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First step to making online shopping safer

Govt decision on holding payment until product delivery commendable

We commend the commerce ministry's decision to hold the payment of local e-commerce platforms until confirmation of the delivery of their products. This, when it comes to pass, will mean that online buyers will no longer have to worry about cheating or any unusual delay in delivery of goods as it will be in the interest of the e-commerce sites to ensure safe and quick delivery to have their payment cleared—adding, as our report rightly points out, a layer of “consumer protection” to such transactions. Currently, the merchants’ payment is cleared within moments of the customers making transactions through bank cards or the mobile financial services platform. The commerce ministry is reportedly going to send a letter to Bangladesh Bank to work out the logistics of the decision, including how the confirmation of receipt of items would come from the customers.

This is indeed good news and the first step to making online shopping safer in Bangladesh's largely chaotic and still-unregulated e-commerce scene. It comes following complaints of unusual delays in product delivery with some platforms building their business model around advance payments from customers, leaving them at the mercy of the former. The success of the new directive, however, will depend on how effectively the payment gateways can be controlled. It will require Bangladesh Bank, which will play the role of a gatekeeper, to build a functional monitoring and clearance system while making sure it doesn't add to the customers' sufferings by making delays on its part.

This is going to be a gargantuan task, however, given the number of online buyers which saw a rapid increase during the pandemic. According to a report citing data from the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB), the sales of products through digital platforms went up 70 percent year-on-year in 2020. More than 160,000 deliveries are reportedly made in a single day in the country. Is the central bank equipped and properly staffed to clear payments for such a large number of deliveries each day? Should the directive apply equally to small transactions? What will happen to the platforms that fail to ensure safe delivery of goods? Evaly, for example, reportedly had delivery pending on goods worth Tk 213.9 crore as of March 14. What punitive measures will be taken in such cases? How to ensure the quality of products sought by consumers?

The e-commerce business landscape is still a developing one and there are, naturally, as many questions as there are answers. Its fast expansion means that many directives that now seem fitting may become obsolete in a few years, but the important thing is to have a digital commerce policy in place, which Bangladesh still doesn't. So while we appreciate the commerce ministry's decision on payments and recommend its quick implementation, we would feel more assured if the decision was part of a comprehensive policy with a well-laid legal framework for registration and regulation, rather than being a one-off initiative brought on by consumer complaints. This is what the policymakers must work on. An e-commerce policy is the need of the hour.

Tackling Indian variant of Covid-19

Experts recommend an immediate nation-wide shutdown

It is shocking to see how fast Covid-19 infections are rising in all divisions except Dhaka, although that can change anytime. The National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 (NTAC) has recommended a complete shutdown for 14 days to save lives and ease the burden of overwhelmed hospitals.

On June 23, a total of 85 people died due to Covid-19 complications in 24 hours. This is the highest Covid-19 mortality rate in the last two months. At the same time, there have been 5,727 new infections and the positivity rate has shot up to 20.27 percent (highest in the last two and a half months), according to a DS report published on June 24.

If the border districts had been put under complete lockdown and cut off from the rest of the country, the government would have gotten some time to take preparation to tackle this new variant. But the district administrations did nothing despite receiving clear guidelines from the government. Although in April and May most of the casualties from Covid-19 were in the cities and towns, now the virus has reached the rural areas as well. On June 24, 68 out of the 81 Covid deaths recorded were outside Dhaka which gives a glimpse of the severity of the situation.

There are two success stories regarding tackling Covid-19. Both are related to lockdowns, one in Razabazar and another in Tolarbag of Mirpur. These two areas had imposed complete and strict lockdown and saw amazing results, including Covid-19 infection rates coming down to zero. The government has to take lessons from these stories and direct its local authorities across the country to do the same. As we've seen that strict lockdown curbs transmission rates, this must be imposed firmly along with ramping up testing, isolating patients who test positive and contact tracing.

It's a relief that the vaccination campaign has started once again, as the vaccine reduces the severity of the infection and the possibility of death. We hope that the government will ensure that the vaccination process goes smoothly without any hitches. Apart from all this, maintaining proper health guidelines such as wearing masks and social distancing have to be enforced. Moreover, the government must make sure the district administrations follow the guidelines properly.

Given the grim predictions by health experts of the devastating trail of the virus, the government must take immediate measures.



SHAMSAD MORTUZA

BLOWN' IN THE WIND
A female student of mine walked out of her dentist's chamber at Bailey Road at around 8pm on June 7, 2021. She walked towards Viqarunnisa Noon School looking for a CNG auto-rickshaw when a random guy appeared from nowhere and punched her. She started bleeding profusely from the cut under her right eye and could not see or sense anything except for a flash of someone in a red T-shirt walking away from the scene. No one came to help her, although a few curious onlookers gathered to relish the moment. She finally managed to get on a rickshaw to return to the dentist's chamber and call her parents. The family was not in the right mindset to report the incident to the police. Later, when the girl went to file a GD, the officers quizzed her about her “relation” with the “presumed” attacker and told her to report the assailant as someone she knew. The GD was not taken as the police failed to believe that such whimsical violence could take place. There must be a story, and she had none. At least, not a prescribed one.

I don't blame the police; they have a tendency to be suspicious. They don't have our luxury of innocence to take everything at its face value. They routinely see the underbelly of our society. They see things that we see only in nightmares. A note on randomness though. Remember the random attack on bloggers; the streak of violence that choked freedom of thought. It was only when a pattern emerged that we realised that those free-thinkers were slaughtered with an ideological zeal. What if an attack like this is designed to create a sense of fear among young women to suggest that they should not be in public spaces? How dare she walk along a footpath after the sunset? I am cooking a story because the police need one to report it as a crime. Since when are motives needed to attack women. Just because she was not mugged or physically violated does not mean that there was no reportable crime. Has there been any month in which we have not heard of garment workers being attacked in a public space or gang raped on a bus? How about the incident where a street

drug-pusher dragged a university student to the Airport Road roadside garden and raped her? What was his motive?

For convenience's sake, let's assume that the perpetrator is an urban outcast, a modern-day ancient mariner who can shoot a bird without any apparent reason. There is no short supply of such urban outcasts. They move in packs now. The display of their random acts of violence is becoming prevalent. Last week, police nabbed some young men for waylaying and harassing a driver whose fault was to give a biker-gang the space to overtake them on a narrow flyover bridge. The incident was recorded by the dashcam of another biker. The police pursued the trail of the viral footage and arrested the entire gang.



I don't think there is enough to implicate them with any serious crime. Police press briefings informed that these young boys were held with some lethal weapons and drugs in their possession. They are part of a gang, and a growing culture. In most cases, members of a gang thrive under the blessings of political or influential “big brothers”. No one will be surprised if these boys are released soon. Their jail initiation through this catch-and-release will only bring further “glory” to the brands under which they operate. There are some dazzling names too: Lara Dey, Film Jhirjhir, Dekhe Lo Chine Lo, Kopaiya Dey, Disco Boys, Chhoton Group, Power Boys, Nafiz Don, Big Boss, Dark Shadow, Red Light, Dada Boyz, Dazzling Spirit, DSB, FCRTTR, 15 Club, PL Rakib, Saiko Ridoy, Dare Devil, Gongzilla, HNY, Dark Souls.

Our rude awakening to teen gang

culture occurred in 2017 when a Class 9 student Adnan was killed by his former gang members for deserting their group. The incident took place in Uttara, and suddenly we were told that about 50 such gangs, including some female ones, were operating in Dhaka while hundreds more were there in Chittagong. Ever since then, news of gang related murders and violence has become a daily feature.

When the Hollywood movie *Extraction* (2020) was released, many of us were flabbergasted by the representation of a gang of boys in Dhaka, reminding one of *Slumdog Millionaire*. Bad things always happen to neighbours. We were in denial that such social disorder and incivility could happen here. The problem is with the widespread of installation of CCTV

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have the subculture of road rage drag racing where teenagers from affluent families indulge in nightly fast and furious drives. On the other hand, we have the slum dwelling marginal young adults who form groups to assume power in a public space that has nothing but neglect for them.

Catching and releasing them will never bring an end to this evolving menace. As a society in transition, we are moving from a less developed to a more developed economy. Consequently, the rift between traditional and modern values is becoming evident. The tension is affecting one of the most vulnerable age groups who are trying to negotiate their hormonal growth as well as their self-identity. The young adults who come from the financially deprived families often lack education and purpose in life. Then there are issues with troubled family structures. Abandoned street children and destitute boys fall under the influence of bad company as they become brothel goers and drug peddlers while getting involved in petty or serious crimes such as mugging, snatching, extortion and harassment. Many of them get their inspiration from the media where violence is glorified.

The man who preyed on my student can be a lone predator or a part of a pack. We will not know for sure unless there is a proper diagnosis. It's important that the law enforcing agencies keep on running the diagnostic tests of our social ills so that strategic interventions can be done and steps for healing can be initiated.

Shamsad Mortuza is Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), and a professor of English (on leave) at Dhaka University.

Does the G-7 summit outcome mean anything for Bangladesh?



PORIMOL PALMA

COMING out of Trump's “America First” policy, US President Joe Biden is robustly engaging his allies in his global vision. After the virtual Leaders' Summit on Climate in April, three months after taking office, he joined the G-7 summit in Cornwall, UK on June 11-13.

One day earlier on June 10, Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson signed a new version of the 80-year old “Atlantic Charter” aimed at strengthening the western alliance for democracy and human rights against autocratic rivals.

In the G-7 summit, the leaders of the world's wealthiest countries—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US—pledged more than 1 billion coronavirus vaccine doses for poorer nations in the next one year, helping developing countries grow while fighting climate change and backing a minimum tax on multinational firms.

A significant part of the G-7 was taking a hard line against China, criticising Beijing for the “repression of Uyghur minority and other rights abuses”. The G-7 said it would continue to challenge “practices which undermine the fair and transparent operation of the global economy” while calling for “transparent, expert-led”, studies into the origins of the pandemic.

Biden also backed plans for “values driven” financing of infrastructure schemes for developing nations, which could rival China's huge Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) meant to connect Asia with Africa and Europe via land and maritime networks.

The 30-member North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leaders who met in Brussels on Monday, where Biden was present, also declared that China presents a security risk.

Now, the question is, does the reinvigorated approach of Biden, G-7 or NATO bear any meaning for Bangladesh, or the region?

Foreign relation analysts say that the US returning to the global stage as a leader is certainly a welcome move, especially at a time when the world faces two major challenges—the coronavirus pandemic and climate change, of which Bangladesh is a major victim.

The world faced a crisis of democratic leadership during Donald Trump's tenure, but Biden has moved to restore global cooperation by engaging the major powers and international bodies.

“Bangladesh, with a huge population, is desperately needing the life-saving commodity. And, the G-7 nations' commitment of providing one billion vaccine doses to the poorer countries, as well as fighting climate change, is laudable,” said former foreign secretary Md Shahidul Haque.

As of now, Bangladesh availed only 7 million AstraZeneca vaccines from the Serum Institute of India, while India provided 3.03 million vaccines as gifts, but halted export of vaccines since March with its massive infections and deaths.

Troubled, Bangladesh is looking for vaccines from just about anywhere in

thinks the patent issue will now be widely debated at the WTO. If the intellectual property rights is waived, it will be a good news for us and the world.

The global cooperation that was on the wane is now getting a new life, he observed, but added that the only downside of the G-7 summit is the absence of China and Russia and the move to counter China.

Bangladesh believes in friendship to all and malice to none. So, if the G-7 countries take any new move to help the developing countries build infrastructure, fight climate change, the scope for Bangladesh will get wider.

Thus far, China has been a major partner of infrastructure finance and technological assistance. If more western nations want to get involved in it, the options for Bangladesh and other

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the world—US, UK, Canada, Australia, Russia, China. China, meanwhile, has gifted 11 lakh vaccine jabs, and the country received only one lakh jabs from COVAX—a situation delaying the country's inoculation campaign.

Bangladesh has also been demanding that Covid-19 vaccines be made a public good and for patent protections on it to be lifted.

The ray of hope came at the G-7 summit where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's proposal of lifting patent protections for the vaccine got support from South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, WTO Director-General Okonjo Iweala and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Shahidul Haque, also senior fellow at the South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance of North South University,



World leaders pose for the family photo at the start of the G7 summit in Carbis Bay, Cornwall.

PHOTO: AFP

developing countries will increase. Bangladesh, however, needs to be very careful not to fall into the side of any alliance.

“Our government has made it clear we are with China-led BRI and US-led Indo-Pacific Strategy as long as these are for our social and economic development,” Shahidul Haque said.

Dhaka University International Relations Department Professor Lailufar Yasmin said the world needs vaccines on an urgent basis as poor countries are suffering the most, but how the vaccine will be supplied at the quickest has yet to be determined.

She thinks the “so-called China threat” from the G-7 was not so necessary. What is important is for global leaders

facing complaints of vaccine hoarding when the poor countries face supply shortage.

Former Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad said if the US and its allies are suspicious about China, they should settle their issues through dialogue, which is more important than ever now as the world is facing a great challenge.

So, while it is important to promote democratic values, international rules and regulations, it is extremely important to be constructive, have dialogue and address the bilateral, regional and global issues with utmost care because the world is now sick and is in need of good care.

Porimol Palma is Diplomatic Correspondent of The Daily Star.