

Why are police disregarding the home minister’s assurance?

Save Tentultala playground, pay heed to public demand

WE are at a loss as to why police were still carrying on the construction work of Kalabagan police station in the city’s Tentultala playground, even though the home minister said he had asked the city corporation and others concerned to find an alternative place for the police station. Our reporters found that the construction work was going on in the presence of dozens of police personnel ignoring the widespread protests on and off social media.

Open spaces in Dhaka are becoming rarer and rarer by the day. We often blame youngsters for becoming addicted to digital devices, and fault them for their predilection for remaining indoors, whereas we cannot provide them with adequate facilities to work out or play outdoors. Over the last couple of decades in particular, Dhaka city has become bereft of playgrounds. Most public spaces have been given away to real estate owners and builders for the construction of shopping malls or housing complexes, caring little for the need for open space. And except for some older educational institutions, most new schools have little to no space for outdoor activities in their premises.

It is against this grim background that the Tentultala situation has been unfolding. Local residents, the media and distinguished citizens have been asking the authorities repeatedly to rescind their decision and leave the playground for the locals to use for outdoor activities. Now, even after months of protests by the locals, and despite the home minister’s instruction to find an alternative site for the establishment, why are the police still bent on using this spot?

We wonder why the eyes of the administration almost always zeroes in on such spots. We agree that a properly organised police station is needed in the Kalabagan area. But we also believe that time has come to consider new plans for building new police stations.

We also believe that the police acted in a highhanded fashion when it picked up a protester and her young son for streaming footage of the construction work inside the playground on Facebook on Sunday. They were released after 12 hours of being locked up. Expressing one’s concern and dissent in whatever legal platform available is a fundamental right, which the police grossly violated. We call upon the administration to halt work on the Tentultala playground in view of the home minister’s assurance, and find a suitable alternative quickly. We also urge the law enforcement authorities to remember that their mandate is to serve the citizens of the country, not make adversaries out of them.

Make people aware of fortified foods

Provide them to the poor at reasonable prices

WHILE the need to consume fortified foods to address the issue of micronutrient deficiency is recognised worldwide, it is really unfortunate that people living in the poverty-stricken regions of Bangladesh, such as parts of Rangpur and Nilphamari districts, don’t have access to fortified foods—nor are they aware of it. According to a study by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b), only 41 percent of respondents had heard about fortified foods. Another 37 percent of respondents faced difficulty in buying these micronutrient-rich foods, while 40 percent could not buy them at all. This is because of the drastic fall in their income during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Food fortification is one of the most cost-effective strategies to increase the regular intake of micronutrients. Under this process, one or more micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals are incorporated into food items to improve their nutritional qualities. Such foods are necessary to meet the nutritional needs of people, particularly the low income households who cannot afford to buy nutrient-rich foods.

Anaemia, which is caused by iron deficiency, is one of the biggest public health concerns in Bangladesh, but it can be fought with iron-rich fortified foods. Micronutrient deficiency causes many other health conditions such as malnutrition, multiple infections, chronic diseases, poor health and well-being, impaired learning, poor mental health, etc. This is particularly dangerous for pregnant women and children.

Although the government has undertaken many programmes to improve the nutritional status of vulnerable populations, there are still many shortcomings in the interventions. While the government was able to make people aware of and popularise the need to take iodised salt, it could not do so in case of other micronutrient-rich foods such as rice and edible oil. The icddr,b survey found that almost all the respondents knowingly consumed iodised salt and knew that packaged salts are iodised.

The question is: If people can be made aware of iodised salt, why can’t they be made aware of nutrient-rich edible oil, rice and other foods? We think a massive awareness campaign is needed to make these food items popular among people. Most importantly, they must be made affordable to all. Since the government is selling essential food items at subsidised prices at different OMS (Open Market Sales) points across the country, it should include fortified rice and edible oil in their supplies. In addition, it should freely distribute these food items under its social safety net programmes to enhance the nutritional well-being of disadvantaged citizens.

What enables this vulgar display of power?



Nahaly Nafisa Khan
is a sub-editor at the Metro
desk of The Daily Star.

NAHALY NAFISA KHAN

I often think about all the times our kids took to the streets to ask for something—justice for their friends who were killed in road crashes or raped and brutally murdered. All they were doing were demanding road safety or an end to the culture of impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. Each time, the authorities turned a blind eye to such protests. At times, their voices were simply ignored, while at others they were silenced with violence.

But imagine something as harmless as asking for the protection of a playground. How can that land a parent and her minor child in jail—and without proper grounds and an arrest warrant? Where does this vulgar urge to flaunt power stem from?

That is exactly what happened with Syeda Ratna, coordinator of Tentultala Math Rakkhya Andolon, and her 17-year-old son, who were detained on Sunday morning when they went live on Facebook to show Kalabagan police building a wall on the playground, while a group of kids accompanied by their parents were also protesting the act. When contacted, Sharif Mohammad Faruquzzaman, assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (New Market zone), said the two were picked up for “obstructing police from discharging their duties.”

Tentultala playground has been in the discussion for several months now, after the Dhaka deputy commissioner’s office handed over the playground land to the DMP on January 31 this year to construct a new establishment for Kalabagan police station. The one bigha land has been a playground, an Eidgah, and a place for namaz-e-janaza for over 50 years now. Locals, naturally, refused to give up the playground and for several months, they’ve been demonstrating against the DMP’s move to take possession of the land. It is in the continuation of the ongoing protests that when Ratna saw the walls going up around the playground, she decided to inform her fellow protesters of the turn of events, using the most viable tool at hand—social media.

After 13 hours of negotiations and arguments, Ratna’s teenage son was finally let go at around 10:30pm on Sunday, while Ratna was freed upon signing a bond that said she would not involve herself with any demonstration over the matter. How can a law enforcement agency curtail a citizen’s right to protest and make demands on their authorities in such a manner?

More questions remain, even after they are freed.

A video recording went viral after the



▲
VISUAL:
TEENI AND TUNI

Police, as we have been taught all our lives, are “friends” of the people. Public servants, they are called. How exactly are they serving the public if they make unlawful arrests to instigate fear among citizens, to restrain a peaceful protest by children? How can we trust them to save us when they turn into perpetrators themselves?

fellow protesters of Ratna and journalists went to the police station after the mother-son duo were detained. When asked if the on-duty officer knew how old the boy was, he said, “We cannot always confirm their age by simply looking at them.”

And yet, without any confirmation, without any offence, they detained him.

When those present at the police station asked the on-duty officer if they had issued

Kalabagan and Kathalbagan), there is a proposal to keep sufficient open space for the area. According to the law to conserve playgrounds, open spaces, parks and water bodies, no one can change the characteristics of a playground. Environmental activists say the place has been used as a playground for a long time and changing its characteristics will be illegal.

an arrest warrant before detaining Ratna and her son, he said, “We don’t always need a warrant.”

According to Section 54 (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, there are nine instances where a law enforcement official can detain an individual without a warrant. A peaceful protest or documentation of an event might not, in our definition, fall under any of these clauses. But somehow, to our law enforcers, it was an act of “obstructing a police officer while in the execution of his duty.” A crime so horrendous that a protester can be taken into custody without a warrant.

Police, as we have been taught all our lives, are “friends” of the people. Public servants, they are called. How exactly are they serving the public if they make unlawful arrests to instigate fear among citizens, to restrain a peaceful protest by children? How can we trust them to save us when they turn into perpetrators themselves?

And most importantly, from where do they get this notion that instigating fear among law-abiding citizens through an ugly display of power can get things done their way? When did they become this unaccountable?

Construction work is still being carried on at the playground, even after Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said he had asked the city corporation and others concerned to find an alternative place for Kalabagan police station.

In the proposed Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of Dhaka, Tentultala playground is not earmarked as a playground. But in Sub-Zone 17 (Dhanmondi, Zigatola,

In 2014, the High Court directed the DC office to take action against any encroachment of open spaces or playgrounds in Dhaka. The office, too, remains silent when it comes to the Tentultala playground.

How many times have the authorities banned or proposed a ban on social media or gaming apps to stop our kids from going “astray”? How many times have they urged on “healthier” modes of entertainment for the teens?

And when they are asking for just that—a mere playground—why are they being taken away and stuffed into jail?

Why, amid many protests, all the provisions for a playground in place, and most importantly, after the home minister’s reassurance, is the construction still going on? What does this say about our law enforcers? That they will not leave any chance to proudly showcase their vehement power, even when it comes to a playground for children?

With each passing day, our right to dissent and raise our voices is being curtailed. There’s something so challenging—or dare I say “anti-establishment”—about a group of kids and their parents asking to protect their local playground that they need to be detained.

Resisting this culture of unaccountability is a timely need. And when I look at the picture of Ratna and her son upon their release—the sheer love and indomitable spirit with which they came through—I can sense an air of resistance. Yes, sir, you do need a warrant. No, you cannot detain a minor, and neither can you stop the protests. Try us.

Time to Focus on the Global Goal on Adaptation



POLITICS OF
CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr Saleemul Huq
is the director of the International Centre
for Climate Change and Development
(ICCCAD) at the Independent University,
Bangladesh (IUB).

SALEEMUL HUQ

DURING the negotiations that led to the historic Paris Agreement at the 21st UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in 2015, the climate vulnerable countries argued for and succeeded in getting the global goal on mitigation of staying below two degrees Celsius—and if possible, below 1.5 degrees Celsius. This was indeed a remarkable achievement for the vulnerable countries at that time.

At the same time, the vulnerable developing countries, led by the African Group of Negotiators (AGN), also argued for having a Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA). This was achieved through Article 7 of the Paris Agreement.

However, unlike mitigation, where a simple temperature goal was possible, there was no such simple goal for adaptation stated, as it is context-specific and difficult to aggregate to a global level. Hence an agreement was reached that there would be further discussion on defining the GGA over time.

Unfortunately, over the last few years, there has not been much progress—until last year at COP26 in Glasgow, UK, where the Glasgow-Sharm el Sheikh work programme on GGA was established to achieve an agreement on the definition and parameters of the GGA by COP28

Each developed country should allocate half its funds for adaptation, and clearly report where the funds are going and through which channels. There should also be a neutral independent body under the UN to monitor these fund flows.

in Dubai in 2023. This work programme will be launched by inviting submissions from all the countries on what they would like to see in the GGA, to be submitted to the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by the end of this month.

Bangladesh is preparing its submission, and I am taking this opportunity to offer some thoughts for their consideration.

First, we need to acknowledge that agreeing on the GGA is quite complex and by no means easy, as there are different ways to develop such a goal that are not compatible with each other. Hence, it is quite likely that we may end up having several different goals for different aspects of adaptation to climate change.

The main dichotomy in approaches is whether to take a top-down approach, like we did for mitigation, or a bottom-up approach, which may be more appropriate for adaptation. In the end, I believe we will need to agree to a combination of both approaches for the final GGA.

My first recommendation will be a top-down approach to providing finance for adaptation in the developing countries by the developed countries—the latter have already agreed to provide USD 100 billion a year for both mitigation and adaptation measures. However, so far the developed countries have failed to provide the full amount, and they only allocated 20 percent of their funding to support adaptation, while 80 percent went to support mitigation.

So the first goal should be to have half of the funding to be channelled towards adaptation efforts, and that should be prioritised for the most vulnerable communities in the most vulnerable

developing countries. Each developed country should allocate half its funds for adaptation, and clearly report where the funds are going and through which channels. There should also be a neutral independent body under the UN to monitor these fund flows.

The second, more bottom-up approach, that I would recommend is the building of adaptive capacity of the most vulnerable communities in every country, since adaptation is now happening in both poor and rich countries. This requires a focus on Locally Led Adaptation (LLA), where Bangladesh is an accepted world leader and can help develop the metrics and methods for implementing and monitoring progress towards the global goal over time.

My third and final recommendation is to emphasise the need for a monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approach to develop the methodology of both implementation and evaluation of progress as adaptation is quintessentially a learning-by-doing process.

I would also like to point out the importance of the global stocktake of progress of the Paris Agreement, which will take place in 2023, and it is essential to have some way to take into account the progress on adaptation—particularly the GGA. Failing to agree on the GGA in time will mean that the global stocktake will not be able to include adaptation, which will be a major setback.

So, Bangladesh has the opportunity to play a significant role in negotiating how we should determine the approaches to agreeing upon the GGA in the next two years, and also play a leading role in monitoring progress over time.