

CHILD MORTALITY REDUCTION

How Bangladesh is faring

NAWSHAD AHMED

CHILD mortality reduction was a crucial aspect of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is considered to be an important indicator of socioeconomic advancement under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Target 3.2 under Goal 3 of the SDGs calls for ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age.

Bangladesh has fared well with respect to reduction of child mortality which is measured by under-five mortality rate (U-5MR) and infant (children under one year of age) mortality rate (IMR). The U-5MR has gone down from 146 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 84 in 2000 and further reduced to 46 per 1,000 live births in 2014 (Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2014). The infant mortality rate (IMR) likewise came down from 92 per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 58 in 2000 and 38 in 2014 (BDHS 2014).

Bangladesh met the MDG target with respect to child mortality reduction. The socioeconomic improvements in the country in the past decades have contributed to this success. The country's GDP has grown at a rate of about six percent on average and the GDP per capita increased from USD 206 in 1980 to USD 1,044 in 2014.

The reduction of population living below the poverty line from 56.7 percent in 1990 to 24.8 percent in 2015 has also

had a positive impact on child mortality reduction and this led to Bangladesh achieving the MDG target of poverty reduction as well. As an SDG target for 2030, we need to now strive to achieve an under-five mortality rate of 25 per 1,000 live births.

It is important to note that the highest number of deaths of children occurs in the early months of life which is caused by complications largely associated with conditions of pregnancy and safe delivery. Low birth weight, one of the most important factors in neo-natal mortality, is an outcome of several conditions in pregnancy including infections, maternal malnutrition,

The slow improvement of exclusive breastfeeding rate since 2007 which rose from 43 percent to 55 percent in 2014, is a cause for concern. About 26 percent of babies born with low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams) in the country are more prone to diseases.

Micronutrient deficiencies remain high which has been demonstrated by low iodised salt intake. About 46 percent households are not adequately consuming iodised salt (Bangladesh Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey, 2013). There is significant deficiency in Vitamin A among children—about 20 percent of children are not receiving Vitamin A. It is clear that child malnutrition is still high

percent deliveries take place in a health facility. The water supply situation has improved greatly and 97.9 percent of the people had access to an improved water source in 2014. The percentage of households with access to sanitary facilities stood at 76.8 percent in 2014 (BDHS 2014).

It is to be noted that considerable inequality persists in the performance of child mortality reduction among different economic groups. The under-five mortality rates are as high as 79 per 1,000 live births for the poorest compared to 35 for the richest quintile of the population.

In 2013, the government committed itself to reducing child mortality under an international initiative called "A Promise Renewed" and in 2014 it developed "Bangladesh Every Newborn Action Plan." This is a comprehensive plan to deal with both the supply and demand sides of the child and maternal mortality issue.

Although Bangladesh has made progress in delivering primary healthcare to the people, the country has only 2.2 nurses and midwives per 10,000 population. In 2012-2013, the government allocation to the health sector was 4.1 percent of the total budget which needs to be increased.

In order to bring down child mortality further, several areas are recommended for improvement. These are: (a) stronger communication/social mobilisation campaigns using appropriate messages with special focus on diarrhoea, malaria, immunisation, and feeding practices; (b) energising the EPI to reach 100 percent coverage of children; (c) making available widely oral rehydration salts (ORS); (d) comprehensive coverage with micronutrient supplements such as vitamins A, D, iodised salt, de-worming tablets, and iron supplements for women; (e) making impregnated bed nets universally available including in all malaria endemic areas, and supporting communities with re-impregnation logistics; (f) empowerment of women and development of their socioeconomic status; and (g) making efforts to end child marriage: child marriage has many negative consequences including early pregnancy, birth complications and babies born with low birth weight.

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Impending Aedes outbreak in the city

Launch massive campaign to prevent it

OFFICIALS from the directorate of health are raising the alarm on a spike of dengue cases in the city. According to official data, there have been 6,479 cases since January which is three times the number a year before. The threat has evolved into type 2 and type 3, which means that with the advent of new varieties of dengue virus, the risk of infection has also multiplied. Experts are calling it "cross-infection" where a patient may be bitten multiple times and that increases the fatality levels for patients.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) that carried out another survey from July 31 to August 9 found that 66 percent areas under Dhaka North City Corporation and 61 percent areas of Dhaka South City Corporation are "risky". While it is very easy to point the finger at the two city corporations for not doing enough, we have to agree that residents also need to keep their homes and surrounding areas clean and dry—so that breeding grounds for this deadly mosquito are curtailed.

Of course this will not be easy. The bulk of Dhaka's population come from rural areas and residents are lacking in knowledge about the necessity of a clean environs. The authorities need to partner with both print and electronic media to launch a massive public awareness-raising campaign. Local community organisations, both NGOs and voluntary organisations, need to be mobilised to take the message to the people that unless they clean up their homesteads, the Aedes mosquito menace cannot be combated effectively. The two city corporations need to increase their budgets to clean the water bodies in the city too. If we are to stop this very real public health hazard, everyone must pitch in.

Threat of militancy persists

We mustn't lower our guard

AFTER a brief hibernation, terrorism tried to rear its ugly head, again. On Friday, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) carried out an operation targeting a house in Mirsarai, Chittagong. During the operation, two JMB operatives exchanged fire with the law enforcement agency before exploding suicide bombs, killing themselves, according to the police investigators' primary findings. The RAB recovered a considerable amount of explosives, arms, and grenade-making materials in the aftermath of the eight-hour-long operation.

The militants apparently were living in the house under the guise of workers in a local factory, meaning they are infiltrating the society instead of simply going into hiding. While it is an example of the successful use of advanced technological equipment—to intercept terrorists' communications—by counterterrorism agencies, they should also focus on increasing their human intelligence capabilities.

As those militants plotted to carry out subversive activities in the Chittagong court, it should be interpreted as the latest incident of the JMB trying to recoup its strength. In August, this newspaper reported how the organisation is raising funds through robbery and other illicit means to reorganise.

In July, JMB also claimed to have killed a secular writer and publisher. What's more, according to multiple media reports, the organisation is trying to elevate itself from a local militant outfit to an international umbrella organisation that would unify several militant factions across South Asia. Therefore, with elections looming large, we cannot afford to let our guard down when it comes to surveilling extremist activities.

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malaria, hepatitis and anemia. Complications in delivery can endanger both the lives of the mother and the newborn.

As the child grows, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections, malaria, and vaccine preventable diseases continue to cause under-five morbidity and mortality. These diseases can even accelerate deaths of children if they are suffering from malnutrition. About 45 percent under-five mortality is attributable to malnutrition.

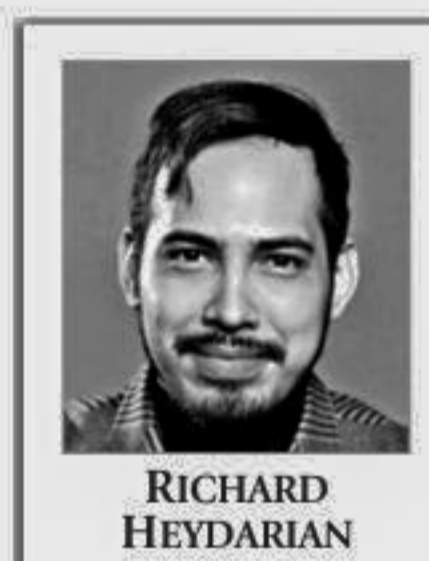
To understand the child malnutrition situation in the country, one important indicator we need to consider is the rate of underweight children which decreased from 57 percent in 2000 to 32.6 percent in 2014 (BDHS 2014). Again, the percentage of stunted children declined from 51 in 2004 to 36 in 2014 (BDHS

and needs to be addressed to further reduce under-five mortality in the country.

The Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) is being implemented for the past several decades now and it is an important way to deal with vaccine preventable diseases. About 84 percent of children aged 12-23 months are fully immunised in the country, as per data obtained in 2014, which is a major achievement. However, efforts should be made to fully immunise 100 percent of children in the country.

The incidence of diarrhoea among under-five children in 2014 was reported at 3.9 percent. The prevalence of malaria per 100,000 population was 777 in 2008 which came down to 434 in 2014. Nationwide, 43.5 percent of births are assisted by a skilled person and some 31

We need strong states, NOT STRONGMEN



RICHARD HEYDARIAN

"THE state, it is me" (l'état, c'est moi), Louis XIV famously said, though it's likely an apocryphal account—a metaphor for the megalomaniac rule of the French

monarch. And here lies the fundamental defect of strongmen, for they conflate the state with their own very being.

On the surface, there seems to be nothing wrong with that. If anything, the rise of right-wing populism in recent years shows the enduring appeal of "strongmen" and the notion of "political will" as some kind of magical solution to complex problems of 21st-century globalisation.

I call this the "strongman syndrome," a political delusion with potentially dangerous consequences that are yet to be fully apparent to all. From childhood, we have been bombarded with fantastical accounts of how a single person could supposedly change the course of history with sheer political will and unremitting determination.

To be sure, one can't deny human agency, and there have been countless unquestionably good men and women who played a crucial role in steering the arc of history in the direction of freedom and justice. The likes of Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. come to mind.

And there are also many great

statesmen, from Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Deng Xiaoping, who not only helped save their nations from ruin, but also laid the foundation for great prosperity.

Yet, as Lord Acton memorably observed, the problem with power is that it "tends to corrupt" and "absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Strongmen come in many forms. There are the tyrannical types who simply

and balances provides unlimited room for abuse as well as miscalculation by the single ruler and his/her coterie. Think of Mao's Great Leap Forward, Stalin's great purges and Hitler's Holocaust, or the list of the world's most corrupt leaders, who were almost all dictators.

Thus, the greatest invention of the past millennium was arguably the modern state, namely the impersonal institutions that protect general welfare through rule

Japan, were largely feudal, impoverished societies under the command of absolutist monarchs.

The modern state, however, changed everything, because it brought about what sociologist Michael Mann calls "infrastructural power," namely the uniform application of law as well as the widespread availability of public goods, as opposed to "tyrannical power," which is the ability of a ruler to oppress and



A worker puts a fresh coat of paint on Tiananmen Square's main gate under the watchful eye of chairman Mao Zedong in Beijing. The absence of checks and balances in a country provides unlimited room for abuse—examples include Mao's Great Leap Forward, Stalin's great purges and Hitler's Holocaust.

PHOTO: STEPHEN SHAVER/AFP

impose their will on the rest of the society. They see the state as nothing but their private patrimony, with individuals as simply subjects rather than citizens.

There are also the populist types who claim to be the sole representative of the voice of the people (vox populi). Thus, once in power, they see the state as nothing but an instrument for the fulfilment of their populist agenda, at the expense of anyone who dares to oppose them.

In both cases, the leader is the state, and his/her will is the law of the land. And here lies the source of the biggest historical disasters: The absence of checks

of law. Without strong states, even the best-intentioned and most skilful leaders are impotent to effect positively transformative change.

But what is a "strong" state? The modern state has two key elements: (1) autonomy from rapacious elites and pressure groups that place private interest over public welfare; and (2) capacity to ensure law and order as well as deliver basic goods and services for the society. A strong state, therefore, is autonomous and bureaucratically capable.

Prior to the advent of the modern state, today's leading industrialised nations, from Germany to France and

pillage in his/her constituency.

As former US president Barack Obama rightly told his African counterparts in 2009, the continent "doesn't need strongmen, [but] it needs strong institutions." He could have said exactly the same thing about the Philippines, which never lacked strongmen and populists who brought more misery than progress, but is yet to possess a strong state.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Dhaka facing the threat of soil liquefaction

Recently, the world has witnessed a devastating 7.5 magnitude earthquake in Indonesia that took away nearly 1,400 lives. Some disturbing video clips have gone viral on social media, depicting how buildings collapsed as soon as the waves hit them. It was because of the saturated soil beneath the buildings. The ground failure through which soil loses strength and stiffness in response to, for example, an earthquake is known as soil liquefaction.

In Dhaka city, numerous studies and press reports have shown how unscrupulous real estate companies and influential individuals continue to encroach on the flood flow zones, wetlands and low lands. They fill up these lands and construct buildings there. Many structures were built just above sand and solid waste, making them very susceptible to soil liquefaction in the event of an earthquake.

Dhaka might face a catastrophe too if RAJUK doesn't reclaim the illegally grabbed lands and put into place a proper land use system.

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