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Change of Kashmir’s status

Scrapping Article 370 and more

IN an unprecedented but not quite unexpected move, the BJP government has scrapped the 70-year-old Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that had accorded a special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In fact, this was one of the points in the BJP election manifesto in the last general election which it has followed through on. But not only that, the BJP government has also bifurcated the state into two with J&K and Ladakh becoming Union Territories, the latter coming under the direct rule of New Delhi.

Admittedly, this is patently an internal affair of India, and under normal circumstances might neither merit any comment nor evoke much international interest were it not for the fact that the issue has to do with J&K. The state has a unique dynamic of its own, and the political developments in Kashmir have both direct fallouts and trickle-down effects. It affects not only the countries of South Asia but the consequences also go much beyond the region. One cannot lose sight of the fact that India and Pakistan have gone to war on Kashmir thrice since the partition of the subcontinent.

While it is not for us to question the rationale of the Indian leaders, who in their wisdom have thought it fit to do what they have done with Article 370, one is curious to ask, why, after seven decades, a ruling party in India thought it was appropriate to change a political dispensation accorded to a state whose accession to the Union of India in October 1947 was effected under a situation which was far from normal. While the BJP narrative is that the new arrangement has been compelled by the prevailing internal situation in J&K, the party also feels the new arrangements would enhance the development of the region. However, critics traduce the move as blatantly political and ascribe motives that go beyond the pious desire to bring peace in the valley.

The state of J&K has been strife-ridden for a while but statistics show that the incidents of terror have gone down considerably in the state post-1990s. One only hopes that the desired purpose for which the Act was repealed would be fulfilled, alienation of the people of J&K would disappear, and there would be lasting peace and development in J&K.

How much does a lecture cost?

Expenditure on ‘training’ by EC should be investigated

A news report that was published in the front page of a leading Bangla newspaper on August 6 gives us pause to think about the flagrant way in which money is spent by the Election Commission (EC). EC records show that each commissioner has given 520 speeches in 18 days, which translates into 14 public speeches every day—a feat that is not possible for any human being!

It is the job of the EC officials to carry out training for its officials to conduct elections. So why should they be paid to give lectures? We are informed that people who took money as “special” guest speakers include the chief election commissioner himself, and the four election commissioners. These officials can at best take travel/daily allowance to go to various venues in the country, but what sort of message does it give out when they take money for giving lectures which is their job?

A former election commissioner has stated that during his time in office, no EC official received any monetary benefit for speeches they gave in different parts of the country as part of training officers on the conduct of electoral procedures. The report also points out that a particular secretary, who had been deputed to the EC during the last national elections, had received Tk 47 lakh as a course “adviser”. We are aghast to think that a part of the public money for the purposes of training—a total of Tk 123 crore which was allotted to conduct training for the last general election and upazila elections—has been squandered!

The EC is a constitutional body and it plays a crucial role in conducting elections in the country. The officials employed by the EC are supposed to be people of integrity and hence when questions are raised about the way money meant for training is being spent, it shows blatant disregard for public money by the people running the EC. This is a serious matter and it needs to be properly investigated. As the government has adopted a “zero-tolerance” policy towards corruption, no stone should be left unturned to preserve the sanctity of the office of the EC.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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No scope for outdoor activities for children

Physical activities should be incorporated as a mandatory part of elementary school. The fact that physical exercises and sports are integral for physical and mental development of children is unfortunately not understood by most parents. People think that good grades are what’s most important and therefore physical training takes a backseat.

Insufficient open spaces and little exposure to the natural environment make children over-dependent on electronic devices which ultimately limit their growth. In urban areas, we barely see children running across the field wearing football or cricket gear, and yet we do nothing about it. This essentially points to our indifference and negligence regarding this issue.

It seems like we are failing to acknowledge the pivotal role outdoor activities can play on children’s development. The issue is not given importance even when parents choose schools for their children. Therefore, schools that do not have adequate open space or playgrounds continue to operate. The number of students who have access to playgrounds is negligible compared to those who don’t. Yet, no significant steps are taken by the concerned authorities to address this problem. How long will the government keep turning a blind eye to this issue?

Abu Hasnat Evna Mostafa, by email



TASNEEM TAYEB

specist TV presenter, further added that mosquitoes, in fact, should be allowed to bite humans, except in Africa, where people might get infected with malaria.

Mr Caron perhaps is unaware of the human toll that dengue, a mosquito-borne disease, is taking in South East Asian and South Asian countries, especially in Bangladesh which this year registered the highest number of dengue cases in its history.

In Bangladesh, according to unofficial sources, so far this year, at least 60 people have succumbed to the deadly menace caused by Aedes mosquitoes. And a staggering 27,437 people have been infected with the disease. This is more than double the number of dengue cases last year (10,148). Government figures, however, put the death toll at 18.

With the increase in the number of dengue cases, various narratives have emerged from different quarters, including the government, the city corporation and the politicians. While the prime minister has urged the countrymen to keep their surroundings clean and has instructed her party leaders and activists to conduct countrywide cleaning campaigns to battle the dengue outbreak—with dolled-up celebrities instantly obliging by taking to the streets with brooms to swipe away the mosquitoes—the Local Government Division (LGD) minister of her cabinet, Md Tazul Islam, claimed that dengue was “under control”, as hospitals kept scrambling to accommodate the influx of newly infected patients.

And although DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon has said that dengue “cannot be called an epidemic yet”, the number of people infected by the disease is increasing by the hour, setting a new record for the country, every day. With the health minister, after his recent return from Malaysia, sensing conspiracy centring dengue, it is unclear how many more lives will be wasted before we can counter the conspiracy of the mosquitoes against the human race.

On Monday, the health minister claimed that the number of dengue cases was coming down, the same day 2,065 dengue-infected people were admitted in various hospitals across the country, the highest number of dengue patients to be admitted in hospitals in a day this year. The very same day, the country also witnessed the highest number of deaths (seven) related to dengue in a 24-hour span. Such comments coming from government authorities reflect either their ignorance or their apathy towards the sufferings of the common people.

Narratives have been quick to emerge.

A French animal-rights activist recently said that mosquitoes should be allowed to drink human blood, since they do it to get protein for their eggs. Aymeric Caron, an anti-

What has unfortunately been slow in coming, however, are initiatives by the concerned authorities to tackle the dengue outbreak. From the use of ineffective pesticides to the inadequate supply of mosquito repellents in the market, the people of this country are having to face multiple hurdles day in and day out just to protect themselves and their loved ones from lethal mosquito bites.

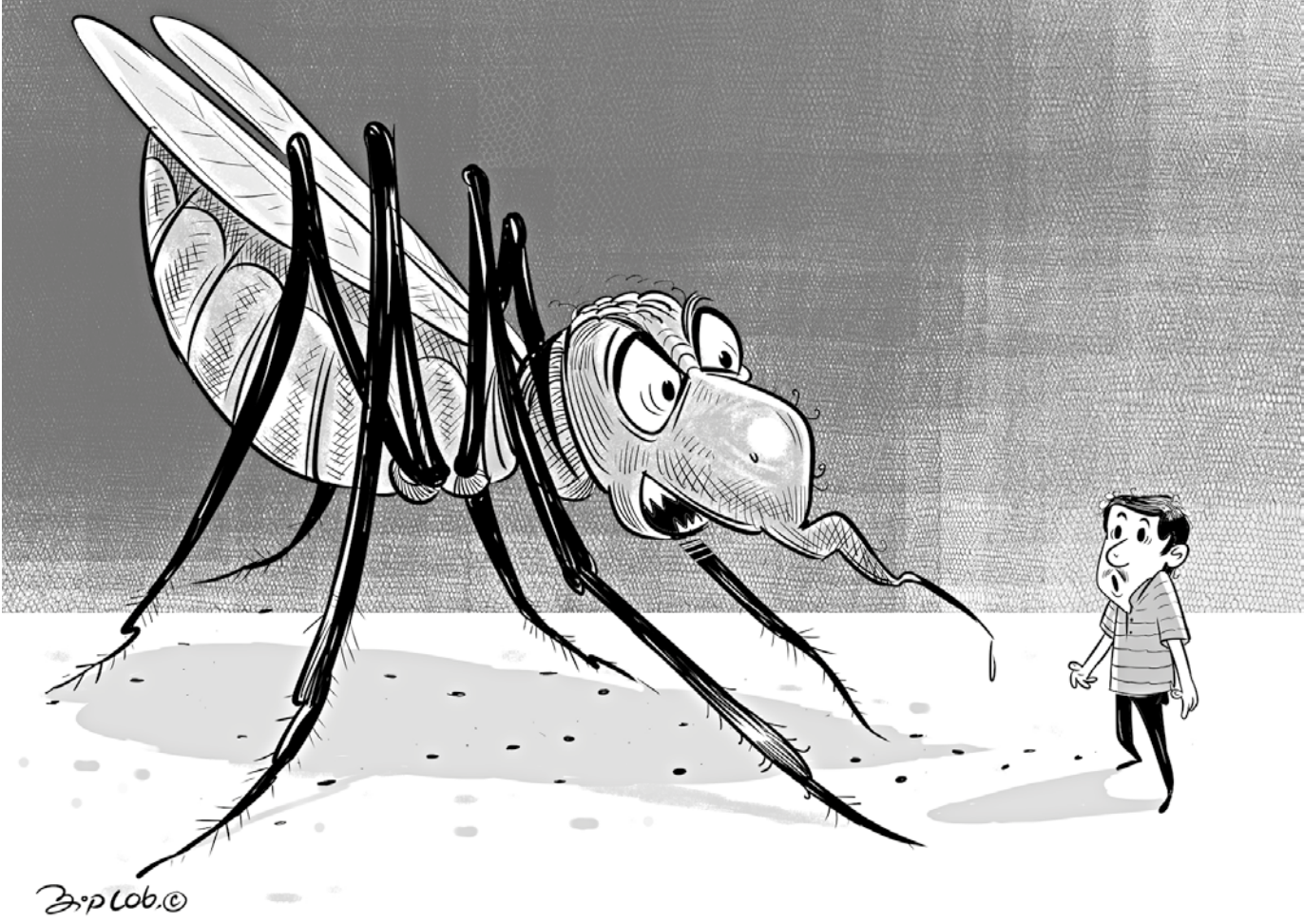
Adult Aedes population in Dhaka has increased manifold over the last few months. According to a report by *The Daily Star*, a recent Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) survey shows that the current density of adult vector Aedes population in the country is 487, which is almost 14 times higher in comparison to

the comparatively limited concentration of Aedes mosquitoes in the off-peak season will only make it easier for the city corporations to contain their numbers.

Professor Rahman also added that spraying pesticides on roadsides is not very effective in containing Aedes mosquitoes; instead focus should be on destroying mosquito larvae, and for this, workers will need to visit individual houses to inspect them and destroy the larvae. A similar view has been shared by the World Health Organization (WHO) which recently suggested that fogging the streets and roadsides might not be effective in destroying mosquitoes, since Aedes mosquitoes travel less and mostly stay in darker places. The WHO recommended

The city corporations’ fix over the pesticide issue and the lack of pace in importing an effective pesticide reflect poorly on their preparedness and ability to combat this disease.

The authorities did take up some measures though, including waiving tax on dengue testing kits, site inspections and fixing rates for dengue tests; however, these measures can at best be considered piecemeal initiatives, with very little impact on long-term protection from the disease. The government’s knee-jerk reaction to the dengue outbreak reveals the lack of a policy framework that is of the essence now, in order to combat and, if possible, eliminate this disease from the country. The government must now roll



only 36 in the pre-monsoon period. The pre-monsoon study was commissioned between March 3 and 12, while the recent survey was conducted between July 17 and 27, in 100 locations around the capital. The survey also reveals that the concentration of mosquito larvae is high, which essentially means more Aedes mosquitoes and a further spread of the disease.

While discussing the ongoing dengue outbreak across the country with this writer, Professor Mahmudur Rahman, former director of Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), suggested that the city corporations should intensively conduct anti-Aedes drives across the country round the year, since dengue is not a seasonal disease. If exhaustive drives are continued throughout the year, it will be easier to combat the prevalence of dengue during the peak season; and

using mosquito aerosol at home and leave temephos, a larvicide, in water containers, to contain mosquito-breeding.

With dengue spreading across the country, one wonders how long it would take for the new insecticides to arrive and contain the situation. On August 2, DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam said that new samples of insecticides to kill mosquitoes “will arrive in a day or two.” According to a newspaper report, DSCC has started testing a sample of a new US-made pesticide since Friday, with a success rate of up to 26 percent. According to the same report, entomologist Professor Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University has suggested that the success rate of a pesticide below 80 percent is not satisfactory. Another sample of pesticides has arrived from India lately, which will also be tested to assess its effectiveness.

up its sleeves and get down to work to prepare a dengue prevention and control policy to curb its increasing menace.

With so many quarters making so many comments, and so little effective action being taken, people have resigned to their fate—living in constant fear of mosquito bites. News of fathers burying little children and husbands burying expecting wives and their unborn babies have become a common feature on the front pages of our newspapers. And amidst all this, the only thing that is shining bright is the failure of the concerned authorities to save people from the grip of a deadly disease that could have been contained at an early stage with comprehensive planning and effective implementation.

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How Bangladesh can improve access to climate funding



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

100 billion every year to support the developing countries tackle climate change, both by mitigation and adaptation.

The UNFCCC also set up the Green Climate Fund (GCF) with its headquarters in Korea to handle a significant part of these funds. The GCF started with around USD 10 billion that has been allocated over the last few years and they are currently seeking a major replenishment from richer countries.

The GCF Board also made a laudable early strategic decision to allocate half the funds to mitigation and half to adaptation and to prioritise the most vulnerable and poorest developing countries for adaptation funds.

In practice, however, while allocation for mitigation projects has been relatively better, allocation for adaptation has been slow and allocation for the poorest and most vulnerable countries has been quite small.

The GCF also laid out a complicated set of procedures for countries to prepare proposals and have national-level accredited institutions to be eligible to submit proposals. This is one of the major reasons for the inability of the most vulnerable developing countries to get accreditation and submit proposals for funding.

The GCF is going to hold its major annual event with partner countries in Korea in late August and this column is the first of three columns that will shed light on the topic of how Bangladesh and other vulnerable countries can more easily access the funds meant to support adaptation actions at national and local levels.

This column will focus on the success (or a lack thereof) of Bangladesh in accessing global climate change funding

accreditation proved to be quite onerous and difficult and only two entities managed to get accredited after nearly two years of back and forth with the GCF.

These two entities are the Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL), which specialises in renewable energy projects for mitigation, and the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), which specialises in adaptation projects, especially for vulnerable communities.



PHOTO: DIN M SHIBLY

from GCF, as well as other sources.

Bangladesh was able to set up its institutions for engaging with the GCF quite quickly. The main National Designated Authority (NDA) on behalf of the government was the Economic Resources Division (ERD) of the finance ministry who then selected and invited six public sector entities to apply for accreditation from the GCF. This process of

Both these agencies are now in the process of submitting project proposals for funding (but none has been approved yet).

At the same time, the government of Bangladesh applied for two projects through multilateral agencies which were already accredited by GCF. The first one was a project for building climate-resilient infrastructure by the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) through

a German development bank called KfW. The second was a project to provide fresh drinking water to pregnant women, and others, in the low-lying coastal districts already suffering from salinity in drinking water which adversely affects pregnant women. This was to be implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MoWCA) submitted through UNDP which is already accredited. Both these projects were finally approved by the GCF and are about to start being implemented by the concerned agencies.

Bangladesh’s success rate in accessing GCF funding has been moderate but not great. It is important that all the relevant institutions both within and outside the government get up to speed in the procedures for accessing climate change funds available through the GCF.

While it has taken a long time to set up the correct institutions and build our own capacity to follow all the complicated procedures of the GCF, we are going up the knowledge curve and need to improve our understanding and performance. This will be particularly important as we enter the next phase to enable NGOs and private sector entities to apply and get accreditation for the private sector window of the GCF which Bangladesh has yet to tap.

Finally, while developing our capacity to access more climate funding, it is also important for us to come up with good monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the money is actually used for the purpose it is meant for. Our access to potentially larger amounts will depend on spending the money we get well and effectively.

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