

## Unfit vehicles should be taken off the roads

*BRTA and vehicle owners must heed HC directives*

IN a new directive to vehicle owners, the High Court on July 23 instructed them to collect fitness certificates for their vehicles within two months. The HC also said that vehicles without valid documents will not be allowed to ply the roads after September 30. The directives are very timely, given that unfit vehicles are one of the major reasons for road accidents across the country.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) estimates that a total of 4,79,320 vehicles without valid fitness certificates are running on the roads across the country—and of them 2,61,113 are operating in Dhaka division. What we do not understand is what the BRTA has been doing when these vehicles are running right under its nose. Tracking these vehicles and taking action against their owners should not be so hard since these vehicles are already registered. Also, why don't the traffic police take any action against them? Although the BRTA has reportedly filed cases against many of these vehicle owners for not abiding by the rules and has also fined a number of them, as it seems, such actions are not enough to stop unfit vehicles from plying the roads.

The BRTA should exercise the power it has been given to make our roads safe for commuters. It should run mobile courts against unfit vehicles, as the court has directed, and also make sure that all the vehicles have their fitness checked and certificates renewed on time. Moreover, it should take stringent action against the drivers without valid driving licenses as well as the high number of vehicles that are not registered but are running on the roads.

## Railway cannot avoid responsibility

*Stop making excuses and enforce authority*

ALTHOUGH the railway top boss would like us to believe that his ministry is in no way responsible for casualties occurring at unauthorised level crossings, we beg to differ. We do so because although these crossings were built without the railway's permission, it falls on the ministry to take strong action against those flouting the rules. The issue was covered by us in an earlier editorial a few days ago and there it was pointed out that one of the reasons why government bodies did not take prior consent from railway is because it entails a large fee. Now, either the ministry should rethink its fee structure or enforce its mandate in removing the illegal crossings set up by various governmental organisations. There really is no middle ground here.

At the recently held press conference at Rail Bhaban, the minister further stated that notices would be served to government organisations that built these illegal crossings. But, why serve notices? Why not act against unauthorised activity and demolish these illegitimate crossings? The data speaks for itself: 122 people killed and 296 wounded in 103 rail-related incidents as of July 15, 2019. These were preventable deaths and merely transferring railway officials or suspending them from active duty will not solve the problem.

Rather, proactive measures like preventing the building of these illegal level crossings or demolishing them would serve public interest. Furthermore, the ministry should ask for additional budgetary allocations to properly man the ones that are legal so that people do not have to fall victim to deadly collisions with locomotive engines at these crossings.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### More attention needed for flood victims

Every year, scores of people die or get displaced due to floods in Bangladesh, particularly in the northern parts of the country. And this year hasn't been any different: nearly three million people have already been affected by floods. Some of the areas of the northern part of the country have been under water for weeks now.

According to many reports, floods have killed nearly 100 people and affected more than 10,000 people across the country in the last 20 days. The situation has not changed much, and the people out there are living miserable lives. According to locals, the funds disbursed for the victims are also not reaching the targeted people due to mismanagement.

Providing proper relief for flood victims should be a prime focus for the government. Long-term policymaking and sustainable initiatives must be considered to prevent floods from endangering people in the future. Citizens in privileged positions should also extend a helping hand to these vulnerable people who are having to deal with this horrible state of affairs.

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Houses are seen flooded in Kurigram, July 15

PHOTO: REUTERS

## DENGUE EPIDEMIC IN THE CAPITAL

# City corporations' inaction and people's woes



NAZNIN TITHI

WITH more than three and a half lakh people already having been infected with dengue fever, as per a report by the daily *Prothom Alo* on July 23, the dengue situation in the country has gone totally out of control. However, data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) shows that a total of 7,766 people have been infected till July 23 this year. This is because the DGHS only keeps track of data of some particular hospitals and clinics, and those who were infected but did not go to a hospital were excluded from government estimates.

The national dailies kept tabs on the dengue situation from time to time, starting from early this year. But the reports could hardly make the authorities, who are entrusted with the responsibility of mosquito control in the city, act. Now that the situation has taken a critical turn, with public health experts and the High Court terming the disease an epidemic, and after several directives given by the HC to the two city corporations, suddenly the authorities seem to have woken up to this horrid reality. Both the city corporations, the DGHS, as well as the LGRD ministry have now begun planning in terms of taking preventive measures to stop the disease from spreading further.

The city corporations' lackadaisical response to the HC directives has raised a question about their efficiency in people's minds. It was evident from their inaction that they did not take the issue of mosquito control seriously when the HC, on July 2, directed them to take steps to prevent mosquito menace and control the spread of dengue for the first time.

As the city corporations were not doing anything substantial to contain the outbreak, on July 14, the HC again directed the relevant authorities to take steps within 24 hours. And finally, on July 17, when the HC termed the dengue outbreak an epidemic and slammed the two city corporations for their failure to combat the mosquito menace, the two city corporations seemed to begin giving the issue some importance.

Reportedly, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has cancelled leave of all officials of its waste and health management departments in a bid to control the spread of the disease. The Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) authorities have also opened a hotline number for its residents to provide primary healthcare facilities. Also,



On July 23 alone, a record 473 people were hospitalised in the city due to dengue fever.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

committees have been formed in every ward of the city to raise awareness about the disease.

But the question is, are these steps making any impact? *Prothom Alo* on July 24 reported that the city corporations' mosquito control activities are nothing but superficial. And till now, we have not seen any progress in the situation, as more and more patients are being admitted to city hospitals every day. On July 23 alone, a record 473 people were hospitalised in the city.

It is simply not understandable as to why the city corporations would have to wait for the HC's directives to do something which should be their routine work. Many city dwellers do not even remember the last time they heard of the fogging machine or witnessed any cleaning drives in their area.

And what about the mosquito control department? Despite the city dwellers' sufferings because of the mosquito menace, the department, with their 281 staff members, has been sitting idle. In fact, many residents of Dhaka have come to know about the existence of the department only recently. Although the department, established in 1948, had been very effective in fighting malaria back then, it is not empowered enough to act on its own in the present day. The irony is that the office building of the department itself is now serving as a mosquito-breeding ground, as one of our reporters found while visiting the place recently. Although experts suggested that

the department should be brought under the two city corporations, we haven't heard of any decision regarding this yet.

Let me now come to the issue of ineffective insecticides. On July 9, *Prothom Alo* ran a report on how traditional insecticides have been failing to kill the Aedes mosquitoes. According to their report, the scientists of icddr,b had done a research study from December 2017 till March 2018 and found Aedes mosquitoes to be resistant to the regular insecticides. The research findings were revealed on May 22, 2018 before the relevant authorities. Research done by the Health Directorate in 2018 also found the same. But what is most unfortunate is that 14 months after informing the research findings to the concerned authorities, no decision was taken to buy new, effective insecticides. What is more, the committee formed recently to decide on the new insecticides has not yet held a single meeting.

What was most surprising was that although the two city corporations knew that the age-old insecticides were not effective anymore, they still bought the same insecticides in the last fiscal year. Reportedly, the DSCC bought insecticides worth Tk 19 crore and the DNCC worth Tk 18 crore.

When it was reported that the traditional insecticides were not effective, one of our mayors commented that the insecticides they were using to kill the mosquitoes were "slightly less effective than promised." And when deaths of

dengue patients were already reported in the media, instead of assuring the public that appropriate action was being taken, he told the city residents not to panic. It was evident from the mayor's comments that the city corporations were, in fact, clueless about the impending danger of dengue outbreak.

Dengue fever was first detected in Bangladesh in 2000. Over the years, the disease has taken a deadly form, as apparently, the serotype of the virus has changed. And according to healthcare professionals, dengue is now an endemic disease in the country, meaning that it is here to stay throughout the year. It is also feared that the dengue situation will become more severe with each coming year.

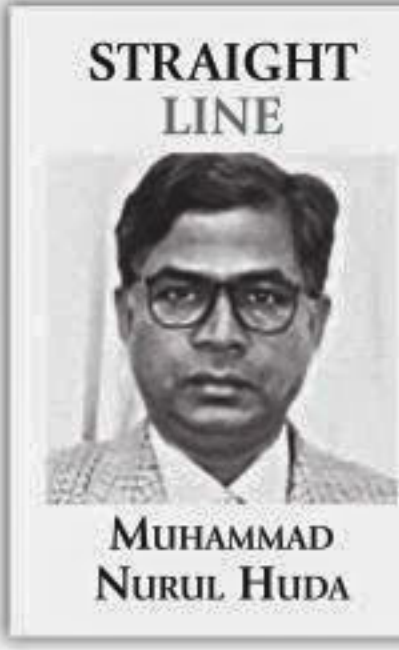
What it means for the two city corporations is that they will constantly have to be on high alert, especially during monsoon which is the breeding season of the Aedes mosquitoes. As for now, they should continue with their cleaning drives and awareness campaigns. They should also import new insecticides as early as possible.

If both the city corporations perform their responsibilities efficiently from now onwards, there is still a chance that we will win against this disease this time. Already 28 lives have been lost because of our negligence. We hope no more lives will be lost to this preventable disease.

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## Flashes of good governance

### *Police's efforts to sanitise recruitment*



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

IT is quite often that we are reminded of the pre-eminent virtues of good governance. Academics and practitioners of all categories have not missed any opportunity to appraise that all our efforts for socio-economic development will be set at naught if we cannot ensure good governance. As of now, experts are telling us that our ambitious and forward-looking budget will not bear the desired fruit if we cannot ensure propriety and discipline in the actual expenditure process.

The imperative of good governance applies in equal measure, if not more, to the regulatory organs of the state. In fact, where freedom and liberty are inextricably linked to the performance of a class of public servants, the necessity and urgency of good governance could hardly be overemphasised. In specific terms, this writer is pointing to the pressing need of ensuring good governance in the police organisation.

Good governance in police has multiple dimensions and for practical reasons it is not intended to dwell on various facets in this write-up. We may perhaps focus on the issue relating to recruitment in subordinate ranks of police organisation. In fact, the recruitment process deserves greater attention due to the simple reason that entry into law enforcement service cannot be done in an unlawful and unethical manner without serious detriment to the integrity of the criminal justice system.

Media reports on the unhealthy meddling in the recruitment process of the police, particularly in the subordinate ranks, are a sad reality. There is perhaps a lack of realisation that however good the organisational structures, the procedures



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PHOTO: STAR

and methods, it is the personnel who translate policy and strategy into action.

Unfortunately, we have not adequately appreciated that the nature of the police's role in a democracy requires that its members should be selected impartially—that they should be administratively competent, politically neutral, and imbued with the spirit of service. Police officers enjoy vast powers under the law and exercise wide discretion. Therefore, the recruitment process should be so devised that they are free from political, personal or corruptive influences.

It is in such a background that we may look at the laudable efforts of Bangladesh Police to ensure malpractice-free recruitment of nearly 10,000 constables in the recent past. Senior officials of the

police hierarchy are confident that the overwhelming majority of these entrants have been appointed on the basis of merit without any influence-peddling. A good number of print and electronic media reports attest to that assertion.

This writer would like to mention, amongst others, the inspiring ventures of Jashore District Police that recruited nearly 200 personnel in an impartial and transparent manner. Recruitment test for the post of Trainee Recruit Constable (TRC) was held in Jashore from June 22 to June 27. A total number of 1,950 candidates appeared for the test in the Jashore Police Lines Field. After examination and scrutiny, a total number of 193 candidates were selected.

The distribution of the occupation of

the guardians of the candidates selected was: 37 percent farmers (number of selected candidates was 72); 17 percent small businessmen (number of selected candidates was 32); 15 percent service (number of selected candidates was 29); 23 percent day labourers/rickshaw-pullers/barbers (number of selected candidates was 43); eight percent guardians who died (number of selected candidates was 17).

It is interesting to note that one Shahab Ali, an appointee, son of a hairdresser in Jhikargacha Upazila, did not know that he would be a proud member of Bangladesh Police by dint of his merit and qualification. He, however, appeared at the selection field being motivated by the extensive publicity campaign by the Jashore District Police, regarding open, competitive and fair recruitment. Many other candidates like Shahab Ali have been selected for the post of police constable through a transparent manner on the strength of qualifications. As can be seen from the above distribution, many of these constables are wards of farmers, day labourers, rickshaw-pullers, hairdressers and other low-income groups.

The effort to recruit constables in an impartial and transparent manner assumes heightened significance because the large majority of our people have to interact with this rank in their daily course of business. Often, this is the first point of contact. The constables would not be sensitive and responsive to public woes if their entry is subject to a painful extortion process. Without doubt, such appointees will enter as bitter individuals who at the first available opportunity will recoup their investments by misusing coercive powers and discretions. The taxpaying citizens would suffer in the bargain. Surely, this is not desirable. The fair recruitment efforts of Bangladesh Police are a definitive step towards good governance and deserve to be recognised as such.

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