

FLOATING LATRINES

Good news for haor people

DWOHA CHOWDHURY with ANDREW EAGLE

For the people living amongst the haors of Sunamganj sanitation has long been a challenge. With vast areas submerged during the rainy season, maintaining hygienic living conditions has never proved easy. But now, in Ghagatia village of Fatehpur union in remote Bishwambarpur upazila, an innovative new floating latrine system is delivering the promise of healthier lives.

"For years, for no alternative we have defecated in the open," says Ghagatia resident Makbul Miah. "Especially during the monsoon there's

no other choice." Ghagatia, which is situated in the middle of Karchar Haor, is hardly unique. According to the Public Health Engineering department, the last national census showed that almost half of the 4.5 lakh families in Sunamganj district lack access to hygienic sanitation.

Thanks to the innovative efforts of Muhammad Talut, the former assistant commissioner for land and acting upazila nirbahi officer of Bishwambarpur upazila, it's a situation that looks set to improve.

Talut, a qualified mechanical engineer from the Bangladesh University

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Special floating toilets in Sunamganj's Bishwambarpur upazila. The toilets, invented by the upazila's former assistant commissioner for land Muhammad Talut, bottom right, are meant for ensuring hygienic sanitation for haor people.



PHOTO: DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Hajj, umrah

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Algiers on Wednesday, the kingdom and the 11 other members agreed to cut oil production for the first time after their bid to out-compete cheaper US shale gas failed.

Opec has also been hit by the lifting of economic sanctions against Iranian oil.

Oil prices reached a peak of \$100 (£77) a barrel in the middle of 2014 but fell as low as \$26 (£20) a barrel in February this year.

The country is now frantically reforming its generous welfare system with deputy crown prince Mohammed bin Salman telling Bloomberg in June that his reform programme will aim to raise an extra \$100bn (£77bn) in non-oil revenues by 2020.

The extra revenue will come from measures such as introducing VAT, tax on expats and tax on sugary drinks but incomes would remain untaxed.

The move will also coincide with an austerity programme announced in December last year.

Other measures due to be introduced at the same time as the visa charges also include a SR20,000 (£4,110) fine for anyone caught "stunt driving" and identify theft will earn the perpetrator a fine of "not less than SR1,000 and not more than SR2,000".

[From Independent.co.uk and Saudi Gazette]

UN chief offers to mediate

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"There was small arms fire and mortar shells fire from across the border in Akhnoor sector which lasted for around two hours," Pawan Kotwal, a top civilian official in India's Jammu and Kashmir state, told AFP.

A Pakistan military statement said its troops had "befittingly responded to Indian unprovoked firing" in the Bimber sector on the Pakistani side.

The exchanges came shortly before Indian army chief Dalbir Singh travelled to Northern Command headquarters, which are in Jammu and Kashmir, to meet soldiers involved in Thursday's strikes.

Singh was able to "personally compliment officers & men who successfully executed surgical strikes" during his visit, the army said on Twitter.

The two countries, who were separated at birth at the end of British colonial rule in 1947, have fought three full-blown wars in the last seven decades -- including two over Kashmir.

The Himalayan region, the Indian side of which forms the bulk of the country's only Muslim majority state, is at the heart of the latest tensions mounting in the last three months.

Since a Kashmiri separatist was shot dead by Indian soldiers in early July, more than 80 civilians have been

killed in the region, many of whom had joined street protests in defiance of a curfew order.

A Pakistan-based militant group then carried out a raid on an Indian army base in mid-September which killed 19 soldiers, the deadliest such attack in over a decade.

Amid massive public anger over the raid, India has sought to isolate Pakistan -- whom it accuses of sponsoring militant groups -- and has managed to persuade nearly all its other neighbours to boycott a regional summit which was to have been held in Islamabad in November.

India's announcement that it had carried out "surgical strikes" in the early hours of Thursday on militant posts on the Pakistani side of the Kashmiri frontier in turn provoked fury in Islamabad whose prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, denounced what he called "naked aggression".

A Pakistani envoy, Maleeha Lodhi, met Ban at UN headquarters in New York overnight to ask the veteran diplomat to intervene personally.

Ban called on "both sides to exercise maximum restraint and take immediate steps to de-escalate the situation", a statement from his spokesman said after the meeting.

MEDIATION OFFER

The UN chief said India and Pakistan should address differences through diplomacy and dialogue, and offered

to mediate.

"His good offices are available, if accepted by both sides," the UN spokesman said.

Lodhi told AFP "the time has come for bold intervention" by Ban while India's UN mission said there was "no desire to aggravate the situation".

But aware things could yet escalate, India has evacuated thousands of people from near the northern border in Punjab state as well as in Jammu.

An AFP correspondent in the Punjab village of Naushera Dhalla said most of its 4,500 residents had moved out, leaving only a small number of men to guard their land.

The village was also evacuated in 1971, the last time the pair fought an all-out war.

"We take turns to patrol the main road to make sure no thieves or robbers come into the village," said Jamshed Singh, one of those remaining.

"I haven't had a drop of alcohol for the last four nights because if there is an emergency and any of us are drunk, we may not be able to react as fast as we need."

Meanwhile in the Battal sector of Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, normal life has also come to a halt.

"Our market is closed as no one dares to venture outside," said shopkeeper Shujaat Kazi.

2 killed in 'gunfights'

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Foundation in Birulia area around 2:30am to recover firearms.

Sensing presence of law enforcers, criminals opened fire on the police, who also retaliated.

At one stage, Nayan was shot, police said.

He was whisked off to Savar Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Police claimed he used to run a drug racket in Savar, Ashulia and Amin Bazar on the outskirts of the capital.

His family members, however, alleged that police "shot him dead" for his political affiliation with the BNP and also for money and then cooked up a story.

"Some police personnel including Sub-inspector Tanmoy and Assistant Sub-inspector Ahsan picked up Nayan from a relative's house in Mohammadpur and took away around Tk 1.5 lakh from the house," victim's brother-in-law Samrat Ahmed Parvez told The Daily Star over phone.

"They took handcuffed Nayan to our house in Hemayetpur of Savar and demanded Tk 2.5 lakh for his release. My father gave them the money," Samrat claimed.

But the policemen did not release him saying they did not have the key to the handcuffs and took him with them assuring his release, he added.

"In between 8:30pm and 9:30pm on Friday, I got a phone call. The caller intro-

ducing himself as SI Tanmoy threatened to kill my brother-in-law unless I paid them Tk 10 lakh," he alleged.

Later in the morning, he heard that Nayan was killed in a gunfight, he added.

SI Tanmoy could not be contacted, while ASI Ahsan asked this correspondent to talk to senior officials.

Contacted, Shah Mizan Shafiur Rahman, superintendent of Dhaka district police, told The Daily Star that every law enforcement agency was looking for Nayan. There is no question of demanding money from a criminal like him, he added.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College for autopsy.

LAKSHMIPUR 'SHOOTOUT'

A robber was killed and three policemen were injured in a "gunfight" with police at Bibirhat of Ramgati upazila of Lakshmipur early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Nizam, 28, son of Abdus Salam of Char Jabbar in Noakhali district.

Iqbal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Ramgati Police Station, said Nizam was arrested in Boyar Char area in Ramgati Friday night.

Based on his information, police took him to Bibirhat area to arrest his accomplices, who opened fire on the law enforcers. The police retaliated with gunshots and Nizam was killed in "crossfire", he added.

Police said Nizam was accused in at least four cases for robbery, kidnapping and possessing firearms.

Equipped with app

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It has trained over 3,000 people on emergency medical services, and some 380 of them are certified and registered with CriticalLink, founded in November, 2014.

"We have treated some 600 patients last year," Farrell, CEO of CriticalLink, told this correspondent recently.

The app was one of the five winners in health and empowerment category in a global contest at the World Summit Awards Social Innovation Congress held from June 29-July 1 this year.

HOW IT BEGAN

Farrell spent four years as a volunteer emergency medical technician while in Duke University in the US. As a medic, she trained first responders in South Africa and is now a senior Doctor of Medicine candidate at the Tulane University School of Medicine.

She came to Bangladesh in 2012 and trained doctors and young volunteers on emergency medical service for two months.

During the Rana Plaza disaster, Farrell was working in Central Africa and was getting texts and Facebook messages from volunteers she had trained while in Bangladesh.

"During my stay in Bangladesh, I got an idea that mobile phones and Facebook work very well here. This is how we realised that we can actually use apps..." she said.

Farrell also knew about the horrible statistics of roads accidents in Bangladesh. According to World Health Organisation, 21,000 people get killed on the roads of Bangladesh every year. The figure includes those who die of injuries sustained in road crashes.

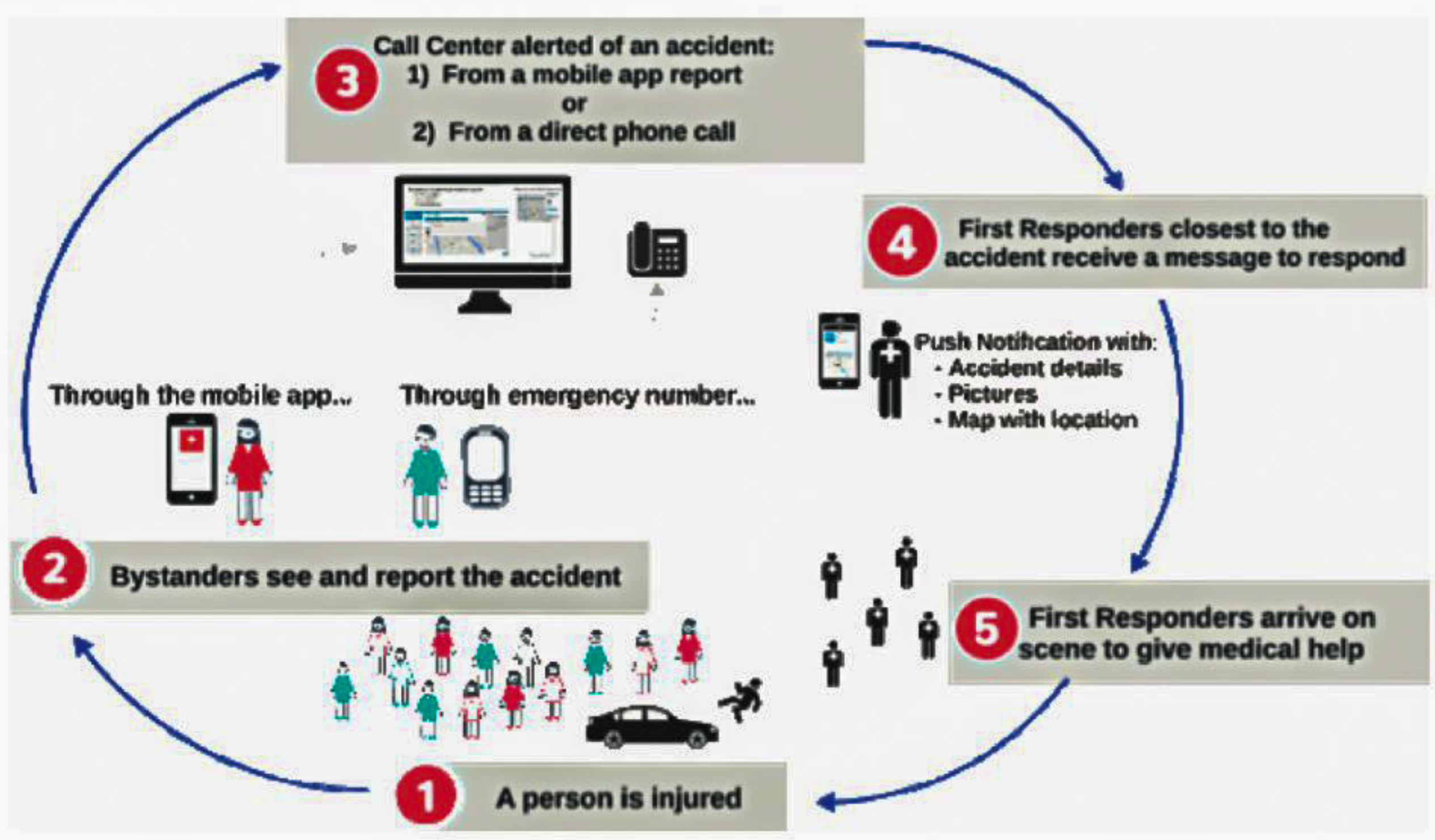
"For every two people who die in the US in road accident injuries, 160 people die in Bangladesh. And, most of them are young and of working age," Farrell said.

More than 85 percent of accident victims are estimated to die before they reach the hospital, she said.

Months after the Rana Plaza disaster, she came back to Bangladesh as a Fulbright Scholar to research on accidents and see how a project like CriticalLink could save lives.

That's when she met Rahat Hossain, then a BBA student of East West University, who along with his friends had actively taken part in rescue operations of Rana Plaza disaster.

They were trained youths on emer-



gency medical services with a grant from the US State Department.

Rahat, engaged in volunteering since his school life, and Farrell decided to train volunteers as well as connect them through the app so that they could be dispatched immediately in emergencies and act, from giving first aid to transporting the patients to hospitals.

They then arranged a meeting attended by some 200 youths. That's how they formed the teams of volunteers and began training. A tech company, Bangla Trac-Miakhi VAS, partnered with them in developing the app.

HOW IT WORKS

Anyone can download the app in their smart phones and get registered. The users can call CriticalLink call centre in Dhaka open from 8:00am to 11:00pm or simply report an accident, said CriticalLink Program Director Rahat Hossain.

"One can also find the nearest police station, fire station, hospital and their phone numbers in the app," he said.

CriticalLink notifies the closest first responders who are divided into eight zones -- Dhaka, Mirpur, Uttara, Banani, Mohammadpur, Gulshan, Mirpur, Lalbagh and Old Dhaka.

"The first responders provide first aid, if needed, and transport the patients to the nearest hospital by rickshaw or auto-rickshaw. They can

also ask for police help," said Farrell.

Earlier CriticalLink only sent notifications via the app, but now it also sends texts.

They are currently working on road accident victims, lives of many of whom could have been saved if there was something like 999 or 911, dial codes in the UK and the US that ensure emergency services in minutes.

Until such services are available in Bangladesh, there are trained volunteers like Zakaria Alam, a BBA graduate.

He recalled a day in April 2015. Zakaria and his friend were spending free time beside the lake on the road north of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Suddenly they heard screams and rushed to find an old tea vendor with critical injuries to his head following an accident with an auto-rickshaw.

Zakaria used his training to stop bleeding, and took him to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital. The doctor there first refused to treat him and suggested the injured be taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

They identified themselves and insisted that the man's head be at least bandaged. The doctor eventually agreed and even personally arranged an ambulance to take the man to DMCH.

"It was so gratifying. I have a deep feeling for those with head injuries because my father and uncle were killed after serious head injuries in an

accident in Jhalakathi in 2013," he told this correspondent.

"It would not have been possible without the first aid training I had from CriticalLink," Zakaria said.

Farrell said they select the volunteers just based on their desire to help, and that they do not provide them any incentives. "Social recognition is something that they get. However, we are thinking how we could give them some incentives," she said.

THE FUTURE?

"We are hoping to have a number like 911. We need support from the telecom companies and the government to expand this service throughout the country," Farrell said.

For the emergency services to improve, the government has to ensure adequate ambulances, trained paramedics on emergency services, improve hospital services on emergency situations so that none can deny treatment to patients, she added.

For now, CriticalLink is operating with the small amount of money it receives as fee for the first aid training to volunteers and corporate houses.

"We are thinking about licensing the app and allow others to use it in various cases, including stopping sexual harassment," she added.

"Our goal is to take this mobile app and location-based dispatch centre anywhere in the world where people need help," she said.

Nepal moves

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scheduled for November 9-10 in Islamabad, but it was postponed by the host country on Friday after six member states expressed their unwillingness to take part, citing different reasons, including increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in the region and growing interference in the internal affairs of member states by one country.

Meanwhile, a regional conference on Saarc's effectiveness, which concluded in Kathmandu yesterday, suggested holding the 19th Summit on schedule. It also called upon the platform to change the venue, if needed.

Following Pakistan's announcement, Indian external affairs ministry spokesperson Vikas Swarup tweeted, "We note Pakistan's decision to postpone Saarc Summit. They've been compelled to recognise the regional sentiment against terrorism."

Speaking to journalists at Tribhuvan International Airport on his arrival home from New York, the Nepalese foreign minister said Saarc is an important forum for advancing

regional cooperation and development.

He also underlined the fact that harmonious relations among the member states would enhance utilisation of the association and boost regional development.

Former Nepalese prime minister Madhav Kumar said the next Saarc Summit should be held without any unnecessary delay.

"While the Islamabad summit is deferred for now, with an understanding of all member states, we can even broach the idea of finding an alternative venue for holding the next summit at the earliest possible date," he was quoted as saying by The Himalayan Times yesterday.

In another development, a high level meeting called by the Nepalese PM in Kathmandu yesterday decided that efforts would be made to reach out to other countries to ensure that the Saarc project goes on.

Earlier, the Maldives on Friday night joined with the boycotting countries by announcing to pull out of the summit and called for taking required measures to convene the summit soon.

Change draft

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people's economic and social welfare, as "Essential Information Infrastructures".

"If someone commits any offence against the Essential Information Infrastructures, then he or she has to face maximum 14 years and minimum two years in jail or a maximum fine of Tk 1 crore or both," according to the draft.

Speaking at the programme, Shahdeen Malik yesterday said, "There may have been necessity to enact a law to deal with the cyber crimes... but 90 percent of the draft [of Digital Security Act] is unacceptable."

"A total change is needed," he said, adding the main problem of the draft is it gives a "sweeping" definition of the crimes.

Tahmina Rahman, country director of Article 19 Bangladesh, said definitions of many crimes mentioned in the draft are "overbroad and wide" and there is a possibility of misuse of the sections.

"Several activities were brought under the purview of cyber terrorism... it is not clear what is the relation

between the activities brought under the purview of cyber terrorism and terrorism. There is ambiguity which should be reviewed," she said.

Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer who works on human rights, however, said there is no necessity of enacting Digital Security Act at all.

He mentioned that there are Penal Code, ICT Act, and Pornography Control Act, and the crimes for which the government is going to enact the Digital Security Act, are well covered by these acts.

The government can bring necessary amendments to the laws if it thinks necessary but no new law is needed, he said.

Those who spoke at the programme include Mahbubur Rahman, associate professor of Dhaka University law department; Syeed Ahamed, founder and CEO of Institute of Informatics and development, and Tasaffy M Hossain, founder of Bonhishikha.

Moderated by Prof Shahnaz Huda, it was held at Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU).