

Who will answer for Rasel’s death?

No one should have to die for demanding a fair wage

We are enraged at the way police have been behaving over the past couple of days to disperse protesting garment workers who have been demonstrating for a minimum wage of about Tk 23,000 across the country. A number of clashes occurred between RMG workers and law enforcers in the past few days. On October 30, the situation took a more dangerous turn as police shot a garment worker dead in Gazipur. In a separate incident, another died after a factory was burned. Even yesterday, there have been violent clashes during protests.

Reportedly, deceased Rasel Hawlader was an electrician at a local garment factory. As the factory was closed that day due to demonstrations, he was returning to his dorm with one of his colleagues. He already had pellet injuries in his right arm from the rubber bullets shot by police to disperse protesters. But police still caught him and shot him in the chest. We must ask: is this how the industrial police supposed to act? Who gave them the power or direction to shoot protesters in the first place?

That said, we do not condone violence/vandalism perpetrated by some of the agitating workers. Apart from that, their week-long protests were mostly peaceful. Anyone living in the country knows very well how the millions of garment workers are passing their days in financial hardship during this time of high inflation. It is only logical to demand a wage that meets their requirements and makes their life somewhat bearable.

Under the current economic circumstances, can our garment workers survive with a minimum wage of Tk 10,400, which has been proposed by the owners’ representatives at the wage board? How could they come up with such a proposal in the first place? The workers’ representatives’ proposal – for Tk 20,393 – is more realistic and in line with the needs of workers. The question is, why do our RMG workers get such low wages compared to their counterparts in other sectors, especially when they are bringing a major bulk of our foreign exchange?

We think it would be wise for them to listen to the workers’ representatives, declare a minimum wage that is acceptable to all workers, and address their concerns that are driving ongoing protests without any further delay.

Dengue needs more sincere response

Authorities must own up to their mistakes going forward

Dengue has claimed over 1,300 lives so far this year—the highest ever in a single year—yet, for reasons that defy logic, even at its peak, it has never received the kind of attention and intervention needed to contain it. This is why we find Dr Ittekkharuzzaman’s criticism of concerned government departments well-deserved. While unveiling a study on Monday, the executive director of the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) slammed the government for failing to tackle the mosquito menace and trying to shift the blame onto residents. This kind of mentality, if not changed, will cost us dearly in the future as well.

It’s a mystery that even after so many years, the government hasn’t found a way to successfully tackle dengue. Can it be attributed solely to the changing nature of the disease? Certainly not. Every year, without fail, entomologists have warned us about potential dengue outbreaks, suggesting preventive measures, but officials have ignored them every time. Even to this day, they continue to use outdated and unscientific measures, like fogging and releasing frogs and ducks in water bodies.

What they seem to be good at, however, is shifting their burden of duty to residents. While public awareness is definitely necessary, what about all the administrative missteps? Top officials, like DNCC Mayor Atiqul Islam and LGRD Minister Tajul Islam, called on residents to be vigilant about keeping their surroundings clean, but they seldom admit to their own shortcomings. Their negligence has led to Bangladesh ranking third worldwide in the number of dengue cases and having the highest death toll till October 22. Apparently, Dhaka city corporations spent Tk 1,080 crore in the past 11 years to curb this menace – an investment that has clearly gone down the drain. Our hospitals are still burdened with dengue patients, while a much-needed vector management policy is yet to be finalised.

This cannot be our response going forward. The TIB has recommended a number of steps including properly following WHO guidelines, strengthening our health sector, and conducting anti-mosquito drives all year round. Above all, we need sincerity to protect our people from dengue. Can the government at least ensure that?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Ticket prices on public buses

There have been repeated demands from commuters to fix the ticket prices for public buses inside Dhaka. We have seen some transport companies, primarily on the Mirpur route, adopt the ticketing system and the fixed pricing. Despite having some shortcomings, the system was largely accepted, and we hoped that it would be adopted on other routes too. However, we are seeing that not only are more bus services not implementing this system, but even those that started this practice are reverting to the old ways. I urge the authorities to look into this matter as soon as possible.

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Could BNP have avoided violence on Oct 28?



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The events of October 28 seem to have many hidden layers underneath what we saw and heard. A colossal difference in the strategies and foresight of the two major political parties of Bangladesh was witnessed on the day.

The BNP has been pressing home its demands for the reinstatement of a neutral caretaker government system and the ousting of the ruling party from power. Despite many provocations, BNP did not walk the violent path and managed to attract large numbers to their rallies in recent times. With time, the support behind BNP kept getting stronger, as did overseas pressure for a fair election. In spite of creating many barriers, the government could not stop people from joining the BNP rallies. Even on October 28, it could not stop the crowd from flowing in.

Things were beginning to get difficult. Even though AL members kept denying that they were getting cornered, their behaviour gave it away, which, in turn, considerably lowered the morale of workers. The government kept up their refrain of BNP being a party that inflicts terror on people and destroys their possessions.

Eventually, their rhetoric seems to have won: BNP could not keep their movement non-violent, as was demonstrated on October 28.

A movement, such as the one BNP has initiated, requires farsightedness and extreme caution. Every step must be analysed considering all possible outcomes, and responses to them must be planned ahead. BNP leaders and activists, however, were not clear about the objective of the October 28 rally. Even the central leadership was not clear about it.

BNP kept emphasising that they did not plan to “sit in” and would carry out their movement peacefully, avoiding violence. But it seemed the grassroots workers and leaders who came from the rest of the country to Dhaka for the rally did not get clear instructions in this regard. AL leaders provoked them by saying things like “BNP wants violence,” and yet there were no words of caution from the BNP.

While entering Dhaka, BNP leaders and workers were searched, frisked and harassed, and many of them were arrested. But AL workers and leaders coming from outside Dhaka faced no such impediment. AL workers were



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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

asked to participate with sticks in their rally—an instruction that some workers-leaders of AL and its wings followed.

On the fateful day, violence broke out in Kakrail. Initially, we heard that BNP activists had attacked a bus carrying AL members. A video that went viral the next day shows some stick-wielding youths wrecking a private car. Some of these youths can also be seen standing close to police personnel. According to the news, BNP workers carried out the attack on the AL bus. But who were these young men? Why didn't the police apprehend them? The media has not raised this question. BNP may or may not raise it. It's unlikely that asking the question will absolve the BNP from the allegation of striking first.

According to media reports, BNP leaders and activists also took part in the attack on the chief justice's residence. Police officers were attacked and a constable was brutally killed. Can BNP deny the blame for these incidents?

At least 17 journalists were injured; they also claimed that their attackers were BNP activists. BNP leaders and workers may have a grudge against journalists, but no matter how rational

a lot. BNP should have remembered that any violence that comes with a movement gets associated with the party that called for it in the first place.

Now, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhruul Islam Alamgir has been arrested, along with many other leaders and workers of the party. Other leaders are in hiding, fearing arrests. In such a situation, the workers are in the dark. We did not see much happening during the hartal on October 29. A few BNP workers were seen supporting the strike. But buses and trucks were torched, which led to headlines like “Hartal supporters have torched a bus.” How is it that BNP, without being in the field actively, managed to torch buses? Incidents like this are likely to happen and inevitably BNP would be blamed. Did the BNP leadership not consider such possibilities?

As a follow-up movement, the party has announced a three-day blockade from October 31—yet another short-sighted decision. A number of violent incidents took place around the country on the first day of the blockade. BNP will again be blamed for these. Jamaat has also called for a blockade. But Jamaat is much more adept at avoiding blame. They did not take any responsibility for the events of

hold a news conference and as a whole, participate in a laughable, yet criminal act?

In recent times, BNP's strength has been its continued, peaceful movements. But it lost that position just two months before the election. October 28 was a day when AL adopted a farsighted strategy to create a trap for BNP. Showing immaturity and a lack of foresight, BNP fell into that trap.

The BNP rally became a fiasco, thanks to the police's tear gas shells and sound grenades and the AL members' provocative words and sticks. So, the question is: what could BNP have done differently? Was it actually possible for them to avoid the violence? Do we expect the BNP to remain calm, no matter how severe the situation becomes? Maybe that is the expectation to a certain extent. The way police as well as AL leaders and activists chased after the BNP members, it was a given that the BNP rally would not be allowed a peaceful end.

However, had the BNP leadership stayed more alert, maybe the violence could have been averted to some extent, if not entirely.

*Translated from Bangla by
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How are our farmers adapting to climate change?



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The effects of climate change are already being felt in Bangladesh, with rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, and longer droughts making it difficult for farmers in the country to continue growing crops. In the face of these challenges, farmers in Bangladesh are increasingly adopting climate-resilient farming techniques and finding new ways to ensure their livelihoods.

Climate-resilient farming techniques help farmers adapt to the impacts of climate change and also enhance their productivity in a sustainable manner. Some of these techniques that can be applied in Bangladesh are crop diversification, crop rotation, improved irrigation management, floating gardening, raised-bed farming, conservation agriculture (CA), agroecology, agroforestry, and sustainable land management using organic fertilisers.

Monir Hossain, a farmer living on the periphery of Pirojpur district, has been using raised beds to grow crops such as cucumbers, aubergines, and pumpkins.

By building beds six inches above the ground, Hossain can ensure that his crops are protected from waterlogging, which can be a major problem during monsoon. In addition, Hossain has been using drip irrigation—a water-saving method that delivers water directly to the roots of plants through a network of tubes or pipes—to water his crops, thus cutting down on wastage and ensuring that the plants get the right amount of water.

Naimul Islam, a farmer from the same district, switched from mono-cropping to mixed-cropping rice, vegetables, and spices. He faced multiple challenges due to the changing climate, such as longer drought periods, saline water intrusion, and extreme weather events. To cope with these challenges, Naimul diversified his farming system and started growing high-value crops such as chilli, ginger, and cauliflower. He also adopted organic farming practices, which he learned from a local NGO, and reduced his dependence on chemical fertilisers and pesticides. As a result, Naimul's income increased

by approximately 50 percent, and he became a model farmer in his community.

Other farmers in the district are also using organic fertilisers and other soil management techniques to improve the health of their soil and increase yields.

These climate-resilient farming techniques are proving to be successful, with farmers in the Pirojpur district seeing improved yields and better incomes. One farmer, Sabina Khatun, has seen her income increase from Tk 15,000 to Tk 30,000 per year by adopting crop rotation techniques even on a small land. Khatun is now able to pay for her children's education and has even been able to invest in new land to expand her farm.

But it's not just about economic benefits—these techniques also have positive environmental impacts, with reduced water usage and more sustainable farming practices.

Farmers in Bangladesh have been able to successfully produce agricultural crops mostly by utilising indigenous knowledge. They have been able to cultivate various crops using their own traditional farming methods, such as using organic fertilisers, crop rotation, and integrated pest management. They have also adapted to climate change and flooding by utilising their knowledge of crop diversification and growing flood-tolerant crops. Additionally, they have been able to utilise water harvesting techniques to combat water scarcity during the dry season. Through such use of traditional agricultural practices,

they have been able to contribute to the country's food security.

Still, Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries and we should assist our farmers in learning climate-resilient farming techniques, as the livelihood of more than half of the population depends on agriculture. In this regard, there are various measures to be taken.

Providing access to climate information and early warning systems can help farmers prepare and plan for climate change impacts. Structured training is also crucial for building confidence in stakeholders and sensitising them to the impacts of climate change. The government and policymakers need to prioritise indigenous knowledge and locally-led adaptation to form the correct agricultural policies. We should also strengthen the capacity of farmers and local organisations in terms of managing agricultural risks and building resilience.

The farmers in Bangladesh are taking on climate change-induced challenges bravely, and their tact seems to be paying off. By adapting farming techniques to suit the changing environment, our farmers are securing their food supply and laying the groundwork for a sustainable future. As climate change continues to pose challenges for communities across the globe, and with Bangladesh being one of the worst sufferers, it is the resilience of these farmers which will bring about positive change.