in control of the situation'. Her complacency stands in stark contrast to the ground reality which keeps aggravating like a bushfire engulfing every pasture with so little to duck under. It is no joke that we have amidst us at this moment some 60,000 Dengue virus carriers within the metropolis, an assessment that casts a long shadow of affliction over a few lakh people.

Making allowance for the fact that the prime minister in her position has to put up a brave face and sound reassuring to people in times of calamity rather than being an alarmist or a doomsday sayer herself, we wonder why she must fail to share her concern with people over what is definitely unfolding as an unprecedented Dengue scourge. Need we tell her that underplaying a situation is the biggest impediment to its solution? Facts have to be accepted ungrudgingly and as they are, before we can even think of tiding over an ordeal as dangerous and enormous as Dengue is threatening to be, to say nothing of rolling it back.

Dengue is not a political affliction but a deadly health hazard and that is how the ruling and opposition parties have to look at it. That one-third of Dhaka may have been infested with Aedes mosquito means that it hasn't been an overnight drop to the hell. Again the gradual deterioration into the present state should not be used as an excuse for what transparently is this government's failure to rise to the occasion. It is not something to be wasting time on by playing to the gallery with any self-defensive diatribe or by demanding ouster of the government but to concentrate on the job at hand and address it as a national calamity, regardless of political affiliations and prejudices. The political parties are free to pursue on a purely apolitical level though, their programmes to galvanise the communities in an all-out war against Dengue.

Ideally, the tenor should be set from the top to have the right kind of percolatory mobilisation at the bottom. But that being something of an illusion in our context and since we cannot wait to see the damage control operation begin rightaway it is advisable that urban communities in particular organise themselves with the ward commissioners, teachers, students and NGO workers vanguarding the galvanisation process on an emergency footing.

The Dengue scourge is a blaring indictment on our municipal, WASA, community, and above all, governance failures over the long haul. Years of spreading and mounting dirt, filth, junkets and squalor together with cesspools of putrid waters making these all look and smell like lavatories nurtured the Aedes mosquito to a point where they have become a veritable threat to public health. It is difficult not to panic over the sheer vulnerability one feels to the lurking Aedes vermin.

Yet all is not lost. We really can come out of this ordeal sooner than we think. We have examples of India and Thailand before us of quick turn-arounds. In 1997-1998 New Delhi had a bout with Dengue invasion, as it were. It was at the ward level with community participation that the breeding grounds of Aedes were fumigated in the Indian capital. Periodic inspection at the household level ensured sustenance of conditions that fended off the malady. For us, too, the bottomline is we free the fight against Dengue of verbal excesses and take it to the operational level wards and hamlets. Clean premises are the best answer to the spread of Dengue.

JUDGED by the number of recorded patients in Dhaka City the incidence of Dengue fever cannot be termed as an epidemic. Nor is the number of deaths caused by it alarming, though tragic and lamentable they are. Yet, the population of Dhaka is in the grip of a mortal fear. This is largely because of the feeling of helplessness, which, in turn, has arisen from inadequate protection against the threatening virus. Individual measures apart, the residents of this metropolis consider the Dhaka City Corporation to be the main body responsible for eradication or control of mosquitoes, a species of which (*Aedes aegypti*) is spreading the virus of Dengue. In spite of spraying activities undertaken by the City Corporation results achieved so far have been limited giving rise to public ire and criticism in the media. The failure of the city government to cope with the situation has become palpable.

This is not the first time that the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has come under criticism by the public. Nor is the mosquito control the only area of its dismal performance. Putrid garbage accumulating at every street corner for days, potholed roads and streets, encroached footpaths, roadsides covered with building materials, chaotic traffic, life-threatening pollution and disappearing empty spaces all over the city are daily reminders to the hapless citizens of the abysmally low quality of life in the capital city. These chronic problems have been pointed out and discussed ad nauseam in various forums and on unmyriad occasions. National and international experts have waxed hysterical over the poor state of governance in one of the major metropolitan cities of the world. The Dhaka City Corporation has the decency of acknowledging its shortcomings in this respect but promptly attributes it to the lack of adequate power and jurisdiction.

The proposal for redrawing the municipal map of Dhaka in the context of Dengue fever may appear like using cannons to kill mosquitoes. But it is not as comical as it may sound. After all, desperate situations call for desperate measures. No one needs to be told that situation in Dhaka City became desperate long before the visitation by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes. Re-structuring the governance of Dhaka is long overdue.

The problem of paucity of fund is also mentioned in the same breath. As a solution the creation of an all-powerful and all-embracing metropolitan government has been proposed emphatically by the present DCC authority. This huge behemoth is to include DIT, Metropolitan Police, WASA, Titas Gas, T & T, DESA and other agencies. It is contended that given the authority and control over these departments the Dhaka City Corporation will be able to provide better services to the people. A cord restructuring the City Corporation at present has to do too many things with too little power and jurisdiction. They have no doubt that bigger will be better.

A close look at the services required to be provided by the City Corporation and its present jurisdiction and authority indicates that size indeed is a problem. In fact, it is the problem. But it is not the problem perceived by the proponents of a big metropolitan government. Instead of smallness of size (area, population) and jurisdiction (lack of control over other agencies) it is the present big organisational size and large jurisdiction that have hobbled the Corporation. Organisationally, it has become too big and unwieldy and in terms of jurisdiction (area, population) unmanageable for provision of services efficiently. There is a clear mismatch between the tasks assigned and the capacity of the organisation to undertake them. Even under the best of circumstances, it is not possible for a single big organisation to cater to the needs of a large clientele. Beyond a certain point, size of an organisation

and the activities undertaken by it produce atrophy. The distance between the centre and the periphery also tend to undermine efficiency. Activities that are divisible and local in nature (garbage disposal, mosquito control) are better implemented when decentralised. The constraint facing Dhaka City Corporation is its centralised functioning, the Wards notwithstanding. Contrary to the views held by some people, it is not always efficient to have a single big organisation for governance of a big area.

IN MY VIEW

Hasnat Abdul Hye



with a large population. More often than not small is both beautiful and better. In respect of provision of services it is particularly so.

One solution to the problem of centralisation of activities and largeness of the area to be served can be transferring of functions and activities to the existing Wards of the City Corporation. But the size of the Wards is so small that in respect of many activities (road construction/maintenance, procurement of medicine for mosquito control, etc) there will be diseconomies of scale, that is, these will be uneconomical. It is in respect of implementation of some activities (spraying for mosquito control, public health and sanitation measures, garbage disposal etc.) that Wards can prove very effective. The answer lies in having more than one municipal government in Dhaka City (with constituent Wards) independently functioning in well-demarcated areas with clear-cut responsibilities. Taking the size of the metropolitan city with its layout and given the present population two city corporations in Dhaka can be created replacing the present DCC. Each of these will have an elected Mayor (with the status of State Minister) and as many Commissioners as the number of Wards under them. Some of the present big Wards may be divided into two or three ensuring a more or less balanced population size. Old Dhaka, with Motijheel and Dhanmondi can constitute one Municipal Corporation (Dhaka City Corporation I) and Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Banani, Gul-

shan, Baridhara and Uttara Model Town can form the second Municipal Corporation (Dhaka City Corporation II). As an apex body there can be a Dhaka Metropolitan Authority whose elected head will be the Governor with the status of a Minister. The metropolitan authority will be responsible for co-ordination between the two city corporations and among all Government Departments. It will have no municipal functions, all of which will be undertaken by the two proposed city corporations in their respective areas. To meet the financial exigencies of the proposed metropolitan authority contributions may be made by the two city corporations and grant-in-aid by the national government. The present Nagar Bhaban can be the seat of the Dhaka Metropolitan Authority and accommodate the Dhaka City Corporation I. For the second City Corporation (DCC II) new office should be located to the north of the city between Uttara and Gulshan. All the staff of DCC should be divided between the two city corporations keeping in view the area and size of population.

If there is imbalance between the revenue collected by a city corporation (I and II) and the liabilities on account of services to be provided to population in their respective areas, the national government can give necessary weightage at the time of allocating annual development fund. Population should be given greater weightage than area for this purpose. The Dhaka City Corporation II comprising Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Gulshan, Baridhara, Uttara may have relatively less population than DCC I, but the wealthy households there will

yield more revenue, or at least equal income, making it viable. The two city corporations will have the same financial powers as the present DCC.

The demarcation for the two City Corporations proposed above is tentative. It can be made more realistic and workable by taking into account the present number of Wards, population, physical size and revenue earning potential. The idea of having two City Corporations should not sound as strange or revolutionary. There was a separate municipality for Gulshan, even though its life was very short. Very few people know the reasons for its formation and its abrupt merger. This time around the matter should be discussed openly and decision taken after considering all views expressed. If we cannot do it for grass-roots democracy, it probably will not survive in the national context will continue to be dim.

In the proposed re-structuring of the Dhaka city government the small size of the two corporations as well as the area to be served by each will lend themselves to greater accountability, responsiveness and efficiency of operation while the problem of co-ordination will be solved through the metropolitan authority headed by an elected Governor. Thus by one stroke the problem of efficiency and co-ordination can be solved. Besides, decentralisation of some activities (garbage disposal, mosquito control, etc) will make these more transparent and suitable for community participation.

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Has Democracy Lost Its Way in Bangladesh?

LET'S run through the definition first lest we forget. According to Joseph A Schumpeter, "Democracy is the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions, which realize the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will." The recent by-election in Jhalakathi, which was basically a face-off between a candidate who was previously rejected by the voters of his own constituency, and the widow of a member of the parliament who died on the job,

In a sense, the by-election was an oxymoronic exercise in democracy. If you have to choose between a candidate whom you didn't want many times before and a candidate whose only credential is that you had once voted for her husband, you are actually exercising freedom in restraint. Toss in the boycott by main opposition parties, you would wonder what was democratic about that election!

has turned that definition on the head. What kind of individuals is likely to assemble to carry out popular will, if people are not offered good choices to elect from?

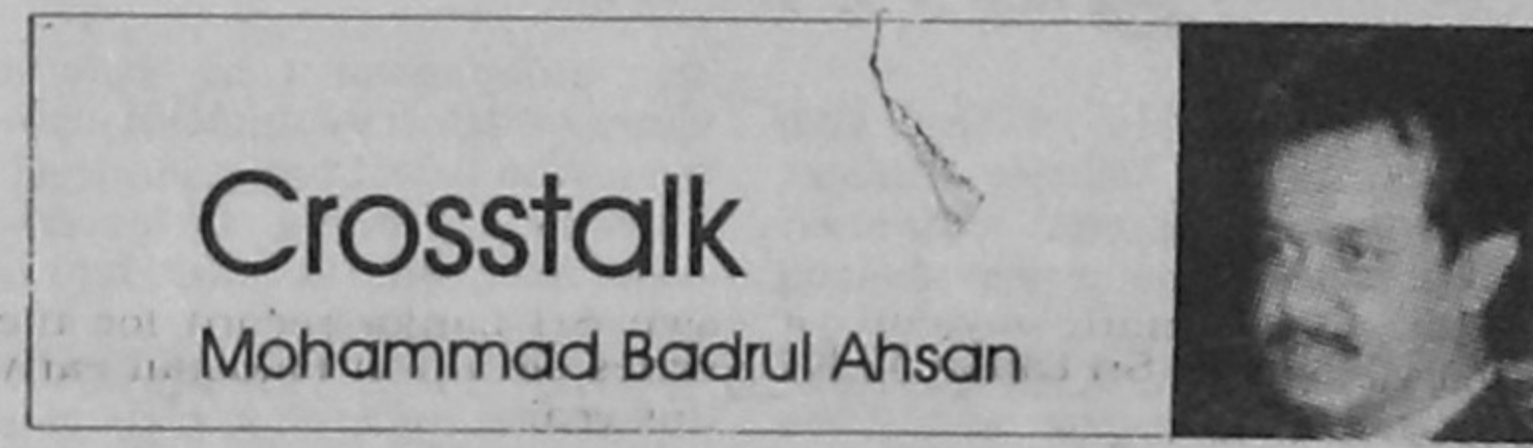
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So, when one of the two candidates claimed landslide victory you wanted to take a pause. Is democracy losing its way? Is rule by the people dissipating in the unruly hands of politicians? Is the most compelling political shibboleth of the 20th century ringing hollow in the face of what looks like political fatigue syndrome? If eternal vigilance is the price of freedom, is democracy frittering away under the growing impact of political indifference?

The speakers at recently held roundtables in the city, one organised by the Centre for Strategic and Peace Studies and another by Action Aid, perhaps tried to address some of these questions, and they concluded that terrorism and black money were the main threat to polls. But can we prevent terrorism and black money from interfering with the polls unless we can prevent terrorists and black money-earners from entering politics? To think we can is like talking about improving the quality of education by increasing fairness in the examinations, while neglecting the curriculum.

What lies at the heart of the democratic process is the theory of government by consent. Democracy's roots may go back to classical Greece, but that concept took a long time to develop by the enlightenment thinkers of the 17th century. If black money and terrorism are disturbing anything, it is the coalescence of this collective consent, which gets distorted in the compulsions of fear and greed. Because, the voters are free to exercise their powers only within the political ambitions of a candidate or his party. If a candidate wants to be elected, he either intimidates the voters or buys their votes. If the party wants a candidate elected, it throws him back at the voters again and again until he is elected.

Thus the futility of democracy is obvious in terrorism, black money and arrogance, which characterise our politics. Not to say that democracy didn't face similar futility in other countries. In fact, it has gone through several cycles of rise and fall. Between 1920s and



1930s, democratic regimes were swept away by the rise of rightist dictatorships in Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal and other countries. It was not until the Allied victory in World War II that democratic governments would start appearing again in both defeated countries as well as the newly independent countries like India, Israel and the Philippines spreading soon in the decolonised Africa and a good number of Latin American countries. Pluralism lost ground once again in the 1960s and 1970s as communism and military dictatorships started to grow.

However, pluralism re-emerged through various means. Portugal became democratic as a result of a coup in 1974, a group of reformist military officers toppled a 42-year-old dictatorship in the virtually bloodless 'Carnation' revolution. Spain didn't revive its democracy until the death of Generalissimo Francisco Franco in 1975. Since the late 1970s, the military regimes voluntarily handed over power to civilian governments in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala, Argentina, Uruguay, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama.

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whole of western democracy. Thus, Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, and Park Chung Hee in South Korea started presiding over years of relative political and social stability and spectacular business growth. Hong Kong prospered under a laissez-faire regime run by competent, unelected bureaucrats. In its reforms China has also kept draconian political control while encouraging economic free enterprise. By contrast, India adopted democracy's political processes but rejected its market economies.

In our case it seems to be the other way around. We have adopted democracy's market economies while neglecting its political processes. The by-election in Jhalakathi has been a grotesque example of how the partial truths of the elements can disfigure the complete truth of the whole. At the centre of all activities is the propelling force of the selfishness of the individual. It becomes harnessed to the public good because in an exchange, whether economic or political, he must serve others in order to serve himself.

That selfishness through selfishness has been misunderstood in the economic sphere, where free market is being mistaken for free loading. Stanford University economist Paul Krugman maintained that innovation in the workplace was needed for improvement of total factor productivity, and Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore concluded that the liberties ingested from that experience could lead to demands for similar prerogatives in the political sphere, including the right to elect leaders. We need to understand that terrorism and black money are anomalies arising from misguided transaction between economies and politics. Unless we restore the equilibrium between them, democracy and free market will mislead each other.

language. I hear someone singing a song in my native language when I walk down the street. My roots are when I sit at home with you in my native dress. Our traditions are a thousand years old. You cannot just let them go like that. The world will be much richer if the collaborations and diversities are sustained and encouraged with different cultures.

It was Gufraj who introduced a UNESCO resolution that was meant to ensure that the 'new information order' that was taking hold around the globe would be a two-way exchange of culture and information — not just the developed countries pouring their culture down the gullets of the developing nations.

As some call this 'Democratisation of Technology' with all its negative sides, have enabled more and more people with more and more home computers, modems, cellular phones, cable systems and Internet connections, to reach farther, faster and much cheaper. Noam Chomsky warns us of the 'promises' the democracy and markets in the New World order makes when he quotes from the Clinton doctrine announced by his National Security Adviser Anthony Lake in September 1993: "Throughout the Cold War, we

contained a global threat to market democracies. Now, we should seek to enlarge their reach." The 'new world' opening before us presents immense opportunities to move forward to consolidate democracy and open markets, he expanded a year later.

We should pay heed to Chomsky and tread very carefully on the road to 'globalisation' to make sure we can get a fair share in the 'new world' and not be unequal markets only. Globalisation, which many term as Americanisation, gives a big leap to the United States because of the edge they have had in the new technology. Therefore, it gives them opportunity, with their wealth and industrial manufacturing capability, not only to be the superpower but also to control the world market and economy.

Political and business leaders, and activists of the third-world countries have to take advantage of the new technology to guard against that by connecting with each other and going global to make their presence felt so that every one is guaranteed equal freedom and opportunity in the democracy and open market of the 'new world'.

The writer is Director, Liberation War Museum.

Friday Mailbox

BOI clarifies

Sir, We have noted with concern the news item published in your daily about BOI on 31-07-2000 and 1-8-2000. The subject concerned about a speech by the President of FICCI at a monthly luncheon meeting on 30-7-2000. His statement if studied in total would clearly show that they were unhappy in the past, but BOI under the new management has taken up these problems relating to issuance of work permit and multiple entry visa, and these have been resolved. To discuss the issue of work permit and multiple entry visa, a meeting was held at BOI on 11-6-2000 where Ministry of Home was represented by Secretary and other concerned officials. The meeting was also attended by the President of FICCI. After detailed discussions, it was agreed that Ministry of Home would issue multiple entry visa without restrictions of number of entries. The Executive Chairman of BOI also offered that the work permit of top management of Foreign companies in Bangladesh would be granted for upto 3 years provided, the BOI would also recommend to the Ministry of Home for issuance of multiple entry visas and the FICCI would send a list of top management of their member companies. The FICCI sent the list to BOI in the first week of July, 2000 and this has already been sent to Ministry of Home for early action. It may also be mentioned that on the recommendation of FICCI the Ministry of Home has started issuing multiple entry visas as requested. BOI has also started issuing multiple year work permit to the Managing Director and other expatriates in the top management of the Foreign companies.

We assure you that things are better than before and would continue to improve in BOI, including services to investors, local and foreign and promotion of investment in Bangladesh. Both local and foreign investment in Bangladesh have risen significantly during 1999-2000. The new management have introduced the practice of meeting investors from major investing countries, and all are happy with BOI in terms of assistance to them. These may please be kept in your view.

Syed Shujauddin Ahmed
Member, BOI

A nation learning its lessons!

Sir, Two mighty political beguns have been allowed (by the people) to rule over the destiny of the nation for over a decade; and it is high time for stocktaking by the people (that includes the non-politicians); as the situation is getting worse and the level of political ineptives has come down to the individual level of attacks and accusations, as analysed by Mahfuz Anam in his relevant commentary (Aug 3).

We have to get out of this vicious circle, for the sake of the nation. The question of dispensation comes in, after the experience gained in the level of government. Without the respective dynamic links, these two housewives would have never made it to political leadership. Therefore, how they are to be judged independently of props? The self-sustaining ability has to be examined after peeling off the props. No body is taking up this exercise seriously as the intellectuals have become partisans. Our politics must undergo systems analysis; otherwise the politicians will continue to sit over judgments themselves (a party to the dispute cannot sit over judgement).

There are other prior examples. Had Bangabandhu not belonged to Awami League, how AL would have fared today? It is a pertinent question, to understand the mindset of this

party. The whole question, generally speaking, boils down to the use or misuse of charisma in politics, specially in the developing countries.

This aspect has not been adequately analysed by the experts and academics. What is available in abundance is political eulogy; which is normally one-sided. The other side of the coin has to be displayed, but not by the politicians themselves. This window of enlightenment must be opened. We also must understand how a nation is tested in various ways.

A Mawaz
Dhaka

Management of Machine Tools Factory

Sir, A former managing director of the Bangladesh Machine Tools factory has well analysed the planning and administrative shortcomings of the set up (DS, Aug 6), which have been dragged on for decades, due to political and circumstantial causes — independence in 1971; the post-liberation teething troubles; the obsolescence of sporadic fresh recommendations from time to time; the lack of integrated approach, and bureaucratic control which is insensitive to profit or loss.

Now with the taking over by the Army, this huge complex can become an asset after several phases of orientation programmes in quick succession, to maintain continuity. Also there may be provision for maintaining a panel of international consultants/specialists for overall monitoring to operate an advanced learning system for quick administrative remedial measures (such complexes run on routine efficiency, plus the ability to take quick policy decisions to changing markets and technologies; avoiding remote control as far as possible).

The country's private sector is now in a better position to respond and cooperate in regard to subcontracting of the inputs and partial marketing of the outputs, first to meet the local development needs, and thereafter for strengthening the export base in several sectors. With energy and power resources well marked for the next few decades, the management would find the environment more friendly, as the awareness factor has gone up in the public sector, and the government is more oriented as a facilitator.

AMM Aabad
Dhaka

Deadly speed breakers

Sir, May I request the city father to turn his attention towards the numerous speed breakers around the capital city.

These speed breakers are the cause of frequent accidents particularly when an emergency vehicle, such as ambulances, police cars, fire brigades etc is in a hurry. People driving in the city are not supposed to remember the different places where speed breakers have been constructed. And moreover, each speed breaker has different heights and some are multiple (or bamboo type) as in Dhaka University area.

I had the opportunity to visit different countries and nowhere did I encounter with these horrible hillocks.

May I therefore, request the authority concerned to remove these speed breakers (or should I say bone breakers) and instead paint zebra crossings with lights for the convenience of the pedestrians?

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Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.