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Countrywide lockdown finally

Other related measures should be undertaken efficiently

THE government has at last opted for what it terms as a “complete” and “strict” lockdown of the country from July 1, having earlier announced that the lockdown would commence from June 28th. Ostensibly, the matter of financial year-ending had to do with the change. However, we believe that the countrywide lockdown should have come much earlier. The idea of sanitising Dhaka by cutting it off from the worst affected border districts was not a complete step to stem the onslaught of the pandemic. By the time the border districts came under lockdown the virus had already been transmitted to other parts of the country including the capital. We often overlook the reality that Dhaka can be safe only when the periphery, the districts are safe. The half-hearted lockdowns have been illusory and self-defeating at best.

But better late than never. Having said that, we must emphasise that the kind of lockdown we have been seeing over the last one month will not do. It is highly discouraging to see that even in the seven worst affected districts life has been going on as if the virus did not exist at all. The burden of responsibility falls on the local administration to ensure that the lockdown is observed strictly.

Lockdown has its downsides, but human life is more important and that should have taken priority over all other considerations, year-ending or no year-ending. We welcome the news that the government is working to take necessary measures to provide cash assistance and food, including rice, edible oil and other commodities to the poor who are going to feel the crunch during the countrywide “strict lockdown” to be imposed from Thursday. One of the reasons that the administration could not enforce the recent lockdown is the absence of any measure by the government to provide sustenance to those that live hand to mouth. But the administration must ensure that the task of distributing relief materials is not entrusted on the local party men. Last year’s bitter experience should not be forgotten.

We would also like to suggest that while lockdown is one of the means of stopping the spread of the virus it would not be effective if other associated measures are not followed. And we have a good example in India from whose experience we can benefit. Given the very high positivity rate in a very large number of districts, number of testing facilities must be enhanced and more people need to be screened by testing for the virus. Along with that, those found to be positive should be isolated immediately. The health guidelines of wearing masks and social distancing must be enforced in public spaces, especially in kitchen markets both during and after the lockdown. It is worth repeating too that our health facilities are inadequate and all efforts must be made to provide more oxygen, more beds and more ICU facilities. These should be done on a war footing because it is a war-like situation that we are facing.

Vaccine supply discrepancies will not make the world safe

Countries must work together to get everyone vaccinated

WE join our voices with WHO in expressing our disappointment with the discriminatory distribution of vaccines around the world with rich countries vaccinating their people and opening up their economies, while poorer countries are facing severe vaccine shortages. Many countries, such as Bangladesh, have had to stall their original vaccination programme when supplies stopped, leaving millions of people vulnerable to the more serious conditions of Covid-19. Meanwhile, many developed countries have excess vaccines and according to WHO, are vaccinating young people who are at lower risk of getting infected. Even the WHO’s Director-General has criticised the rich nations for not sharing the vaccines.


Globally, vaccination campaigns have brought down both infection and mortality rates caused by the coronavirus. The pandemic was slowing down all over the world, as WHO reported the lowest number of new cases in February. But the Delta variant of the Covid-19 epidemic has created new concerns, as the virus has been identified in at least 85 countries and is spreading rapidly among those who have not been vaccinated yet. According to health experts, 80 percent of the population should be vaccinated to tackle the Delta variant. Also, the second dose of the vaccine is just as important. According to the WHO, vulnerable people may need to get an annual vaccine booster to shield them from the Delta variant of the virus. But, if the rich countries share vaccines equitably, there won’t be any need for boosters as complete vaccine doses will do all the work.

This newspaper on June 2 reported that the US was going to both donate and sell 80 million Covid-19 vaccines to other lower income countries including Bangladesh. But, we haven’t received any US vaccines yet. However, there is some good news, and it is that Bangladesh is going to receive 2.5 million doses of the Moderna vaccine under the Covax programme (an initiative of some international bodies including the WHO) within the next 10 days. Bangladesh received the first consignment of 100,620 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine on June 1, under the Covax scheme run by the WHO and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. Also, the health minister has said that the first shipment of the Sinopharm vaccine that the government has bought from China will arrive in the first week of July.

Distribution of vaccines to developing countries that are experiencing shortages must be done quickly and efficiently. Rich countries with excess vaccines should share them with lower income countries. We still have to acquire more vaccines if we want 70 percent of the population to be vaccinated, which will give us a fighting chance against Delta and other variants. Countries must work together to ensure everyone is vaccinated because otherwise, no one is totally safe as new variants may keep developing and spreading.

Managing environmental resources for green growth in Bangladesh

MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE current pattern of global economic development is unsustainable. It is based on the extraction of natural resources and use of a carbon-intensive production and consumption system to produce goods and services for the economy. Indeed, the global development path has been based on the philosophy of accelerating growth by way of burning fossil fuels. Since the ‘60s and ‘70s, several economists have been arguing for sustainable economic development which would take care of natural resources and ensure

adopting a green growth policy. Even though its carbon emission is only a little over 0.1 percent of global carbon emissions, Bangladesh has committed to make a transition towards a green economy in its national plans and strategies. Bangladesh’s green growth strategy will mostly be geared towards addressing environment-related challenges. It will be to reduce the burden of future environmental costs. This requires huge investment in green infrastructure.

Given the enormity of investment required, the private sector has to come forward. In order to attract private sector investment in this field, the government can provide fiscal incentives for green investments. Measures, such as a low interest rate for loans to support low-carbon technologies, tax incentives for

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intergenerational equity.

As the world is struggling to recover from the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, the importance of sustainable use of natural resources and adopting a green growth strategy have taken an important place in the global discourse. Therefore, in the wake of the pandemic, countries are working to “build back better” which puts environmental concerns at the forefront. Several advanced countries are using their stimulus package to create green infrastructure. In fact, during the global financial meltdown in 2008-09 also, several countries had invested in green industries. However, progress since then has been rather slow. Instead, extraction of fossil fuels in some of the large countries continues till now. Moreover, some advanced countries also provide subsidies on fossil fuels which is a counter-productive measure. The spirit of green growth has been affected by these activities.

Low-income countries like Bangladesh have also shown much enthusiasm in environmentally friendly cars, measures to increase energy efficiency in industry and agriculture, and allocation for protected areas and cultural heritage could also be undertaken to encourage adoption of a greener development path.

In Bangladesh, the private sector has already felt the urgency of greener technologies. For example, as the global trade regime is getting stringent on compliance issues, many Bangladeshi readymade garments factories have already implemented green technologies in their factories. However, for smaller factories, this is an additional burden. They will need the government’s support. Development partners will also have to support green investment.

The other aspect of a green growth strategy is to protect and manage environmental resources. These resources are essential for the existence of humankind and the ecosystem. However, the value of such resources is often forgotten by us. Moreover, we often only see the use value of natural resources. But natural resources have both use and

non-use values. These resources are used as raw materials for economic activities. However, the non-use value of natural resources is also important as they are foundations for life. The market prices also cannot capture the price of those resources. For example, the ecosystem services provided by forests are often ignored. As a result, the cost-benefit of trees would be compared with the return from a factory established by cutting those trees.


The economic value of natural resources and how these resources can help achieve sustainable development often go unrecognised by most of us. One of the reasons behind this is that we often forget the basic features of natural resources. But, depending on the characteristics of natural resources, public policy will have to be different. In order to meet our economic demand we use the naturally created environmental resources as raw materials for production and energy. So, natural resources create direct utility for human beings. We undertake economic activities based on several resources that nature has created. These include water, air, fuel, coal, gas, mineral resources, solar power, fisheries and much more. But the stock and source of all types of natural resources are not the same. Their longevity is also not the same. Some natural resources are depletable while some are non-depletable.

Therefore, the efficient management of natural resources is extremely important. Even if resources are non-depletable their excessive use and mismanagement can have a negative impact on human health and lives. For example, despite being plenty in supply, unsustainable use of water and air can do harm to human beings immensely. Health hazards would not only increase health costs but also reduce productivity and economic growth. Therefore, policy interventions are needed in case of sustainable resource management and economic growth.

Degradation and depletion of environmental resources emanate from the market and policy failures. To address market failure in case of resource depletion, market-based instruments have been suggested. For example, based on the polluters’ pay principle, the polluters would be charged. However,

It’s time to talk about cotton

RMG NOTES



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

COTTON is the lifeblood of the Bangladesh RMG industry, with our country among the world’s four largest users of this miracle fibre. The other three are China, India and Pakistan,

the latter two of which also have large home textile markets.

In Bangladesh, cotton is the main feedstock of the garment export industry. Despite the slowdown caused by the global pandemic, the latest statistics from the US show that Bangladesh has increased its cotton import forecast for marketing year (MY) 2021/22 to 7.6 million bales as a result of higher demand for locally spun yarn.

The domestic consumption of cotton in MY 2021/22 is forecasted at 7.9 million bales, which is approximately the same consumption levels of MY 2020/21, due to sustained demand for yarn, fabric, apparel, and garments as the world economy slowly recovers from the pandemic.

I believe it’s time for Bangladesh to make better use of this precious resource while also giving greater consideration to the opportunities afforded by recycled cotton. We take cotton for granted at our peril given our huge dependence on it as a raw material. Did you know, for instance, that in 2020 Bangladesh became the largest denim exporter to the US last year, giving our country a market share in the US of around 20 percent. Bangladesh is also the leading denim exporter to the European Union, and all of these denim products are made, of course, with cotton.

The first issue to consider here is cotton waste. It was reported recently that in 2019, Bangladesh produced approximately 577,000 tonnes of waste just from the RMG and fabrics mills of which almost half (250 thousand tonnes) was 100 percent pure cotton waste.

This subject was recently discussed at a meeting led by the BGMEA, which is now looking seriously at the issue of recycling due to growing demand for recycled garments from fashion brands and retailers.

Last year, more than 50 brands, manufacturers and textile recyclers signed up to a programme which aims to grow the textile recycling industry in Bangladesh by capturing and directing post-production cotton waste back into



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the production of new fashion products. The work is also looking to boost circular commercial collaborations between textile and garment manufacturers, recyclers and fashion brands operating in Bangladesh.

I have been banging the drum for textile recycling for many years. On my travels, I have seen more and more sophisticated recycling technologies are now entering the market and, as one of the world’s leading cotton users, it is vital that Bangladesh is at the forefront of the next generation of cotton recycling.

Bangladesh has an advantage here with our focus on cotton fibres—also known as cellulosic fibres—which are traditionally

easier to recycle than synthetic garments.

The other issue is that our customers, brands and retailers, are now calling for recycled cotton in their collections. Virtually every major fashion brand has a recycled collection these days. Thus, as well as reducing waste, embracing cotton recycling solutions represent another opportunity for Bangladeshi suppliers to meet the future requirements of brands.

Just recently, for example, Primark introduced a new sustainable loungewear

collection in an effort to source more recycled materials. The new collection has been certified by circular fashion business Recover (which is one of the partners in the circular partnership mentioned above).

Primark has created an eight-piece collection partially made from recycled cotton, with each item made from between 15 percent and 25 percent recycled cotton. It is surely not beyond the skills of our RMG factories to cater for this need for recycled items—which often retail at a premium.

The other issue to consider around cotton is long-term. A recent study found

this is a difficult and unpopular method to implement. In the absence of good governance, there is a possibility of the method being arbitrarily used. The powerful and corrupt polluters may get away through bribes. There are so many polluting vehicles and industries in the country. There is also rampant deforestation and heavy pollution of river waters. How many have been penalised? What is the rate of success in reducing such pollution? Dhaka is still one of the most polluted cities in the world. The resources generated through pollution fees could be used for environmental development and natural resource management.

Policy failure also leads to overexploitation of resources. Subsidies can damage the environment. Subsidies on fisheries, agriculture and energy, for example, encourage higher use of resources. Of course, the affordability of the poor will have to be taken into consideration. The poor depend directly on nature for their livelihoods. Therefore, the poor should have access to natural resources. But instead of cross subsidisation, the government can help the poor by providing targeted direct support so that they can use resources for survival.

Policymakers should undertake cost-benefit analysis before initiating all infrastructure projects. How the environmental impact would be taken into account and how the environmental costs would be internalised, should be clearly specified in the project documents. Besides, the negative social impact due to the change in natural resource management should also be addressed. Often, large infrastructure projects such as roads and highways require shifting people from their original places. How these measures may affect their employment, income and social lives have to be assessed and dealt with adequately.

Environmental policies have to be cross-cutting as environmental degradation can impact several sectors at a time. The government’s decision-making with regard to sectoral policy design and implementation should be based on economic, social, and environmental consideration. Decisions should be based on scientific evidence on the possible impact of such policies. Regular review and data on the progress in these areas should be shared with the people.

The narrative of sustainable development has to be shared among broader stakeholders including the private sector, non-governmental organisations and workers. They can play important roles towards environment-friendly policies.

Finally, production will invariably create environmental pollution. Without production, the economy cannot run, society cannot exist. Therefore, technological development and use of technology are a must to reduce pollution.

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that the current six highest cotton-producing countries—India, USA, China, Brazil, Pakistan and Turkey—will likely be exposed to increased climate risk, particularly from wildfire, drought and extreme rainfall in the next 20 years.

In fact, experts reckon that 40 percent of global cotton growing regions are projected to experience a decrease in growing season as temperatures increase beyond the optimum temperature range for cotton growing.

Water scarcity and extremes in rainfall, from insufficient in some regions to extreme and more intense in others, will present increased risk for the world’s most productive cotton growing regions, the study claims.

Consider what this might mean for Bangladesh and its supply of raw cotton. The report above is based on forecasts up until 2040—a sobering thought indeed for our industry, which is so heavily dependent on cotton.

Bangladesh RMG exports are forecast to grow in the next few years. That is certainly the aim as far as public policy is concerned as more exports equal increased job creation and rising wealth. But it will be a major logistical challenge for our production and output to continue increasing while there is growing pressure on our key raw material. Also consider that, at the current time, we are seeing high and rising prices for cotton, for a variety of reasons, one of them being that many brands no longer want to use cotton from Xinjiang, China, in their collections. Supply is being squeezed globally and this is causing prices to rise.

With all the above in mind, I believe we need to give more consideration than ever to how we manage this raw material and seriously look to take a lead in cotton recycling and related technologies in coming years.

There is no time—or cotton—to waste.

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