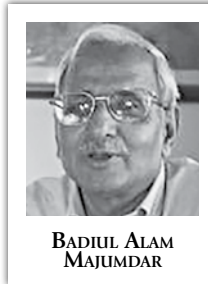


How do we break the chain of coronavirus infection?



BADRIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

DESPITE the claims made a few months ago that Bangladesh has successfully—more successfully than many western countries—beat back the coronavirus, the virus has returned with a vengeance. In the past month, there have been serious spikes in the rates of infections, hospitalisations, and deaths. The government has, therefore, declared a lockdown to deal with the situation.

In my view, lockdown is not the right answer in the long run because its repeated use may paralyse the economy, causing more devastation. More importantly, a lockdown merely represents some temporary, time-bound restrictions, not specific interventions for breaking the chain of new waves of the virus. To permanently break the chain, we need to take some specific actions during and following the lockdown, in addition to expeditiously making vaccines available.

During the past year, The Hunger Project (THP) has been pursuing a Coronavirus Resilient Villages (CRV) initiative in about 1,200 villages around the country. The CRV model is based on the WHO guideline of “risk communication and community engagement”, requiring changes in people’s behaviour. THP feels that the operations of this initiative, supported by the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), would be useful in formulating interventions to stop the virus in its tracks.

Since 2015, THP has been implementing an SDG Union Strategy, involving a three-way partnership between the people, their elected representatives, and a group of volunteers—representing the grassroots level civil society—to localise and achieve SDGs. The CRV initiative is leveraged on this strategy. Last year, the government issued a circular to form Coronavirus Prevention Committees

in Unions, which unfortunately existed largely on paper. THP has reorganised and activated these committees by involving the gatekeepers of the community, including the Union Parishad chairs and members. It has also created CRV Committees in villages, with representatives from all walks of life.

Involvement of the community and creating its ownership are critically important goals of the CRV initiative. From the outset the volunteers tried to bring home the realisation among the villagers that “we are in it together”. They sought to create the mindset that only the individual safety of each person will ensure the collective safety of everyone in the village.

For risk communication and behavioural change, the volunteers carried out 3W campaigns to promote washing hands, watching distances, and wearing masks. To create behavioural change, which is difficult and time-consuming, trained volunteers repeatedly took turns sitting with 20-25 families, using specialised communication materials. They held courtyard meetings to create awareness among mothers against



A quick survey in THP’s working areas revealed that the CRV initiative has been producing very positive results.

PHOTO: THE HUNGER PROJECT

child marriage, violence against women, stigmatisation, and nutrition. In addition, the volunteers recruited imams, priests, and other social leaders to dispel misinformation, disinformation, and myths about the virus. They also helped the villagers get tested, connect to tele-medicine services, get registered for vaccination, and go into isolation/quarantine.

The volunteers worked closely with community clinics and sought to make their management committees active. THP also donated digital thermometers, oximeters, and blood pressure machines to these clinics.

Furthermore, the trained volunteers extended helping hands to those who had lost their livelihoods. They helped eligible individuals enrol in the government’s social safety net schemes. Using community philanthropy, they collected food, money, and materials worth about Tk 4 crores to distribute among vulnerable families.

A quick survey in THP’s working areas revealed that the CRV initiative has been producing very positive results. The rate of mask-wearing in the working areas is nearly 60 percent, compared to about 30 percent in other areas. In addition, the level of awareness among the villagers in these is relatively higher and the number of coronavirus patients and deaths are lower.

We have important lessons to learn from the CRV experiment. One of the lessons is the relevance of experiences of our Liberation War for the current pandemic. In 1971, our father of the nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, asked the people to create fortresses in their villages and neighbourhoods against the enemy. Our people did so, even risking their lives, which enabled us to defeat the mighty Pakistani army, who were highly trained and equipped with modern armaments.

Like during the Liberation War, we will now have to initiate another “people’s war”

against the coronavirus, which is invisible and hence, can be underestimated and ignored. Again, every individual will have to confront this invisible enemy, not with armaments, but by changing our attitudes and behaviour.

Changing people’s behaviour requires honest and transparent communication. However, in the past, communications from some of our policymakers were often misleading and boastful. More seriously, they often claimed that people do not listen to them and do not abide by the health regulations, essentially blaming the victims. In addition, the vaccine rollout seemed to be designed to cater to the educated class with internet access, ignoring the villagers, and also hurt the credibility of the policymakers.

According to WHO, coronavirus will not go away soon, notwithstanding the discovery of the vaccines, and we will have to become resilient. To do so, we will have to rise above our petty partisan interests and unitedly confront the coronavirus in every village and neighbourhood, using the advice of the experts. In doing so, we will have to take people into confidence, and the government, non-government organisations, and local government bodies will have to work shoulder to shoulder to create resilience against the virus.

The CRV approach is designed to create such resilience. In a recent webinar held on April 8, 2021, our planning minister and many experts such as Mushtaq Husain, Muzaherul Huq, Benazir Ahmed, Lenin Chowdhury, and Abu Jamil Faisal recognised the innovativeness and effectiveness of the CRV model. For example, according to Mushtaq Husain, the coronavirus will not go away on its own. Only with CRV-like interventions in villages and cities will we be able to break the chain of virus in even a matter of months and become a model for other countries.

Dr Badriul Alam Majumdar is Global Vice President and Country Director at The Hunger Project.

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The benefits of taking a professional placement year in the UK



C RASHAAD SHABAB

ONE of the most rewarding parts of my job at the University of Sussex is to lead the professional placements programme for the Economics Department. This programme enables

students in our undergraduate programmes to gain a year of graduate-level work experience between their second and final years of study. The skills, knowledge and experience gained during the placement year are not only associated with better future employment outcomes but also appear to improve subsequent academic attainment. Recent revisions to the UK immigration law mean that international students can now fully participate in this powerful tool to embed employability into their academic degrees.

Students registered in placement degrees receive tailored career development support during their first and second years, in addition to the academic support that is shared with their peers. This specialised support ranges from CV editing to training on interview techniques and structured workshops that impart specific skills that are in high demand for employers. Placement students are also given access to a university database of vetted placement opportunities. Perhaps most importantly, aspiring placement students are mentored and advised by final-year students who have successfully completed their professional experience and returned to complete their degrees.

During their second year, placement students apply to jobs they are interested in with the support of all the services

described above. If successful, they secure paid employment that typically commences at some point during the summer after their second-year final exams. During my time as placement lead, our students have secured roles with world-famous brands such as Rolls Royce and L’Oreal; at prestigious consulting houses, including Deloitte and EY; and in impactful public sector roles, such as at the Department for International Trade and the Office for National Statistics.

In contrast to a typical three-year undergraduate degree, placement students register on a four-year version of the degree that includes the placement year. This has implications for student visas: international

students who are interested in placements would be well-advised to register in the four-year degree first, so that they are issued a student visa with an appropriate duration. Opting into the placement year when a student is already in the UK on a three-year student visa may lead to a duplication of visa fees.

The placement year is different from other short-term employment opportunities in that it is an integral part of the student’s academic degree. The student continues to be registered at the university, and the university continues to fulfil a duty of care to the student. All placement organisations are vetted by the university and the employer signs a formal

A further advantage of the placement year is that it is not uncommon for students to receive offers to return to their employers upon completion of their degrees.

peers. Indeed, these students often report that the professional world teaches them to manage their time much more effectively. Returning students also say that they are even more enthusiastic about the academic content of their degrees because they have experienced first-hand how the theories and results that they encounter in the classroom are applied in the real world. Due to these forces, it is common for placement students to graduate near the top of the class.

A further advantage of the placement year is that it is not uncommon for students to receive offers to return to their employers upon completion of their degrees. My department has an especially strong track record of former placement students being recruited to the Government Economics Service’s “Fast Stream” programme upon graduation. The prospect of continued employment with the placement institution after graduation is especially important for international students, given the recent revival of the two-year post-study work visa. Thus, the experience of an international student on a placement degree can be enriched by up to three years of work experience—one year as a part of the four-year degree and two years on the post-study work visa.

After almost a decade of Theresa May’s “hostile environment”, the United Kingdom finally appears to be making reasonable policy choices regarding the tremendous social and economic value brought to these isles by international students. As an ardent proponent of internationalisation, I would strongly encourage international students, including those from my home country of Bangladesh, to participate in these transformative educational opportunities.

Dr C Rashaad Shabab is a Senior Lecturer in Economics at the University of Sussex Business School in the UK.



On average, placement students graduate with far better marks than their non-placement peers.

PHOTO: AFP

memorandum of understanding with the university that clearly spells out their obligations to our students. Throughout the year, the student maintains contact with a member of faculty who advises the student and ensures that they are receiving the necessary support. In this sense, the placement year may be viewed as supported transition to work life.

An unfortunate aspect of many labour markets is that people with family networks get privileged access to scarce employment opportunities. Because of this, it can be difficult for international students, who may not have access to such networks in the UK, to get a foothold in the labour market. A professional placement year can be an important means of integrating with the UK labour market, as it allows students to build their own network of professional contacts while being supported and mentored by the university.

An underappreciated aspect of the placement experience is the extent to which it can improve a student’s academic attainment. On average, placement students graduate with far better marks than their non-placement

QUOTABLE Quote

LEO BUSCAGLIA
American author (1924—1998)

Worry never robs tomorrow of its sorrow, it only saps today of its joy.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Moral flaw
- 5 Enjoys Aspen
- 9 Director Malle
- 11 Some change
- 13 Quarter doubled
- 14 Man with a moral
- 15 Heating choice
- 16 Mark for cancellation
- 18 Comfy shoes
- 20 Private room
- 21 Utopias
- 22 Sunset direction
- 23 Major lang
- 24 Nap site
- 25 Almanac bit
- 27 Secures, as a

DOWN

- 1 Online journals
- 2 Spot
- 3 Long shot
- 4 Men’s store buy

5 A bunch

- 6 Boat bottom
- 7 Illegal investing
- 8 Go pieces
- 10 Herculean
- 12 Depleted
- 17 Print units
- 19 Cooped (up)
- 22 Golfer’s choice
- 24 Winding dances
- 25 Extreme diets
- 26 Invite on a date
- 27 Supply with staff
- 28 Oozy sediment
- 30 Gets up
- 31 Places last
- 33 Small seabird
- 37 Spy grp.

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

SUNDAY’S ANSWERS

S	T	E	P	C	E	D	S
T	E	N	O	R	C	E	D
E	R	A	S	E	N	I	C
A	R	C	S	C	A	T	T
M	A	T	T	E	R	A	L
P	E	C	S	A	F	E	
P	O	L	E	B	A	T	T
P	L	A	T	T	E	R	E
S	I	N	A	I	N	T	R
U	N	I	T	E	S	O	R
P	I	C	A	S	W	A	T

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT