

Better connectivity with elevated expressway

Managing ramps and digitising toll collection are vital

At a time when citizens are severely affected by Dhaka's traffic jams, which eat up around five million working hours per day (as per a 2018 Buet study), we welcome the opening of the Tk 13,857.57-crore Dhaka Elevated Expressway, which promises to relieve congestion in certain areas, reduce travel time, and significantly improve connectivity. The partially opened 11.5-km expressway from Airport Road to Farmgate aims to reduce the trip to a duration of 10 minutes from the usual hour or more. In addition, the 13 ramps for accessing and exiting the expressway will provide alternative routes for vehicles. Commuters will enjoy the total benefit of the project when the full 19.7-km expressway, from the airport to Kutubkhali on the Dhaka-Chattoqram highway, is opened next year. The expressway promises to increase the road capacity of the capital by 20 km.

One noteworthy benefit is that heavy vehicles (such as trucks) which can only operate at night will be able to use the expressway and bypass the city, reducing the clogging on regular roads. The shorter lead times and improved infrastructure are anticipated to benefit businesses such as the apparel industry and the export of perishable goods, which rely on products reaching the airport on time for shipment through air. It will also connect major industrial belts such as Savar, Gazipur, Narsingdi, and Narayanganj. The Dhaka-Ashulia Expressway is also being built, with a deadline of 2026. The two expressways will enable people travelling from the northern, western, and south-western regions to bypass the congestion in Dhaka while crossing the city.

While we look forward to the significant changes this expressway and other under-development infrastructure will bring about, it is vital for the government to address all the concerns expressed by experts. The ramps, for instance, have to be managed efficiently. And a digital tolling system must be installed to avoid long queues of vehicles.

The Dhaka Elevated Expressway is part of a much bigger plan of modernising and expanding our transport network that will, no doubt, alleviate traffic congestion as well as provide greater and more efficient connectivity. At the same time, the government must focus on improving the existing roads under the expressways, flyovers, and the Dhaka metro rail, which will continue to be used by thousands of public transport users as these vehicles are unlikely to use expressways. The government must ensure that all these infrastructure projects are aligned with one another so that the transport system in its totality will see the dramatic positive change that they promise.

Finally, given the multiple setbacks this public-private partnership (PPP) project faced due to problems with securing funds, among other factors, the government should work on removing bureaucratic tangles that impede PPPs which, if managed efficiently, can bring about impactful developmental changes.

LPG cylinder prices burdening people

Strict market monitoring needed from authorities

We are concerned with the way importers, distributors, and retailers are indiscriminately increasing the prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders, despite the fact that the prices are being fixed by the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) regularly. According to a report in this daily, the BERC fixed the retail price of a 12-kg LPG cylinder at Tk 1,440 in early August. However, consumers in different parts of Dhaka had to buy the refilled cylinders for around Tk 1,400. Our reporters recently visited some areas of the city, including Kachukhet, Shewrapara, Tejuri Bazar, and Karwan Bazar, and found that a 12-kg LPG cylinder was even sold at Tk 1,500 in some places. At a time when the country's people are already overburdened by increasing costs of living, such illegal practices by traders have added to their sufferings.

The LPG market in Bangladesh has always been chaotic due to price manipulation by traders at different levels. Although the BERC fixes the price of LPG every month, the importers, distributors, and retailers reportedly do not abide by this. When asked about the reasons behind the inflated LPG prices at the consumers' end, retailers blame the distributors and the distributors point fingers at the importers. We often hear from importers that there is a shortage of imports and that they have to face many challenges in opening letters of credit, and that the volatile foreign exchange rate also contributes to increased prices. But these excuses do not fly with the public because the BERC is supposed to fix the prices of LPG cylinders in the country while considering all factors. Moreover, such prices have to be adhered to by the concerned distributors.

The BERC, therefore, cannot shrug off its responsibility. It seems that the regulatory body has confined its work to fixing the prices only, even though monitoring the market should also be one of its top priorities. It also has the power to take action against non-compliant companies, which it should exercise regularly. We therefore urge the BERC to take every step that is necessary to keep the LPG cylinder prices within the reach of ordinary people.

New Message

To

Subject

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The photographs of two young siblings who died of dengue recently have been doing rounds on social media, triggering an outcry. In one photograph, printed by a Bangla daily, nine-year-old Arafat Hossain Rauf is seen sitting with his seven-year-old sister, Isnat Jahan Raida. It's hard to take your eyes off the adorable picture. But that warm feeling turns into anguish as soon as you read the news of their demise. The mental state of their parents just adds to the heartbreak. It's beyond anyone's imagination how they would cope with this void that has now taken the place of their precious children.

According to the newspaper reports, the father, Mohammad Ibrahim, while sharing fond memories of his children, said that Rauf and Raida would always cling on to him, whether it be at the dining table or when they would go to sleep. Ibrahim had plans to paint Raida's room pink and Rauf's blue. But all those plans have been shattered in the span of a week. Rauf died of the dengue on August 18, while Raida breathed her last on August 25. Raida had developed a fever on the day her brother died. As her condition deteriorated, Ibrahim rushed from one hospital to another for a paediatric ICU, but to no avail.

Rauf and Raida are among several hundreds of people joining the procession of the dead. Once a seasonal fever, dengue is now taking its heaviest toll on Bangladesh, shattering all previous records of infections and deaths. Despite this, we have hardly seen any effective measures from the authorities concerned, especially from the two city corporations in Dhaka. Far from admitting their shortcomings, authorities have maintained that they have done enough, that too with the same old approach to contain

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It's always a pleasure to see Bangladesh be the hero in a story. As such, it was a huge delight attending the General Assembly of the World Farmers Markets Coalition in Rome and seeing our country being showcased for connecting farmers and consumers through farmers' markets. This acknowledgement was particularly rewarding for me because I had worked hard to establish local farmers' markets. Following a pilot project, we set up 15 new markets over just 15 weeks in Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Gazipur, and Narayanganj city corporations, bringing the total to 16.

Why is it so important to connect the growers and consumers of food? Many people are afraid to eat local fresh fruits and vegetables for fear of chemical contamination. Being able to visit a market, chat with the farmers, and be assured by a government agency (the Department of Agricultural Extension) that the produce being sold is safe and mostly chemical-free enables people to eat a healthier and more local diet. The closer the food is grown to where we live, the less our consumption contributes to the climate crisis.

Today's children may even think that vegetables come from the superstore, having no idea of the role of farmers in our food supply. Try asking a child how many kinds of soft drinks or chips they can name and then how many kinds of local fruits or vegetables they can think of. It's a tragedy to see people suffering ill health due to poor diets, while losing their connection with the local supply of food.

Without a doubt, establishments like farmers' markets benefit growers, who earn more but also forge a connection to those for whom they grow food. They

the vector-borne disease. Both the Dhaka city corporations have spent hundreds of crores in their war against mosquitoes, but nothing seems to have borne any result as people are dying every day and hospitals are still scrambling to serve patients. As many as 597 precious lives have been lost this year, and more than 1.25 lakh people have been infected as of September 1.

corporations round the year, despite the fact that dengue has been an all-year-long phenomenon for the past decade.

The city corporations continue to carry out anti-mosquito activities with the same old methods, like fogging and using larvicide in a non-systematic manner, along with some occasional drives. This

tilapia fish in the lakes. That did not help, either: all the fish died within a few days, and most of the ducks either died or were stolen. All this while the city corporation high-ups never lagged behind in advising citizens to play their part in ensuring mosquito-free houses and neighbourhoods.

Human lives are on the line. We don't know how many more parents



The dengue situation this year wouldn't have been so dire had our authorities learnt any lessons from past experiences.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

The situation wouldn't have been so dire had the authorities learnt any lessons from past experiences.

In 2019, Bangladesh registered the highest number of dengue cases – 1,01,354 – ever since the disease's official outbreak in 2000. That year, 179 people succumbed to the virus. Then came 2022, the year when the country recorded the most dengue deaths – 281. Yet, we have seen an absence of concerted efforts from city

casual approach, coupled with a lack of planning and coordination among government bodies, have only made the situation grimmer. Besides, we have seen some bizarre strategies being employed by the city corporations, such as flying drones to detect stagnant water and releasing frogs in ponds to destroy mosquitoes and their larvae. Before the frogs, authorities tried to control mosquitoes by releasing guppy fish in the city's drains, and ducks and

will have to lose their children to the disease, a fate that can be preventable if the appropriate scientific steps are taken. We would like to know whether the people in responsible positions are witnessing the families' despair. Are they hearing the cries for lost loved ones? How many more lives will have to be sacrificed before the authorities wake up from their slumber and take necessary measures? We don't want any more Raufs and Raidas to meet such a tragic end.

How farmers' markets lead to thriving communities



At farmers' markets, growers enjoy getting to know the buyers, while buyers enjoy the connection with farmers, the freshness and tastiness of the produce, and the knowledge that it is grown safely.

PHOTO: STAR

also help communities, which gain a lively, attractive, and small market that can become a weekly meeting place for the neighbourhood.

So there I was in Rome, in a large auditorium. On a huge screen, a locally-made short video about our farmers' market programme was being played. The audience cheered loudly. Throughout the five days I was there, Bangladesh's success in establishing and operating so many markets was mentioned repeatedly. People from other countries looked up to us as an example to re-establish a connection between growers and consumers of food.

The markets were originally funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), with support from the Netherlands embassy. We all

know what happens at the end of a project: however much talk there may be of sustainability on the application form, the work tends to stop when the funding runs out. It would have been tragic to see all the effort my colleagues and I put into those markets simply vanish, along with the markets, at the end of our project.

Fortunately, most of the farmers, community members, and local officials involved saw the importance of this new connection and worked hard to ensure that it would continue after the funding ended. One community even increased the frequency of the markets from once to twice a week. To date, while fewer farmers are attending and there are some limits to what is being sold, partly due to the heavy rains, 15 of the 16 markets continue to operate. Farmers enjoy getting to know

the buyers, while buyers enjoy the connection with farmers, the freshness and tastiness of the produce, and the knowledge that it is grown safely. Local officials are happy to provide these benefits to their communities.

As the South Asian representative of the World Farmers Markets Coalition Academy, I am thrilled to be able to help spread the knowledge gained in Bangladesh more widely in the region and world. I'm also excited to have the task of helping others throughout the world gain insight into how to connect rural and urban areas through farmers' markets. Lastly, it's a delight for me to visit a local Farmers' market each week to choose bright, fresh, tasty leafy greens, fruits, and vegetables – buying directly from the person who grew them.