

How others control dengue

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In 2010, Kolkata city had faced its worst dengue outbreak – an event that prompted the municipality to draw up a definitive plan to control the menace.

“We started to get positive results from next year for both dengue and malaria,” Debashish Bishwas, chief vector control officer of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, told The Daily Star.

The plan involved dividing 206.2 square km of Kolkata Municipality areas into 144 wards and 16 boroughs and bringing the whole system under the leadership of five vector management experts, three of whom are PhD holders in this field.

The authorities also formed 32 rapid action teams that took immediate steps after getting information about a dengue patient. Moreover, 1,700 field workers as well as 1,440 staffers work to create ward-based data banks and its monitoring and also do awareness campaigns and collect information about fever.

This year, the Kolkata municipality has had about 500 cases of dengue and no confirmed death. In 2022, two

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

CHITTAGONG UNIVERSITY Contractors halt work protesting extortion

Fingers pointed at BCL men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Contractors have suspended their work at Chittagong University bringing allegation of extortion by a group of non-students.

In a letter to the CU vice-chancellor, the association of enlisted contractors of the university yesterday said all types of construction and repair work will remain suspended until steps are taken in this regard.

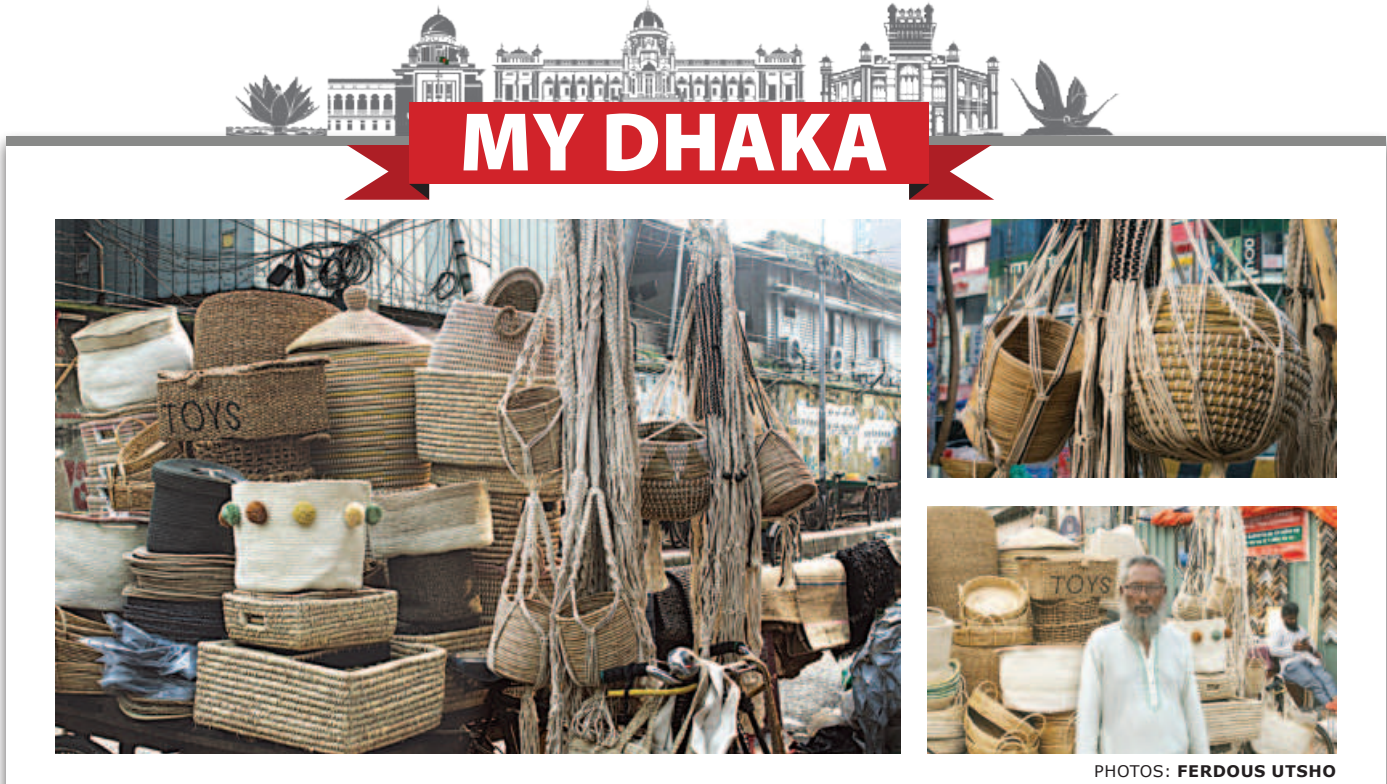
A section of non-student Chhatra League leaders are accused of extortion.

The letter signed by association President Md Sekandar Hossain and General Secretary MA Khaled Chowdhury stated that contractors are extorted by some druggie non-students who also steal all types of construction materials, including rods, bricks, cement, and electrical equipment.

They also beat up contractors, engineers, and construction workers, it added.

Speaking to The Daily Star, association President Md Sekandar Hossain said some former CU students, who have been staying on campus for

SEE PAGE 7 COL 6



WEAVING DREAMS Jute vendors on city streets

BY AYMAN ANIKA

Recently, while passing through the bustling streets of Gulshan-1, an elderly vendor selling beautifully stitched jute bags and mats caught my attention.

I have encountered such hawkers before – shouting at the top of their lungs to grab the attention of passers-by to sell their jute-infused products.

We will find plenty of such jute-made goods on Dhaka's streets, and the richness of their craftsmanship is immeasurable.

Known as the “Golden Fibre”, jute is deeply rooted in Bangladesh's culture and economy. Dhaka is a living testament to this legacy because you will find vendors selling bags, purses, rugs, footwear, and home décor items crafted with jute, in markets or at roadsides in the capital.

Jute's natural allure and versatility have seamlessly captured the world of home décor. From elegant rugs that add warmth to living spaces to intricately woven mats and carpets that tell stories of tradition, jute brings an authentic touch to interior design.

Just stroll down the streets of Gulshan-1 at Road 11 (beside Gloria Jean's Coffees), and you will find a smiling vendor named Berek Molla selling jute products like masterfully



crafted rugs, carpets, placemats, coasters, baskets, hats, and whatnot!

“We do not necessarily make these products; we buy them from manufacturers who produce them to export abroad. You see, our jute-based products are very popular in foreign countries. Therefore, people exporting them like to order them in bulk,” he said.

“Generally, factories make these jute-based items more than necessary, and after fulfilling the requested order, they sell the remaining products to us – the vendors or hawkers, who set up make-shift shops and stand in the scorching heat or get drenched in the rain to sell these products and make ends meet.”

Local artisans find a canvas in

jute, creating intricate crafts that tell stories of tradition and skill. These hand-crafted jute items are brought in from the northern parts of our country, namely Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Bogura.

“Adverse weather conditions combined with inflation pose significant challenges for us. For example, due to the incessant rain in the past few days, most of my products were damaged while being transported from Rangpur.

“This is heart-breaking for us, but time and again, we have to endure it,” said Berek.

The allure of jute isn't confined to the carts of street vendors or local markets only. You can find similar products, such as rugs, bags, shoes, baskets, etc., adorning the shelves of leading fashion houses in Dhaka.

However, hawkers or vendors sell similar types of products at a relatively cheaper price, costing anywhere between Tk 100 to Tk 1,500.

Take a tour of Doyel Chatter at Dhaka University and you will find many handicraft shops selling versatile jute products. Dhaka College might also be a good option for you, with shops showcasing a wide range of jute-based products.

Plastic bags that clutter the streets of Dhaka have met their match in jute bags. So, it is high time we recognised these sturdy, reusable, and eco-friendly products, as well as the local vendors and artisans who are trying to bring back the charm of jute to the urban landscape of Dhaka.

3-day-old infant missing from DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-day-old baby boy reportedly went missing from the Dhaka Medical College Hospital yesterday.

DMCH Director Brig Gen Md Nazmul Haque said they received a complaint in this regard.

Grandmother of the newborn, Mashura Begum, said they came from Mirpur's Rupnagar area on Tuesday, and the newborn was initially kept at ward 212 and later moved to ward 106.

Shahina Akhtar, 22, mother of the newborn, was sleeping in her bed and in the afternoon she realised that the baby was missing.

Mashura said despite an extensive search, the baby was nowhere to be found.

The child's father Hiron Mia said he was not present during the incident. He arrived at the hospital later and notified the police by calling 999.

The DMCH director said they suspect a woman in this connection and were questioning her.

Student killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A student was killed and four others were injured as a lorry collided head-on with a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Narayanganj's Bandar upazila yesterday.

The victim, Israt Jahan Tanha, 17, of Machimpur area in the district's Rupganj upazila, passed SSC exams this year.

The accident took place on the Asian Highway in Andhirpar area around noon, killing Israt on the spot, said Reazul Hoque, officer-in-charge of Kanchpur Highway Police Station.

Police seized the lorry, but its driver and helper managed to flee, he added.

The injured were sent to Dhaka for treatment.

UP member stabbed to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cumilla

A union parishad member was stabbed to death allegedly by a youth in Cumilla's Laksham upazila yesterday.

The victim, Abul Kashem, 52, was a member of ward 8 of Mudafarganj (Dakshin) Union Parishad, said Abdullah Al Mahfuz, OC of Laksham Police Station.

Victim's cousin Mir Hossain said Kashem had an altercation with Rajib Hossain, 32, at Shreyang around 3:00pm as he asked Rajib to come to his Shreyang Bazar office, saying that locals brought several allegations, including drug addiction, against him.

At one stage, Rajib started stabbing Kashem, leaving him injured.

He was taken to the local upazila health complex where doctors declared him dead, said Mir Hossain.

“When I tried to catch Rajib, he fled the scene throwing chilli powder into my eyes,” he added.

Where does the fault lie?

FROM PAGE 1
the Aedes mosquito, according to entomologists.

The starting point for any definitive largescale action is a policy that would serve as a guideline. Bangladesh's Vector Management Policy – which is being drafted by the ministry of local government, rural development and co-operatives – is yet to see the light of day.

In the absence of a policy, one would think that the city mayors would be proactive in keeping the residents safe from the dangerous mosquito population. But it was all lip service.

Take the case of the Dhaka Mosquito Control Department. For a long time, the two-storied building in Dhakeshwari area was a breeding ground for the mosquito that has so far infected 123,808 and claimed 593 lives – the highest yet for a single year.

Although vector control is not in its jurisdiction, the ministry of health and family welfare's role has been found wanting to. It hasn't created a database, so the actual gravity of the dengue outbreak remains undetermined.

The daily dengue bulletin from the Directorate General of Health Services is based on data from only 57 public and private hospitals in Dhaka and 81 district and divisional level hospitals.

But as many as 16,000 public and private hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres and blood banks across the country are providing dengue care.

Dengue is a reportable disease in other countries, meaning data on every single dengue patient must be recorded, according to Manjur A Chowdhury, a former president of the Zoological Society of Bangladesh.

In the absence of data on the exact number of victims and their locations and serotype distribution, any vector control programme would be akin to driving blind.

“Without information of all dengue patients, cluster elimination is not possible,” Chowdhury said.

Genome sequencing is no less important as identifying any potential changes in the dengue virus gene would inform the dengue management

programme.

Dengue virus exists as four distinct serotypes (closely related forms of the virus). Immunity from infection with one serotype may provide lifelong protection from that serotype but is only partially protective against other serotypes. A second infection with a different serotype than the first infection increases the risk of severe dengue, which can lead to fatality.

Similarly, Bangladesh Meteorological Department's role was found lacking too.

One of the reasons for the rising incidence and transmission of dengue over the last decade has been the warming temperatures, falling humidity levels and heavier summer rainfall – thanks to climate change.

Due to climate change, Bangladesh's temperature remains favourable for the breeding of Aedes mosquitoes all year round, said Kabirul Bashar, professor of medical entomology at Jahangirnagar University.

A temperature between 20 to 30 degrees Celsius is required for Aedes mosquito breeding.

“We get 20 degrees Celsius temperature even during winter – this is why we are getting dengue cases round the year,” he said.

Had the Met department given a warning about the conducive conditions for dengue incidence and transmission this year, the authorities, perhaps, would have been goaded into preparation mode sooner.

What transpired was a complete lack of initiative from anywhere, leaving it to citizens to fend for themselves this year from dengue, whose symptoms of high fever and painful body aches have earned it the nickname of “breakbone fever”.

The authorities concerned failed to chalk out an early plan when they saw over 62,000 cases last year, said GM Saifur Rahman, assistant professor of medical and applied entomology at the National University in Gazipur.

Both the city corporations failed to destroy the Aedes mosquito eggs laid towards the end of last year, according to Chowdhury, also the former chief

executive officer of Safeway Pest Control.

Those eggs hatched at the beginning of this year, earlier than their usual time, thanks to the shorter winter.

Serious anti-mosquito drive identifying active clusters during the lean period of dengue (November to April) is very important as during this time the number of Aedes mosquitoes remains low, said Chowdhury, currently the chairman of the Centre for Governance Studies.

The authorities will have to carry out an extensive drive including source reduction, larviciding and adulticide to destroy Aedes and its larvae.

“But authorities concerned did not take steps following this method,” he said.

Rapid urbanisation is also to blame for the ongoing dengue outbreak.

“The numbers of multi-storey buildings and cars have increased significantly since 2014, both of which play a significant role in the spread of dengue during the dry season – many people wash their vehicles in parking lots, where stagnant water accumulates,” said Bashar, the entomologist from Jahangirnagar University.

The Aedes mosquito requires pools of stagnant water to breed. These pools may be as small as a teaspoon and are found in nature (in puddles or tree holes) or in human environments (in trash, flower pots, buckets, used tyres and so on).

Going forward, dengue is likely to increase for Dhaka as the climatic conditions have become more suitable, said a 2021 World Bank report titled ‘Climate Afflictions’.

Humidity in the range of 60 to 80 percent, maximum temperature between 25°C and 35°C, and rainfall between 200-800mm create ideal conditions for mosquitoes.

Weather data between 1976 and 2019 indicate Dhaka is experiencing falling humidity levels, rising temperatures, and heavier summer rainfall. These together with factors like urbanisation are increasing the risk of the spread of dengue in Dhaka

city, the WB study said.

Subsequently, a coordinated action plan has become the need of the hour. In China, 13 to 18 ministries work together to control mosquitoes, according to Rahman, the entomologist from National University.

“The Vector Management Policy has been prepared – the approval of the cabinet committee is needed to put it to practice,” Md Tazul Islam, LGRD minister, told The Daily Star last month.

The policy, which has been in the works since 2020, has accommodated the research findings of different countries.

“Having a policy is not enough – we have to work in line with the policy,” he said, adding that the LGRD ministry is already functioning as per the policy.

Asked about the lean season management, he said: “During the lean period, eggs are found and it is not possible to destroy them. It is possible to kill the mosquitoes when they turn to larvae.”

The city corporation of Chennai has deployed a drone-based mosquito control system under which drones survey and dispense larvicide to effectively eradicate mosquito breeding habitats. The Delhi municipality is also planning to use the system.

“Without public participation, controlling dengue is not possible – public participation will have to be improved. We are trying our best,” Islam said.

Mosquito is mainly found in urban areas and for that, the city corporations have the capacity to control the menace, he added.

“We started working on controlling dengue from the beginning of the year and we are still doing it,” Atiqul Islam, mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation since March 2019, told The Daily Star.

He asserts that dengue is under control in his jurisdiction.

“We were not sitting at home. We have worked in coordination with various agencies to prevent dengue. We have come up with new methods to prevent dengue,” Islam added.

One of the new methods the DNCC intended to adopt was the use of the BTI, a naturally occurring bacterium that kills mosquito larvae. When BTI, short for bacillus thuringiensis israelensis, is present in water, mosquito larvae feed on it and die – long before they can grow up to become flying, biting, disease-spreading adults.

DNCC's BTI supplier, Marshall Aggravate, said the pesticide was imported from a Singaporean company Best Chemicals. The company denied it, prompting DNCC to halt the project and file a case against Marshall Aggravate for their alleged forgery.

“We have taken a comprehensive three-tier plan to combat the spread of dengue fever within the city corporation,” said Selim Reza, CEO of DNCC.

The plan involves a coordinated effort to identify and eliminate the breeding grounds of the Aedes mosquito and has been in action since January.

He denied any lack of coordination between different government agencies in controlling dengue.

“We have been successful in controlling dengue, and the health ministry has said so too,” Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, the mayor of DSCC since 2020, told The Daily Star.

The caseload is stable now and has dropped from July.

“The picture will be clear if you compare the numbers from August last year.”

DSCC is announcing red zones to neighbourhoods with more than 10 dengue patients. Larviciding and adulticide are conducted within 300 metres of the dengue patient's home, he said.

But their words ring hollow as at least 342 people died of dengue this August, making it the deadliest month since the health authorities started recording dengue cases in 2000. Of the deaths in August, 17 were reported yesterday, the last day of the month – and 16 of them were in the capital Dhaka. Besides, of the 593 deaths this year, 438 were reported from Dhaka.

Korvi wins

FROM PAGE 1

“I never thought about winning such a prestigious award while working for the people,” he said in an interview with The Daily Star.

“With this award, our responsibilities have also increased. At the same time, it opens up many new possibilities, such as expanding our successful model to other countries,” he said. “It would also be a source of pride for Bangladesh.”

Korvi said, “We were surprised to learn that the Ramon Magsaysay authority had been monitoring us for the past five years. They even conducted research on our activities and collected information about us.”

JAAGO Foundation currently offers lessons to around 13,500 children with the help of UNICEF. In addition, the NGO also runs a USAID-funded training programme for 55,000 individuals who have dropped out of school, or could not finish their education, or are currently unemployed.

“We are teaching them relevant skills that can help them get employed,” Korvi said.

JAAGO Foundation began its journey in 2007 with the goal of voluntarily teaching underprivileged children. It started with only 17 children but eventually established a school in a slum in Rayerbazar.

In 2011, the foundation launched the platform “Volunteer for Bangladesh.”

JAAGO Foundation was registered as an NGO in 2020. It currently has 600 employees, with offices in 14 different locations outside Dhaka.

The Ramon Magsaysay Award is considered Asia's premier prize and highest honour. The award is named after Ramon Magsaysay, the seventh president of the Philippines.

This prestigious award recognises exceptional contributions of individuals in various fields, from public service to social innovation that impacts the lives of Asians.

Twelve other Bangladeshis who won the award include Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, Prof Muhammad Yunus, Zafarullah Chowdhury, Abdullah Abu Sayeed and Matiur Rahman.