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FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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How to tackle a dangerous virus

Precaution, not panic, is the answer

No doubt the world is once again witnessing the outbreak of a new virus with a deadliness not witnessed since the SARS virus at the very beginning of the century. Reeling in after the dengue epidemic, Coronavirus presents the country with a new threat. Reportedly, of the 3,000 people who have been infected by this disease so far, the vast majority are living in China. The Chinese city of Wuhan in Eastern China has been the worst affected. The virus is quite similar to SARS, attacking the respiratory system.

Not surprisingly, the world has gone into a reactive overdrive in order to prevent the disease from becoming a global epidemic, and human beings being the vector of the disease, spread of the virus becomes so much easier, and perhaps more difficult to fight. Some are even touting draconian bans on international travel as one of the ways of preventing its spread.

We believe that the government has taken the timely decision of advising people not to panic. But alongside that, it should go on full gear on the public information mode to make people aware of the ways to take precaution against a virus that causes mainly respiratory illness, according to WHO, and to protect them and those around them. We would hope that the authorities have put into effect all necessary measures to prevent the outbreak in the country including a 100 percent screening of incoming passengers at all ports of entry. We commend the government for its decision to repatriate all Bangladeshis living in Wuhan, but that also depends on them having spent the required period in quarantine in China. However, once that is done the authorities should ensure proper screening before they are allowed to mingle with their family.

Furthermore, we must ensure that should the virus reach Bangladesh, we have doctors and staff ready who can treat the patients in a timely manner and take the necessary precautions to stop it from spreading.

West Bengal’s anti-CAA resolution

A moral victory for the secular forces

We are heartened by the news of West Bengal legislative assembly passing a resolution against India’s controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which makes faith a basis for attaining Indian citizenship, discriminating against the Muslims. West Bengal is the fourth Indian state to reject the law, after the Left-ruled Kerala and Congress-ruled Punjab and Rajasthan. These resolutions, which basically asked the central government to withdraw the CAA, are significant because they reflect people’s opinion in individual states and can together turn the tide in favour of the secular forces. The growing list of states rejecting the law also represents the disquiet on the ground, as protests continue to rock the country and spill onto newer territories. Earlier this week, Indian Americans joined by civil rights groups held demonstrations in some 30 US cities demanding the repeal of CAA. On Thursday, the European Parliament is set to vote on a resolution condemning the law and urging the EU’s foreign service to put pressure on New Delhi.

Whether the collective force of these protests and resolutions will make the Indian ruling party see the pitfalls of its divisive policies remains to be seen. We remain hopeful, however, as the people, irrespective of faith, have come out to assert their belief in their shared humanity. As long as they stand firm and united, India’s glorious secular legacy is secure. In Bangladesh, India’s closest neighbour, the CAA and earlier the NRC have caused considerable disquiet as the general public are deeply distrustful of their likely outcome. If India does go ahead with them, there are fears that the fate of Indian Muslims unable to prove their citizenship might directly affect Bangladesh. We have repeatedly expressed our concerns in these columns before, especially with regard to how the contagious rhetoric of the pro-CAA camp might end up escalating tensions in Bangladesh and hurting its communal harmony. Even Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave voice to the concerns last week, by calling the CAA “unnecessary”. As we deeply value our friendship with India, we hope good sense would prevail there and the Indian government would move away from implementing this ill-conceived piece of legislation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

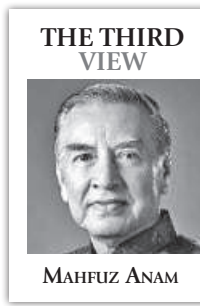
letters@thedailystar.net

Stand up against patriarchy

Women being harassed, whether it be sexually, mentally, physically or otherwise, can almost always be traced back to the roots of patriarchy that are ever so engrained in our society even to this day. It seems that no matter how much of it is discussed, we are yet to weed it out while safety and security still remain a grave concern for us women. Such a mindset where men are allowed to predominate over us simply based on their sex, is indeed illogical. What further fuels this disgraceful societal imbalance is the culture of impunity that the perpetrators so lavishly enjoy. Exemplary punitive measures demand to be enforced.

I have also noticed many parents raising their children in a manner that favours patriarchy, whether intentionally or not, that I do not know. Nonetheless, there is a chance the kids will grow up learning that boys are superior to girls and, god forbid, might in turn pass that to their kids, enabling the cycle to continue. While it is surely a matter of pride that we as a nation have come a long way in our journey towards development, it is utterly disappointing that despite contributing to the progress of Bangladesh equally, if not more than our counterparts, many of us women are yet to break free of the rusty shackles of patriarchy.

Samia Jahan, Rajbari Govt. College



THE THIRD VIEW

election activities on behalf of their respective candidates. The 30-minute clash left 15 people injured including two journalists. Both sides went to the police to lodge complaints. Police accepted that of one side and refused to accept the complaint of the other. Will our readers

LAST Sunday, supporters of the BNP mayoral candidate for Dhaka South, Ishraque Hossain, and those of the AL councillor aspirant, Rokon Uddin Ahmed, clashed while carrying out

power today AL activists would have been similarly treated. We know it, we say it, and yet we expect that things should improve. After all, AL has been in continuous power for the last 12 years (2008 to 2020). Isn’t this long enough time for things to change? Election is not an everyday affair. It comes once after several years. So is it too much for us voters to expect that more tolerance will be shown to the opponents during electioneering?

What is perhaps very worrisome is the partisan behaviour of the police. For, on the election day and the days just preceding it, every step, every gesture, and every statement by the police will have wide impact on the outcome. Voters know well that mayors may come and

police’s role is supremely important for the proper running of a country. If that country runs on democratic principles, as we claim to do, then their functioning as a neutral and non-partisan institution becomes all the more important. Police is not there only to harass, throw tear gas, beat up, and arrest people but also to make people feel safe. They are the institutional representation of the force of the state that people see on an everyday basis. In the villages they are the representative of most things official. Corruption of their image and function amounts to erosion of people’s faith in the state structure itself.

Obviously the image of the police is far removed from the ideal that I have mentioned above. It has come down over

two instances). Their recent behaviour during the so-called “quota” movement and later during the “road-safety” movement by the school and university students have greatly shrunk their public acceptance.

Howsoever corroded their present neutrality may be during normal times, we expect the police to show some semblance of neutrality during the time of election. When that minimum show of neutrality is not forthcoming, then we really need to worry as to how free and fair the upcoming city polls are likely to be. A video that went viral a few days ago shows that a police official was recorded to be using the term “them” and “us” in describing the activists of the two mayoral candidates.

Of equal concern is the role of the Election Commission. Even the secretary general of the ruling AL felt the need to say that the EC could conduct an independent inquiry if it felt necessary. But, not surprisingly, till the writing of this column the EC was not known to have felt that need. Yesterday we carried an op-ed piece which raises many questions about the EC’s activities. We are looking forward to a reply from the EC’s office.

After the national election, we really hoped that the mayoral polls would see initiatives by the EC which will create confidence in the public mind about this election being above board. This, we thought, will happen because the EC needs, desperately, to raise public confidence about its neutrality. Unfortunately, the very reverse has been the experience. Practically none of the opposition objection has been taken seriously. The way one election commissioner has been side-lined and increasingly marginalised just because he happens to disagree with the rest is very disturbing. Not one of his observations have been taken into account. Why? Have his views proved to be outlandish, so devoid of facts, so utterly outrageous that he is no longer to be listened to? Let the EC be warned that the public perception is quite the opposite.

It was also hoped that the government, having spared no effort to entrench itself deeply into the power structure, would feel confident enough to permit a semblance of free play during the city polls to strengthen their democratic credentials.

On both counts of our expectations from the EC and the government, we appear to be totally wrong. So the opposition continues to be harassed, the ruling party continues to flout EC regulations, the police continues to be one-eyed, and the media continue to cry foul. What else is new?

Mahfuz Anam is editor and publisher, The Daily Star.



Supporters of Ishraque Hossain, BNP’s mayoral candidate for the Dhaka South City Corporation elections, clash with supporters of an AL-backed councillor candidate in the capital’s Gopibagh recently.

PHOTO COLLECTED

hazard a guess whose complaint got accepted and whose was refused? Not only that, within hours, five BNP activists, named by the AL, where picked up from various parts of the city. The result, as expected, is the spread of fear among the opposition activists and their natural reluctance to come and canvass for their candidate. And this is happening with days to go before the election.

Election rule violation is normal in our country. So is the dominance of the ruling party of the day. If BNP were in

go; councillors will also come and go and even ruling parties may come and go (seems doubtful at the moment), but they will have to live with the police forever.

Why didn’t the Wari police station accept the BNP complaint? Are we to believe that only BNP activists were the scum of the earth and the other side were followers of Gandhi’s doctrine of non-violence?

Police is an invaluable institution of every modern state. While the army’s role is critical in protecting our sovereignty,

the years, even decades. All succeeding governments have used them for their partisan ends. (Two particular scenes come to my mind at this moment: one of Matia Chowdhury—a famous student leader, veteran politician, and two-time former minister—being assaulted by the police, and one of former BNP mayor Khoka, whose blood-stained picture resulting from police assault we published—both from the vicinity of Jatiya Sangsad. Nothing illustrates better the partisan use of police than these

Why do the most vulnerable communities receive so little of the climate change funds?



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

However, as there are far more poor communities in developing countries, the vast majority of the globally most vulnerable communities are in the poorest developing countries.

Hence, at the international climate change negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Least Developed Countries (LDC) group argued that developed countries should extend funding to support developing countries to tackle climate change, prioritising their most vulnerable communities.

In response to these demands, the developed countries have promised to provide up to USD 100 billion a year from 2020 onwards. They have started to provide some of that money through different channels including the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), the UN agencies, and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

The amount of funding made available has been in the tens of billions so far (no one knows exactly how much, as it is difficult to track) but around 80 percent of that has gone to support mitigation activities to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases; only 20 percent has gone to support adaptation in the poorest developing countries.

Furthermore, only 10 percent of that adaptation funding has reached the most vulnerable communities in the most vulnerable developing countries. Therefore, the proportion of global funding to tackle climate change that actually reaches the most vulnerable communities is only two percent! This is clearly wrong and must be

corrected going forward. I will make some suggestions on how to correct the situation.

The first thing to acknowledge is that we have failed to prioritise the most vulnerable communities—that we are all collectively responsible and need to change our behaviour and procedures.

At the global level, it means that the developed countries who are providing the funds must make it a requirement to track (and report back) on whether the funds are reaching the most vulnerable communities (and how much is reaching them).

now on track and report on how much of their climate change funds (whether from national or international sources) reaches the poorest and most vulnerable communities in their respective countries.

The onus is now also on fund management entities such as the World Bank, UNDP, GCF, etc. to ensure that the highest priority is given to distributing funds to the most vulnerable communities. Unfortunately they don’t have a very good track record so far, so some profound re-thinking is needed to deliver funds more effectively as well as track and report on that delivery.

next few years.

While this is a laudable target, it is not enough if the money does not reach the most vulnerable communities and, even more importantly, does not enhance their adaptive capacity.

So, it is extremely important, also, to develop a system of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) of the CBA, with the first emphasis being on the learning component.

The ultimate goal of enhancing funding and other support to the most vulnerable communities is not just to give them money but to enhance their



The file photo shows floods in Jamalpur district exceeding previous levels that manifests the effects of climate change in Bangladesh.

PHOTO REUTERS

It is also very important for national governments in the developing countries to do the same. It can be argued that one of the key reasons why poor communities are vulnerable is that their own national governments don’t prioritise them in investments and decision making. This is also true in developed countries.

Every national government, both developing and developed, must from

Last week, the Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA), under the co-chairs Ban Ki-moon, Bill Gates, and Kristalina Georgieva, formally launched their locally led Adaptation Action Track to support Community Based Adaptation (CBA) in Dhaka at the Gobeshona conference. They are lobbying for billions of dollars’ worth of global funding to target and reach the most vulnerable communities over the

adaptive capacity in the short to medium term and enhance their resilience in the longer term.

Bangladesh has been a pioneer in developing practices and learning on CBA. We can also lead in this global effort on MEL of the CBA going forward.

Saleemul Huq is Director, International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University Bangladesh.