

An innocent man thrown in jail

The state must compensate him for this grave injustice

WE commend the HC for granting bail to an innocent man—named Manik Hawlader—who had been wrongfully serving the jail sentence handed down to a convict. The actual convict—a man named Manik Miah—was sentenced to four years' imprisonment on February 11, 2019 for possessing 600 bottles of phensidyl. Before the judgement, however, Manik Miah secured bail from the HC and then absconded, mentioning his name as Manik Hawlader in the bail document.

But as the HC rightly observed, that cannot justify why an innocent man was arrested and put in prison in the actual convict's place for months. Why didn't the police verify the authenticity of names, addresses and other details of both individuals? This failure on part of the authorities should be punishable. Moreover, it needs to be investigated why an innocent man was implicated and sent to jail instead of the actual convict, and to find out who were behind this. Was this a case of mistaken identity or a deliberate framing of an innocent man in an attempt to save a criminal? These questions have to be answered through a thorough investigation.

Even if it was a mistake, a mistake of this magnitude cannot simply be ignored. Those responsible for it must be made answerable. And in that regard, we are pleased that the HC has sought the response of various officials involved with the case to explain how they made such a blunder.

While we acknowledge the great effort of the court to right this wrong, we are disappointed at how easily the law can be taken for a ride in our country. While it is important to find out who abused the system, the fact that the system can be abused this easily is in itself worrisome. We have read about other cases of the wrong person being arrested and left languishing in jail for months or even years. Usually, the "mistake", whether unintentional or deliberate, occurs when the case is filed or when the charge sheet is drafted. This calls for greater scrutiny and diligence on the part of the police when investigating an allegation. We call on the government to look into this matter and ensure such mistakes do not recur and compensate the innocent man for his travails.

Construct Lawachhara forest by-pass immediately

The reserve forest stands in peril

TO learn that a project proposal to construct an alternative road from Sreemangal to Bhanugach that would skirt Moulvibazar's Lawachhara reserve forest is still waiting to be placed at a pre-ECNEC meeting for approval is frustrating. The Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister's justification that approval of the project has been delayed due to the pandemic doesn't hold much water. We believe that the ECNEC has been holding its consultations regularly and approving various projects as well during the pandemic. So why not this project?

Nobody needs to be reminded of the grave danger that Lawachhara is in at the moment, brought upon by the road and railway line that cuts through the heart of the forest. With time, the traffic on this route has increased. Apparently, the immediate danger is posed by the railway line on which 10-12 trains run every day. A 6.5-kilometre road connecting Sreemangal and Kamalganj and a five-kilometre portion of the Dhaka-Sylhet rail route go right through the forest.

Regrettably, the deaths of endangered species of wildlife under the wheels of trains and other vehicles are a frequent occurrence—reportedly, at least three of them are run over daily. Such mishaps betray the lack of strict enforcement of relevant rules. Why can't the errant drivers, who continue to speed despite multiple signboards of a "restricted speed" of 20km/hr on this stretch of road, be hauled up and punished? The wildlife casualties tend to occur when the animals try to cross over the tracks or across the roads. A simple solution is to fence off this portion to keep the animals off. At this rate, only Providence knows when the alternative road and railway construction might happen, and the least that can be done is to protect the animals from losing their lives on the roads and rail lines by fencing them off.

However, it is not only the fauna, but the flora that is also under threat. Imagine the huge amount of pollution caused by the 500 or so motor vehicles that frequent the Sreemangal and Kamalganj road through the forest, as well as the 10-12 trains that run through the forest on a daily basis. While the deaths of the animals are apparent, the damage to the plants and trees are not so visible. But the decay, nevertheless, is happening. We might just eventually lose the forest, and with it the wildlife therein, because of a lack of urgency on the part of the administration. An alternative route is of immediate necessity. And we would hope that the minister really means it when he says that he would now try to speed up the process.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Safe water and sanitation

Access to safe water and sanitation is a basic human right and one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nation's agenda for 2030. Yet, WASA has been accused of supplying unsafe water to our homes time and time again—and we are yet to see improvements. In a congested city like Dhaka, this lack of supply of safe water hampers our standards of living. I urge the authorities to provide safe water to the homes all around Dhaka. This is especially needed now, at a time when health is of utmost importance.

Md Saeed Hasan, Dhaka University

A governance assessment of lockdowns

Can nationwide and district-based lockdowns tackle the second wave of Covid-19 in Bangladesh?

RAFSANUL HOQUE, INSIYA KHAN and MOHAMMAD SIRAJUL ISLAM

FEBRUARY 7, 2021 was a significant day for Bangladesh—logging only 292 new coronavirus cases in 24 hours, the lowest in almost ten months, it began its nationwide Covid-19 vaccination drive. However, the number of cases soon escalated, with the infection rate rising from three to seven percent between February and March. With the imminent lockdown following nationwide and district-based attempts at restrictions in past months, the government's handling of the second wave of the virus begs introspection.

Several factors influenced the initial upward trend in infections at the start of the year. First, the government was



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN/STAR FILE

expecting a worse scenario of the infection rate during winter. When infections did not escalate, as anticipated, the people and the government became complacent enough to return to normalcy. Second, as the vaccination drive began, people began feeling safe enough to move around without following advised health protocols. Although only 50 lakh people were vaccinated by mid-March, less than four percent of the total population, it created a sense of safety among people. Third, people were desperate to come out of restrictions on movement and gathering. Moreover, the dilemma between public health safety and livelihoods escalated to people choosing livelihoods over health. Economic vulnerabilities became aggravated due to the combined effect of the government's lockdown and an ineffective and inadequate subsistence support system during the pandemic.

The government was relatively less vigilant in its approach during this year's

recorded in any country worldwide. Considering how the government was well-aware of the rising trend in infections in Bangladesh and the disastrous state of its neighbouring country, it should have started taking stronger measures earlier. Instead, it reacted the same way as last year and delayed imposing restrictions and a nationwide lockdown. Rather than acting early, the government began imposing restrictions with changing intensity as weeks went by. Around the end of March, the authorities put forth an 18-point directive, which consisted of restrictive measures to limit public gatherings, transportation and markets. Surprisingly, two days later, a lockdown from April 5 with a new 11-point directive was announced.

At the onset, the government seemed to apply some learnings from the past by being more decisive in identifying the type of institutions that must close, thus reducing confusion. Furthermore, stricter law enforcement was observed after the

first week and up till the reopening of markets. However, when markets opened in accordance with government directives, people and shops were reported to be fined. The government also postponed all elections nationwide after announcing the new lockdown, unlike last time. Finally, it came up with some new ideas like the "movement pass" to aid citizens in need-based traveling.

However, these nationwide measures, despite some level of effectiveness, can be criticised as being inconsistent and coming too late. Initially, the nationwide restriction on public movement was announced for only a week, till April 11. A "strict lockdown" was announced in the next week and extended till April 28 with increasing intensity. The lockdown was extended six more times till June 16, arguably gradually losing its strictness, especially during the Eid holidays. Allowing businesses to revive throughout Ramadan and Eid festivities was a repeat of the first phase of the lockdown in 2020. Such repetition questions the government's farsightedness and learning. A longer lockdown extension was announced from June 16 till July 15, but with barely any serious enforcement as before.

The failure of the nationwide restrictions were followed by specific district-based restrictions. These were indeed essential, considering the spread of the new Delta variant of Covid-19. However, experts again criticised the restrictions for coming very late. The National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 as well as local civil surgeons had advised immediate restrictions in seven districts in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions on May 31. As the virus quickly spread through these regions, enforcement became tougher. Presently, a nationwide "lockdown" has been announced.

Essentially, the overall response this year has not seemed well-planned and prudent. Repeatedly, experts identified specific, achievable, necessary guidelines implementable at the local level. Directives need to have a robust matrix, defined parameters and clear mandates. They also need to have specific measures based on precise data. Yet, the 11 directives given this April were ambiguous and difficult to implement. Some directives were broad and "asked" us to maintain such measures without clearly identifying the consequences of non-compliance. It is also difficult to imagine how they could be replicated on a small scale at the local level.

After the nationwide restrictions lost their aptness, district-based lockdowns seemed to be the dominant strategy. This

was helpful for the economies of low-infection districts.

However, it seems that this strategy came too late as well, as the government has been forced to shift to a strict nationwide lockdown again. Most certainly, this will not be the end of lockdowns in this country. Therefore, the government needs a robust plan to keep the economy afloat while controlling the spread of the virus. In that case, commercial activities can only continue by restricting all unnecessary, recreational, public and social gatherings. Strict and targeted measures with heavy consequences for non-compliance can contain the virus from one side. Additionally, the government has to proceed with a clear plan and firm decisions.

The only practical lockdowns are the ones which have a broad relief plan and can protect healthcare systems from being overwhelmed. Even limited-scale lockdowns can only work as a measure for temporary control, not as a solution itself. In the long run, the only way out of such restrictive measures is a successful nationwide vaccination drive. Developed countries like the United States are returning to pre-Covid routines and vaccinated individuals are not required to wear masks in public anymore. European nations are also on their way to normalcy, with the current Uefa Euro 2020 football matches being played with supporters in the galleries. Only an immediate large-scale vaccination programme will ensure sustainable safety for the people of Bangladesh.

The nature and direction of this virus are still not fully traceable in terms of intensity and variety. Moreover, treating Covid-19 patients requires specialised medical arrangements like ICUs and oxygen. Therefore, we should ensure that we are prepared for the future and make a coordinated effort over the next couple of years to make necessary arrangements in terms of improving our health infrastructure. Based on current findings, a data-driven system can be established to track the nature of the virus, followed up with prompt actions by the government. Strict health and safety regulation compliance with preventive measures is a must. Finally, while large-scale lockdowns can only be a short-term strategy, considering their effect on vulnerable sections of the population, a large-scale vaccination drive should be the long-term focus.

Rafsanul Hoque and Insiya Khan are research associates at the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), Brac University, and Mohammad Sirajul Islam is a programme manager at BIGD, Brac University.

Is a global goal on adaptation possible?

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

2015, all the countries of the world agreed on a global goal on mitigation as well as setting a global goal on adaptation.

The global goal on mitigation was relatively simple, as it was to keep the global temperature below 1.5 degrees Celsius. This takes into account the emissions of different greenhouse gases by each country and the global warming potential of each of these gases to calculate how much each country is contributing to raising the global temperature. Each country, in turn, has to submit its plans for reducing its emissions—called the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)—making it possible to calculate if each country is doing enough or not. It is also possible to calculate the cumulative effect of all the NDCs, to see whether we are on track to stay below 1.5 degrees. Unfortunately, we are still not compliant with the global goal and it will be necessary for all countries to enhance the ambition of their respective NDCs by the time COP26 is held in Glasgow, Scotland in November this year.

The calculation of the global goal on mitigation and measuring progress towards reaching that goal is thus relatively simple. However, this is not the case for the global goal on adaptation, because adaptation takes place in different locations in highly local circumstances, and making an aggregate global goal is extremely technically challenging. What progress has been made so far in trying to come up with metrics and indicators to track progress towards a global goal on adaptation, which is supposed to be discussed and agreed on at COP26?

The first aspect of a global goal on adaptation is, in fact, the issue of funding for adaptation, and this is quite simple. Developed countries had promised to

provide USD 100 billion a year from 2020 onwards to developing countries to tackle both mitigation and adaptation. However, 2020 has come and gone but they are yet to deliver the full amount. The developing countries had demanded that 50 percent of climate finance should go to the most vulnerable developing countries for adaptation. Till now, only 20 percent of climate finance has actually gone to support adaptation. Hence, there are two major expectations that are yet

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and the implementation of the NAPs could be used as a means of measuring progress. The global goal would be for every country to develop and share its NAP and then to implement it over time. This activity is happening but isn't yet incorporated into an agreed global goal on adaptation.

Another set of scales for measuring adaptation can be at the city or town level and many cities and towns around the world are preparing their respective



STAR FILE PHOTO

to be fulfilled by developed countries—namely, delivering USD 100 billion of climate finance and giving half of that, USD 50 billion, to support adaptation. If we consider adaptation finance as one of the global goals on adaptation, then we have already failed the first test.

However, it is in the more technical domain of setting an adaptation goal, and also developing and agreeing metrics and indicators for measuring progress towards the goal, that there are a number of schools of thought—which different scientific groups around the world are developing, including from the Bangladeshi scientific community. One of the first aspects of deciding how to set an adaptation goal and then how to measure progress towards achieving it, is to choose the scale of the unit of measurement. This could be at a national level where countries are preparing their respective

adaptation plans, and also beginning to implement them. This set of town-based indicators could be another interesting way to measure progress. Yet another set of common scales to use are the same ecosystems in different countries and continents. For example, mountain ecosystems, delta ecosystems, forest ecosystems, islands and floodplains all over the world have some common characteristics and similar climate vulnerabilities. Hence, adaptation in one such ecosystem can be useful for people living in similar ecosystems in other countries to learn from each other. This approach would be a more ecosystem-based one, or to use the phrase in vogue, a Nature Based Solutions (NBS) approach to measuring progress on adaptation.

Whatever type of adaptation system we choose, there are two important aspects of setting a goal and then measuring progress

towards the goal. One is to see which country or location is making the most progress and which the least. This produces a ranking of best to worst countries or locations, which is useful to track progress over time. However, the second aspect of aggregation of all the efforts at the national and local levels is more challenging, as it is difficult to know what the aggregate number should be. There have indeed been efforts such as in the Race to Resilience (R2R) campaign for non-state actors to try to get two billion people to become resilient, but these are not easy numbers to measure and verify.

In Bangladesh, the scientific community had come together under the banner of the Gobeshona initiative, with more than 50 universities and research institutions participating. We have become the leaders in focusing on Locally Led Adaptation (LLA), where the focus is mainly on enhancing the adaptive capacity of the most vulnerable communities in the most vulnerable locations to become more resilient. This will be one of the major features of the upcoming Mujib Climate Resilient Prosperity Plan, currently being prepared, where there will be a series of Local Adaptation Hubs set up around the country in different climate vulnerable zones to enable the communities themselves to enhance their adaptive capacity over time.

This LLA process starts with raising awareness of the problem, which has to a large extent been achieved, to then enhancing the knowledge of each different stakeholder group on what they can do to tackle the problem in their respective locations. We are on a steep learning curve on this pathway. The aim is to achieve an all-of-society approach to adaptation in Bangladesh and to share our experience with other vulnerable developing countries under the umbrella of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, which Bangladesh currently chairs.

Bangladesh has a significant opportunity to contribute to both the scientific and technical discussions on the global adaptation goal, as well as at the political level at COP26, where this issue will be discussed and negotiated.

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