

Delay in setting up RT-PCR labs at airport

Caab, healthcare facilities must cooperate with each other

It seems the news on Wednesday that seven healthcare facilities would set up RT-PCR labs at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) within three to six days was a sham. These labs are desperately needed by the between 30,000 and 50,000 migrant workers, who have been stranded here and unable to go back to work in the UAE for months. This is due to the fact that, on August 4, the UAE government imposed a condition for migrant workers from different countries to carry a Covid-19 negative certificate based on an RT-PCR test result obtained within six hours before boarding their plane. Though countries like India and Pakistan responded promptly by arranging for RT-PCR labs at their airports, the same cannot be said for Bangladesh—a country that owes 10 percent of its USD 24.8 billion of remittance in the last fiscal year to migrant workers in the UAE.

A report by this daily published yesterday has revealed how the setting up of these labs is still far-fetched as there are a couple of issues that the authorities involved must resolve. First, the chosen seven healthcare facilities must have their standards of procedures approved by the UAE government in order for their test results to be acceptable. Second, though the seven firms have told the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) that the rooftop space of the airport's parking building allocated to them is unsuitable for setting up RT-PCR labs, it seems the Caab is reluctant to cooperate. Its representatives have been reported saying that the healthcare facilities "will have to create an environment for setting up labs at their own expense" and that "action" will be taken against any organisation unable to set up the lab within the stipulated time.

The tone of the Caab's response is hard to overlook. Especially since the priority should be to set up effective RT-PCR labs that can carry out proper Covid-19 testing of our migrant workers, so they can return to their workplaces and resume earning their livelihoods—which have been stumped for months due to the government's apathy towards them and their needs. The Caab must understand that this is not the time to create conflict or try to avert responsibility. Moreover, it is baffling that this is the state of operations even after authorities received directives by the prime minister herself to set up rapid Covid-19 testing labs not just at HSIA, but also at the country's other two international airports. It seems not even the protesting workers' movement of fasting unto death earlier this week, demanding that these labs be set up, has communicated the urgency of the matter to the authorities involved.

We would urge the relevant authorities—mainly the Caab—to cooperate with each other and to set up proper RT-PCR labs at all three of our international airports quickly, but not hastily. The quality of service must be ensured so that outbound migrant workers are not faced with even more troubles.

Only a fully functional law can make our roads safe

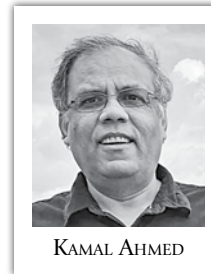
Rise in road crashes and deaths concerning

It is extremely disappointing to note the ever-increasing chaos in our road transport sector. As the Road Transport Act-2018 remains mostly ineffective three years after its enactment, and the number and deaths have increased manifold across the country during this time. According to police data, there has been a 40 percent increase in road crashes and deaths in the country in the first seven months of this year, compared to the same period last year. Meanwhile, it has become quite difficult to bring those responsible for the accidents and casualties to justice and compensate the families of the road crash victims due to the nonchalant attitude of the road transport authority.

According to our report, the rules of the Act have not been formulated until now, without which the law cannot be implemented. Moreover, several key sections of the Road Transport Act-2018 still could not be implemented because of "negotiations" between transport associations and the government, according to road safety campaigners. Up until now, the government did not penalise those driving large vehicles with licences for light or medium sized vehicles and also did not impose any fine on any vehicles that were modified for carrying containers. Reportedly, the BRTA still issues fitness clearances to these modified vehicles.

Most importantly, under this new law, compensating the road traffic victims has not been possible as the Trustee Board which is supposed to deal with the issue still could not start its work and will not be able to deal with the compensation-related issues before the rules of the Act are formulated. As we know, the BRTA has finally formulated the draft rules and it is now awaiting the law ministry's vetting. We think the process should not take long at the law ministry—however, after the vetting, the draft rules will also have to go through several other procedures before they become fully functional. We are also concerned about the amendment of the Road Transport Act-2018. Apparently, the transport ministry has made a draft of the amended law in which at least 29 of the 126 sections have been amended and punishment or fine under at least 14 sections have been reduced. Before finalising the draft amendment, the government should consider the opinions of all the stakeholders concerned.

Looking back at the 1971 Concert in Sympathy



KAMAL AHMED

It was 50 years ago today when hundreds of Londoners flocked to Sadler's Wells theatre to show their support and donate to the cause of Bangladesh's Liberation War. It, too, was a concert, though not as spectacular as the Madison Square Garden's Concert for Bangladesh organised by the Beatles' guitarist George Harrison

and Sitar Maestro Ravi Shankar. The London Concert and seven other concerts in the following weeks in various other English cities were known as the "Concert in Sympathy". Sadler's Wells had three shows on the day. And, the key organiser of the series was Birendra Shankar, one of the nephews of Ravi Shankar.

Birendra courted support from politicians, artists from both parts of Bengal, celebrities including Hollywood's top actress Glenda Jackson, and businesses for his concerts. Birendra Shankar, who founded the Sanskritik Centre of Indian Arts, was well known for his devotion in promoting Indian classical music in Britain. Unfortunately, there is not much information available about his experience in organising this huge series of concerts as he passed away in 2015 at the age of 82. Most of the other participants from India and Bangladesh too have died.

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Though Birendra reproduced a commemorative album of the concert in 1996, marking the 25th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence, that album too is not available on the market. I found a private collector's copy on eBay in 2019 which now belongs to Prothom Alo. Fortunately, the Islington Local History Centre and Museum of Islington Borough of London where Sadler's Wells theatre is located has kept a flyer and some pictures of the event in its digital archive.

According to an obituary written by his wife Barbara Shankar published in the *Guardian* on June 18, 2015, Birendra had already successfully organised and managed musical shows of Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, a folk festival and a dance festival at Piccadilly theatre, Royal Albert Hall and the ...Scala Theatre.. Powered by such experience, he travelled to India and refugee camps in bordering areas of West Bengal and brought in Ruma Guha Thakurta, Nirmalendu Chowdhury, Sabitabrata Dutta, Radhakanta Nandy,



PHOTO: ARCHIVE

Phani Bhushan Bhattacharya, Chandrakanta Nandy, Mohammad Moshahed Ali and Shah Ali Sarkar to "show something of the soul of the millions". British artists were inducted to express their "sympathy for the suffering people".

The musical soiree was a unique mix of two cultures. On the one hand it was a portrayal of the performing arts of Bengal, mostly folk music and songs, and the other was Western music performed by British artists to express their sympathy. It also included songs of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Another remarkable aspect was the depiction of religion in rural life. The show started with the Azan (call to prayer) at dawn and then a devotional Hindu song "Rai Jaago Rai", followed by a farmer walking to his farming field with bulls and plough. British artists played different compositions with the piano, cello and other instruments. Among them were Jazz artists Norma Winstone, John Taylor, cellist Keith Harvey and pianist Marilyn Knight. Actress Glenda Jackson, who won the Academy Awards as the best actress that year for her role in "Women in Love", recited a couple of short poems. French sculptor Jephhan de Villiers donated one of his sculptures—to be auctioned for aid for the refugees—that was exhibited at the foyer of Sadler's Wells.

Describing people who fled persecution and deaths at home and took refuge across the border, the concert flyer said: People! Lonely and lost; baffled and bewildered; disrupted and dispossessed. Once they were farmers, workers, teachers, doctors and artists—now only refugees. But, to reflect the resistance and defiance it pronounced: "Bengal, together with her music and literature is alive! Though all is not well there, we hope that we might reach what all Art seeks to reach—the heart of the matter. A battered peoples' Art lives".

The Earl of Harewood George Henry Hubert Lascelles, who was then the director of the Royal Opera House, Oscar winning actress Glenda Jackson, the vice chancellor of the University of London and the mayors of Birmingham and Wolverhampton were among the nine patrons of the committee. Members of the committee included about 20 members of parliament,

including well known supporters of our Liberation War John Stonehouse and Peter Shore. A Nobel Prize winning economist, Professor JT Tinbergen, was also a member of the committee.

Since finding and listening to the album, I have been trying to learn more about the concert. But I could not find any of the organisers and participants except Glenda Jackson—as most of them have passed away. When I contacted her in early 2020, she was again ruling the British TV screen following her return from politics to acting after a 27-year break, when she played the key role in the BBC drama series "Elizabeth Is Missing". For the 2019 production, she won a Bafta TV Award and an International Emmy for best actress. Sadly, when I asked her about the Concert in Sympathy, she could not remember anything. She only said we should all be happy that Bangladesh gained independence and expressed her delight that she had also done something for the cause. Our conversation ended soon, but her recital of the following verses reverberated in my ears, though I could not ascertain who the poet was:

*Each day blood flows on Bengal soil
Every traveller leaves behind some of his blood in this blood bank
Where it is stored for the future needs of the land
Bengal's blood is drawn inexorably towards the soil
And though the river may dry and the sea disappear
The garland of nature she wears may dry
Yet one day from this same blood shall emerge a new river
A fresh garland of nature
The village that was once destroyed
And so who wants to keep his blood in the blood bank at the hospital
Where it becomes polluted with the poison touch of glass bottles
There can be no blood bank better than the Bengal soil
Where each drop of blood donated becomes 10 drops
And that is why people no longer go to the blood bank at the hospital
Bengal's blood is drawn inexorably towards the soil.*

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Green jobs and green energy

The relationship between renewable energy and the economy

BIJETRI TASNUVA PRONOMI

How long does the world have until climate change irreversibly changes our planet for the worse? A new "climate clock" installed at Manhattan's Union Square by artists Andrew Boyd and Gan Golan is counting down the amount of time left to achieve net-zero emissions before the effects of carbon emissions from energy use alter the future of this planet. According to climate scientists, an increase in global temperature (caused by greenhouse gases produced by human activity) will lead to higher sea levels, more flooding, intense wildfires, heatwaves, drought, and a rise in other natural disasters. A 2019 report by NASA on global climate change warns that an increase in global temperatures by 1.5 degrees Celsius will lead to melting ice, species and biodiversity loss and extinction, food insecurity, heat-related and vector-borne illnesses and economic losses from climate change.

The use of energy (which is currently derived from fossil fuels at disproportionately high rates) is at the core of our modern, global economy. We use energy to power our homes, schools, offices, and factories, to drive our vehicles and transports, to produce our clothes and most essential items, among other activities. However, given the catastrophic impact of climate change and the role of carbon emission from burning extractive energy sources such as fossil fuels in driving such impacts, it is increasingly important for our planet and our economies to be calibrated towards transitioning into renewable energy that will lower emissions. Renewable energy can not only solve the rapidly worsening climate crisis, but it can also facilitate in creating more jobs within an economy, leading to higher wellbeing and a thriving global economy.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that renewable energy sectors are primed to create higher employment opportunities than traditional fossil fuel industries as they tend to have "longer and more diverse supply chains, higher labour intensity, and increased net profit margins". These jobs can be created through

the production and distribution of equipment and other inputs as well as through services like project operation, installation, and management. Renewable energy can not only create new jobs, but it can also create better and more decent jobs by expanding the scope for better working conditions and creating opportunities for dialogue between workers and employees. It can also create possibilities for greater economic activities in other sectors—for example, it can accelerate economic activity in the agricultural sector by increasing the demand for biomass. Moreover, simple economic principles can also be the driving force behind fossil-to-clean energy

with fossil fuel jobs being phased out and replaced with green energy jobs, research suggests that falling employment in these industries will be offset by the rising employment in the renewable sector. Another issue is ensuring the just transition of a labour market into the green energy sector which necessitates the flexibility of the labour force. As such, transitioning to a new industry will also require new training and opportunities for retraining and supplementary upskilling opportunities, along with possibilities for transition for workers in extractive energy industries as well as focusing efforts on retaining workers and their expertise within the industry.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

transition. Building and maintaining new green energy plants are far more cost-effective than fossil fuel plants, creating more demand for workers and raising job opportunities. A green energy sector is currently booming in the US—around 3.3 million people are working in the sector, outnumbering total fossil fuel jobs in the country.

Expanding the renewable energy sector portends more job opportunities; however, the challenges associated with transitioning into it also need to be addressed. Although there are concerns

Despite the promise of higher employment and greater economic growth and wellbeing with renewable energy transition, conversations around this issue inflict doubt and scepticism about the viability of green energy to ensure sustained economic growth. There is a pervasive myth in policy discussions which indicate that higher growth cannot be separated from soaring greenhouse emissions, especially as countries in the Global South (a term which refers to lower, middle-income, and emerging national economies) are rapidly

industrialising their economies, leading to more carbon emissions.

However, the concept of eco-economic decoupling in economic and environmental fields suggests that an economy can achieve economic growth without resorting to corresponding carbon emissions and environmental pressures through adopting relevant policies and technologies. Dr Narasimha Rao at Yale University, whose research examines the relationship between energy systems, human development and climate change, demonstrates that the choice between economic growth and lowering emissions is often a false dichotomy. Traditional economic thinking centres economic growth and wellbeing around metrics like GDP that do not measure the sense of wellbeing and equality within an economy; thus, he suggests moving towards a more holistic definition of growth that focuses on ensuring justice—social, economic, and environmental. According to Dr Rao, reducing inequality—both between countries and within them—is one of the most effective ways to mitigate the impact of climate change. Economic growth does not need to be energy-intensive. Instead, it is possible to create opportunities for energy-efficient economic growth in developing countries through expanding renewable energy sectors, which in turn can lead to policies and technologies that protect the environment, create jobs, and elevate people's quality of life.

The "Climate Clock" ticking away at Manhattan showed that at the time of writing, humans have a little over seven years to reverse the future that unfettered climate change and environmental degradation will inflict on the planet. Transitioning into a renewable energy economy is a key part of the solution to the challenges posed by climate change. It is also the solution that is more positioned to create higher employment, a dynamic economy, and one that will allow greater wellbeing while keeping our planet safe.

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