

## Another haphazardly arranged vaccination drive

*This time, it is school children and their guardians who are suffering*

THE government's vaccination programme for schoolchildren, which has been underway since the first of this month, is beset by a number of difficulties. According to a report in this daily on Wednesday, long queues, mismanagement at the vaccine centres and multiple difficulties in the registration process have dampened the excitement surrounding the initiative to inoculate schoolchildren aged 12-17. This, unfortunately, shows that the authorities have not learned any lessons from previous nationwide vaccination drives that were mired with inefficiencies as a result of poor planning and lack of proper oversight.

It is most disappointing that the government is yet to devise a system to make its inoculation programmes efficient and easy for those who are hoping to get vaccinated. In the absence of such a system, students of various schools have had to wait for hours on end to get their vaccines, according to the report. Some students were even seen struggling to just get into the school premises. The chaos inside and outside of the schools and the massive gatherings of students and their guardians is only exposing them to unnecessary risks of contracting the virus. And this has, so far, been a staple of all of the government's vaccination drives.

The report revealed that some of the gatherings were happening because not all the vaccination booths were functional. The number of school students in Dhaka is huge. The government should have taken this into account and set up a substantial number of vaccination centres. That there are currently only a handful of vaccination centres available for school children, where some of the booths are not even operating, is simply unacceptable. Parents also complained at the lack of assistance they received from school authorities when it came to registering their children for vaccination. Moreover, there has been a huge mess-up when it comes to registering with the Surokha app, as those having a 16-digit birth certificate have been unable to register at all.

These are all problems that should have been sorted out a long time ago. After so many rounds of government vaccination drives, there is no excuse for these hurdles. The lack of focus on the part of the authorities to ensure that the inoculation of school children goes smoothly is truly perplexing. Therefore, we call on the authorities to immediately address these issues once and for all, as otherwise, the current vaccination drive of school children, like many before it, might again fail to deliver the desired results. And that is something we can ill-afford at this stage.

## Draft guideline to regulate three-wheelers encouraging

*Slow-moving vehicles are a major cause for road crashes on highways*

THAT the government has made a draft guideline to regulate risky three-wheelers and similar types of vehicles on national and regional highways is encouraging. According to the draft, three-wheelers like Nasiman and Kariman and the battery-run easy-bikes will not be allowed on national and regional highways unless they have the route permit, and registration and fitness clearance, to operate on the dedicated routes. The number of such vehicles would be brought down in an effort to reduce road crashes and traffic congestion. Moreover, the drivers of the vehicles which would be allowed to operate, would also be required to have driving licenses.

Various studies done over the years have found slow-moving vehicles to be one of the major reasons for road crashes on highways. However, not much has been done to control their operations. Reportedly, a ban was imposed on the three-wheelers such as Nasiman and Kariman on 22 major national highways in 2015, which remains largely unenforced. The result of the non-enforcement of the ban is that road crashes have increased on the highways in the last few years. According to a police report, a total of 3,095 people were killed in 3,259 road crashes in the first seven months of this year, which is over 40 percent higher than that of the same period last year. And experts have blamed the plying of a large number of small vehicles on highways for this rise in the number of casualties from road crashes.

While we appreciate any steps to control the movement of slow-moving vehicles on the highways because they increase risks of accidents, we would also like to remind the government that these vehicles are very cost-effective for the local people. If they are taken out of the roads, there must be alternative modes of transport made available for people at cheaper rates. Another solution could be to improve the technical standards of these vehicles and let them operate on separate lanes, while ensuring that they are driven by skilled people with driving licenses.

That being said, we think the draft regulation is a very significant development in ensuring road safety. Since it is still in its preparatory stage, transport experts as well as ordinary people should be allowed to give their feedback to make it more people-oriented and enforceable.

# PM Hasina's earnest call for action at COP26

*Bangladesh's climate diplomacy may go a long way in compelling major emitters to take more responsibility in dealing with the climate crisis*

BAREESH HASAN CHOWDHURY

IN the lead up to COP26, the BBC published an article highlighting five people who would be key to successful outcomes in Glasgow. The list included veteran Chinese climate negotiator Xia Zhenhua and COP26 President Alok Sharma, amongst others, and included the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina, who the BBC termed the "voice of the vulnerable". As the current President of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) and the V20 Group of Ministers, much is expected of Bangladesh's delegation to be a strong moral voice and advocate.

These expectations are not without justification. Bangladesh, along with other small developing states, often have outsized voices at forums like COP, punching well above their economic weight, and with good track records of pushing through valuable decisions

often begins after the leaders have left their negotiators to work overtime to iron out a deal—and the opportunity was taken by many to announce significant new climate pledges, including a spate of net zero commitments and action. Others used the opportunity to remind their fellow heads of states of the urgency and moral imperative of successful outcomes at Glasgow.

PM Hasina began with the oft-recited yet highly effective reminder that Bangladesh contributes less than 0.5 percent of global emissions, yet is a country that is among the most vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. The moral imperative of climate action is not on developing states like Bangladesh, but rather on rich, industrialised nations. But the climate reality is that we are already facing the effects, and without effective climate

announced that work is underway on a National Adaptation Plan that should be unveiled next year. Bangladesh's new NDC were deemed "ambitious" by her, and she briefly mentioned the extensive domestic solar programme, as well as plans to have 40 percent of power generation from renewable sources by 2041. The main body of her speech ended with her reiterating her responsibility

*In climate diplomacy circles, Bangladesh remains a respected and motivated actor fighting for climate action on the global stage.*



PM Sheikh Hasina presents her national statement as part of the World Leaders' Summit of the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland on November 1, 2021.

PHOTO: AP

through the UN mechanism. An appeal by the PM on behalf of the CVF countries for the submission of ambitious new NDCs went out last year and acted as a call to action for many ahead of Glasgow. Most recently, Bangladesh and the Marshall Islands were commended for their efforts in the UN Human Rights Council to push through a resolution for the creation of a new mandate holder, in the form of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Climate Change. In climate diplomacy circles, Bangladesh remains a respected and motivated actor fighting for climate action on the global stage.

As a result, PM Hasina's speech at the Leaders Summit on the first two days at COP26 was eagerly awaited. The series of speeches by world leaders is more theatre than actual policy action—the real work

finance, technology transfer and focus on adaptation, many lives and livelihoods will be lost in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the Global South.

Bangladesh is already planning and taking actions to deal with this climate reality, as outlined in the number of policy initiatives the PM talked about. She mentioned the establishment of the GoB's Climate Change Trust Fund, for which she announced spending would be increasing yearly, as well as the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan, the first of its kind in the world and a blueprint on building resilience, promoting development and spurring economic growth centring around climate action. It is widely expected that this will be a blueprint for other developing nations to develop their own climate prosperity plans. She also

to speak not only for the people of Bangladesh, but also the 40 plus members of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, and spoke of the efforts of the CVF countries to pursue a "Climate Emergency Pact".

She closed her speech with four demands, summarising the long-standing demands of many in the developing world. The first of these was that the major emitters and industrialised countries must submit ambitious new NDCs for upgraded climate action as well as, importantly, guarantee their implementation. The second was to highlight a major talking point at COP26, which is the promise of the mobilisation of USD 100 billion annually in climate finance to developing countries, which has yet to be kept. The climate finance that has been mobilised (usually well short of the USD 100 billion target) has often been skewed for mitigation purposes, and the PM reiterated the CVF's demands that the finance should be split 50:50 between mitigation and adaptation. In addition, she also demanded affordable and accessible technology transfer for developing nations. Finally, she called for the addressing of the elephant in the room: Loss and Damage, including calling for enshrinement of shared responsibility for climate migrants/refugees and displaced peoples due to adverse climatic effects such as sea level rises, increasing salinity, erosion, droughts, etc.

While her speech covered many points deserving of their own careful analysis and writing, and bravely put forward a series of demands for major emitters and industrialised nations to take responsibility and appropriate action to fight the climate crisis, there were some significant issues missing, especially in relation to Bangladesh's environmental

actions at home. There was no mention of coal, a major talking point at this COP, as repeated calls from the COP Presidency have urged for coal to be binned at Glasgow. Bangladesh has persisted with planned future reliance on coal—a policy that contradicts the moral high ground of its climate diplomatic position and makes less and less economic sense as the price of renewables plummet worldwide. While in a separate speech she mentioned the 10 coal power plant plans that were binned earlier this year by the government, there remains extensive coal generation plants, many in fragile ecosystems, with questions surrounding ecological impacts and human rights violations.

In addition, with international pressure on coal funders, whether these cancellations came about from climate considerations or economic necessities is a matter of speculation. Without an updated Power Sector Master Plan, it remains unclear as to what direction the government's energy policies will take and remains a somewhat uncertain field. Deforestation and the conservation of carbon sinks were also noticeably missing from the PM's speech, especially with continuous reports of land-grabbing and tree-felling in reserve forests in Bangladesh—such as the decision to use 700 acres for the establishment of a civil service academy in Cox's Bazaar, which includes areas that are categorised as Ecologically Critical. Bangladesh initially abstained from signing on to a major political commitment on protection of forests at COP, but has since signed on.

PM Hasina's speech in Glasgow made a lot of good points and stressed on important demands, something one must hope her negotiators and the delegates of other CVF countries will push hard for in whatever outcomes emerge from Glasgow. However, these cannot just remain demands, they must become realities as the climate crisis worsens. Near term action is extremely important. While no government is perfect, Bangladesh's moral position internationally must also be backed up with action domestically, something which, at the domestic level, has sometimes been found lacking. The pipeline of policies and strategic documents will create an important framework, but we have to wait until they are published to scrutinise what they do well and what they lack. Words are important, but action even more so. Whatever emerges when the dust settles in Glasgow, we hope the government of Bangladesh will apply the same urgency to dealing with environmental degradation at home.

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# Locally-led adaptation is a key strategy in dealing with the climate crisis



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THIS world is home to some 7.6 billion people, and not every person lives as well as the next. Some live in concrete homes, some in thatched huts. Some in the urban jungle, some in towns and villages, and others, literally in jungles. Some live on flat land, some on plateaus, and some on plain land. Those who live in climate vulnerable areas are often posed a common question: Why not move?

This article will not answer the above question. There are a number of reasons as to why a group of people choose a particular area and make it their home. It is as much of a geological decision, as it is a cultural, social or emotional one. However, it is important that we highlight the plight of people who choose a particular spot as their home and demand localised attention for them, while or without waiting for solutions to big-picture, global problems. We need to make leaders understand that while global environmental debates remain ever fluid, people who live in deteriorating local conditions require customised and personalised solutions, and they require them fast.

Take deforestation, for instance. The people in these vulnerable areas are largely dependent on the forests for their livelihood, but deforestation has now become a problem for the entire world. Similarly, if the world is to curb the global rise in temperature and keep it below 1.5 degrees Centigrade, countries will have to cut their emissions for decades. It is a given that the bigger the issue, the more time it will take. While conventions are held every year regarding burning environmental issues such as deforestation and global warming as a consequence of deforestation, vulnerable people are grappling with

seemingly smaller but more urgent and life-threatening consequences, such as hunger, displaced animals entering villages, and floods and cyclones—none of which can be put on hold because conventions with important world leaders are looking for solutions. Granted, global warming is a much bigger issue in the grander scheme of things, but it definitely is not as easily solved as some localised problems may

wait for reforestation in a particular area for the floods to stop while people lose livelihoods, homes get displaced and children fall sick. Research has shown us all the reasons why floods in one area would occur again and again. Even if evacuation seems an obvious solution, oftentimes, it does not work due to a combination of economic forces, lack of education, human rights issues, etc. An integrated problem like this would



In almost neck-deep water, a woman carries dry food and kitchenware on a makeshift raft in Char Rajibpur upazila of Kurigram, after the Brahmaputra River swelled up in the district last year.

FILE PHOTO

be, if given proper and timely attention. Therefore, it is only fitting that these local problems be provided with unique solutions—whether nature-based and local, or a mix of global and local—but definitely keeping in mind the local surroundings. They demand customisation in the way they are solved, and deserve acute attention and swift intervention from their national governments, international agencies and other decision-making bodies. Take, for instance, floods. The drone view of why floods occur frequently is a lack of green cover provided by trees. However, it would be impractical to

never have a one-size-fits-all solution. Therefore, simply calling for evacuation in that area does not serve any purpose. It is like yanking at the string of a botched necklace while the whole piece disintegrates in your hand.

Then what do you do? The answer is two-pronged. It lies at the very roots of where the problem is occurring—in locally led adaptation (LLA), and ironically, in the experienced hands of top decision-makers, researchers, government and private institutions, civil society torchbearers and international agencies. Let us explore both in detail. Locally led adaptation action involves

empowering local stakeholders to lead or meaningfully contribute to adaptation actions. Each place has its own unique history, its dilemmas, and its tried and tested localised methods of putting things right. Indigenous people know their land better than anyone and know how to respect nature and the environment in which they live, often striking the right balance between sustaining resources and protecting themselves, even if it is just to survive and delay the issues at hand, and not mitigate them. Right now, almost everywhere in the world, people are going by the top-down approach. The top officials of government ministries, who have next to no hands-on knowledge of problems faced by the people who are in the thick of the problem, are trying to find solutions to these problems. Their expertise is simply not enough to generate the sort of results that would sustainably work for these people.

It is the people living in the affected areas who will be able to assist themselves better, as they have been dealing and adapting with issues like these all their lives and through generations. The experience they pass down, the improvised techniques of adaptation, blended with the modern knowledge of local and regional experts, can be crucial to their survival and to planning out localised solutions for them, even, and especially, in the face of global negotiation delays. In short, even when a failure of global leadership delays things, local intervention can and should be faster than global delay. This can be made possible through LLA where all authoritative bodies working at the local level—supported by their governments and private institutions, including civil society leaders—and foreign agencies work and learn from each other and about adaptive actions by involving local-level entities.

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