

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

'Easy money' scams continue to haunt lives

Online vigilance a must to protect people

It is gravely concerning that online scams are showing no signs of letting up; in fact, as the days pass, they just take new forms to deceive people. A recent report has brought to light how at least a hundred unsuspecting individuals have been duped through elaborate online scams. With so many such incidents making headlines regularly, we wonder what's stopping the administration from taking robust measures to stop them.

To illustrate the extent of damage, the report mentioned how one individual gave away over Tk 9 lakh to scammers. The plan goes like this: fraudsters offer online jobs with unusually high remuneration for menial tasks, such as subscribing to YouTube channels. Once they gain trust by paying a small remuneration, they urge victims to invest to earn even more. The story ends with the criminals vanishing with the invested money.

These stories are more harrowing when we hear that sometimes people borrow heavily from banks, friends, and family in the hopes of earning easy money. Scams like this thus eventually upturn lives and devastate families. According to a report by Prothom Alo, an estimated Tk 22,000 crore remains stuck in MLM and e-commerce platforms, unlikely to ever be recovered, with approximately one crore potential victims of scams. Over the last 15 years, Tk 92,000 crore has also been looted via bank scams, as per the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Why—even after so many sensational scams—do our people still fall prey to these crimes or criminals? While greed is certainly a factor, we cannot ignore the systemic pitfalls. The blame must not solely fall on victims, but also on the prevailing financial insecurity, inequality, and lack of adequate financial governance. Jobseekers are especially vulnerable to fraud as they may be in desperate need of money. The government can—and must—address these issues to eliminate this plague.

Right now, the authorities should ramp up online vigilance and provide appropriate training to law enforcers for tackling crimes on social media. Laws must not remain on paper; swift action is a must to deter scammers. Besides, as foreign nationals are getting increasingly involved in these ploys, international collaboration and monitoring is essential. Finally, large scale awareness campaigns are imperative to educate people on how to detect scams. These measures, along with resolving the deep-seated structural issues, can help root out such online frauds.

A highway caught in perpetual repairs

It serves as a microcosm for shoddy public construction projects

We are shocked by the levels of indifference, negligence, and corruption that likely went into making a vital road subject to frequent repairs. According to a report, the road in question is a 38-kilometre stretch of the Jashore-Khulna highway, crucial for transporting goods from Mongla Port to various destinations in the country. Notwithstanding its significance, the highway remains in a perpetually bad shape, having undergone repairs an unbelievable seven times in the last nine years, incurring a cost of over Tk 400 crore. Another round of repairs is now underway, but this has only added to people's suffering, with the mix of potholes and patches of loose gravel causing hours-long gridlocks and increasing risk of accidents and damages.

The question is, why would a road's condition deteriorate repeatedly, sometimes within months of a repair work? Both the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and the contractors responsible for the repairs have, conveniently, shifted the blame onto overloaded trucks. That's a laughable excuse even if not entirely untrue. Trucks ignoring weight limits do pose a challenge, but whose responsibility is it to ensure that they do not do so? The fact is, it is shoddy construction, including use of low-quality materials as well as lax monitoring by the authorities, that are to blame for this particular road failing to withstand heavy vehicle traffic. Moreover, the weighbridge control centre set up at the highway's Chengutia point also remains closed, further cementing its eventual doom.

We're too familiar with this pattern of irregularities that has frequently allowed politically backed contractors and corrupt officials to exploit public projects for their own narrow gains. Too often, we have seen new roads deteriorate too quickly, with repairs leading to temporary relief before they inevitably deteriorate again. Against this backdrop, we hope that the recent government move to revive a high-powered task force to check wastage of money in public projects will lead to better accountability. But any such effort must also address poor quality control, for the sake of the long-term returns of public investments.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Support electric vehicles

Electric vehicles are now considered the transportation of the next generation and rightfully so—they are more environmentally friendly, have fewer carbon footprints, make less noise, and are full of modern-day technological features. However, Bangladesh has yet to enter this era of electric vehicles, except for some makeshift and largely illegal three-wheelers. As Bangladesh progresses, it should invest in electric vehicles. We don't have to rely on premium vehicles from the West, we can also look to the east, like China, who now lead the manufacturing of affordable electric vehicles. Or we can invest in making our own. Electric vehicles are the future, and it is high time the government supports their popularity.

Nusrat Mumu
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Why Bangladesh is seeing such a cold winter



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QUAMRUL HAIDER

It may seem counterintuitive, but the extreme cold spell currently sweeping through Bangladesh and elsewhere seems like a good time to remind us that climate change means much more than an increase in dangerous heat waves during the summer months. Nevertheless, like clockwork, every time the temperature in winter drops precipitously, deniers of climate change like to remind us, "It is bitterly cold out there! Where is all that global warming and climate change that you guys talk about?"

Everyone who understands the science of climate change knows that the arguments presented by the deniers are bogus and irrational, and are often presented in bad faith. In reality, winters across the contiguous US have warmed by an average of nearly 1.5 degrees Celsius over the last half century. But "less cold" does not necessarily mean "never cold." So even as winters on average have been getting shorter and warmer, many places should still expect to see bouts of very cold weather—at least for the foreseeable future.

Paradoxically, there is growing scientific evidence that extreme cold temperatures are an outcome of human-induced climate change. Indeed, a study published in 2017 in the journal *WIREs Climate Change* lays out how the warming Arctic and melting ice appear to be linked to cold weather being driven farther south.

As a matter of fact, extreme cold spells in the Northern Hemisphere are caused by distortion of the polar vortex a cold air mass which, under normal circumstances, sits above the North Pole in a large, low-pressure zone. It exists at two levels of the atmosphere: one in the troposphere, where most of the weather phenomena occur, and the other a bit higher up, in the stratosphere, home of the ozone layer that protects us from the harmful effects of ultraviolet radiation. Like a spinning top, the vortex rotates counter-clockwise, keeping blisteringly cold air locked in the Arctic region.

However, scientists believe that global warming distorts the vortex, thereby resulting in a sudden plunge in temperature south of the Arctic Circle. That is because increases in global temperature are not evenly spread around the world. They are greater on land and at higher latitudes.

Consequently, on average, Arctic temperatures have increased in recent decades at about twice the global average.

As a result of warming, more ice of the Arctic Ocean is melting during the summer months. As the ice melts, the Arctic ice sheets reflect less sunlight, causing the Arctic Ocean to absorb more heat, which it then releases into the atmosphere, adding to global warming. This process, and other Arctic feedback loops, are known

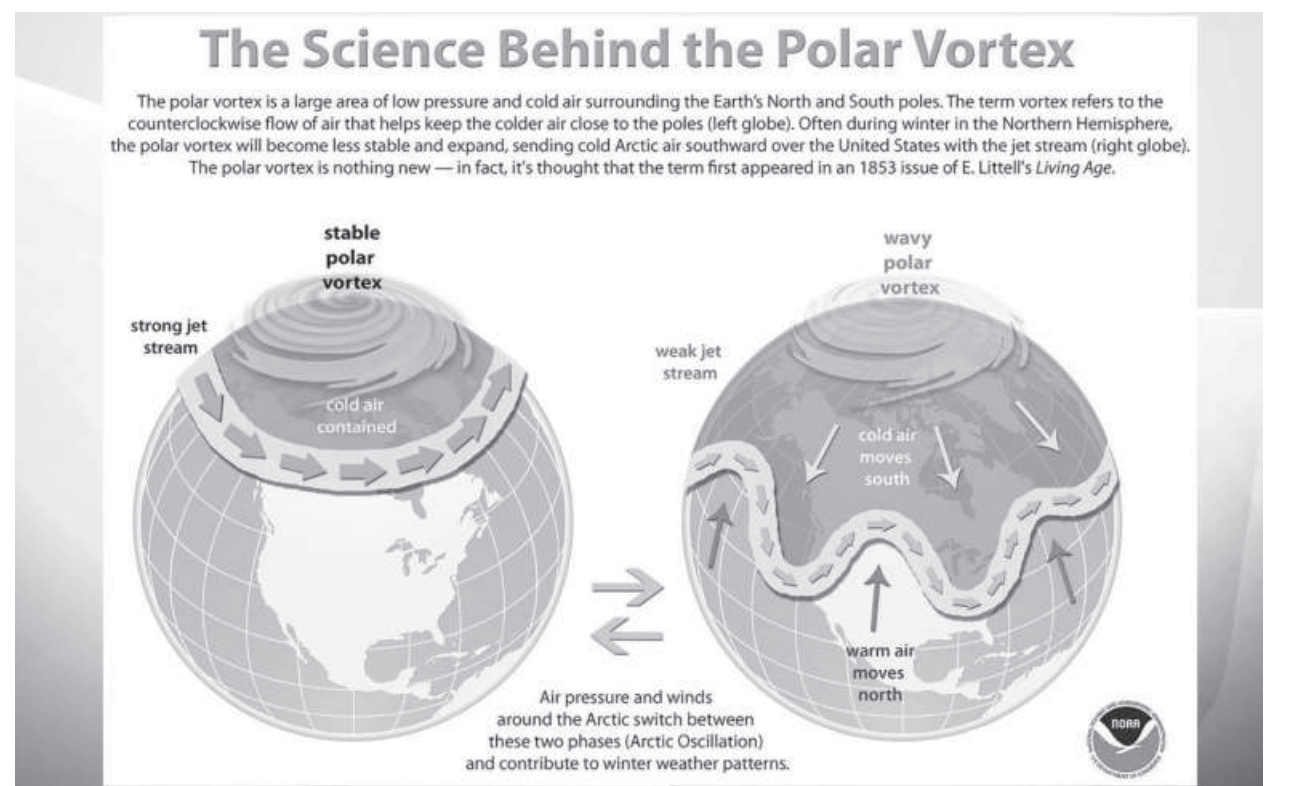
blows from west to east all across the globe and acts as a divider between warm and cold air. Evolving research suggests that the loss of Arctic sea ice and rise in average global temperature, along with distortion of the polar vortex, trigger the jet stream to slow down and become increasingly erratic. In the winter months, this allows bone-chilling cold Arctic air held in place by the once stronger jet stream to spill much further south, effecting a sharp drop in temperatures.

While climate scientists are predicting that our planet could warm, on average, roughly two degrees Celsius by the end of the century, we should not interpret that to mean an end to bitter cold waves during winter at least not yet. Cold blasts will still occur; but depending on how much greenhouse gases we dump into the atmosphere, they will become rarer over time. It is

can occur anywhere from the ground level up to a few thousand feet into the atmosphere, and they generally occur during winter months, when nights are long and cold.

In an area experiencing temperature inversion, the warm air lid prevents ground-level air from rising. Hence, the cool, dense ground air cannot mix vertically. In fact, the air is so stable that it is quiescent and pollutants become trapped below the warm layer of air, creating dirty air with dangerous concentrations of noxious pollutants. In areas with heavy pollution, and high humidity in the cooler layer of the atmosphere, thick ground-level fog will form.

Temperature inversion begins to form a few hours before the Sun sets. The situation is reversed in the morning when sunlight strikes the Earth and vertical mixing of the air



SOURCE: NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION, US

as Arctic Amplification. Eventually, the amplification has a ripple effect extending well into the stratosphere, weakening and distorting the polar vortex, thereupon allowing the air to escape south. In other words, instead of staying where it belongs in winter, closer to the Arctic Circle, the air moves down south into continental United States, Europe, and Asia. Clearly, even a tropical country like Bangladesh cannot escape the wrath of the distorted polar vortex.

There is another factor that affects winter temperatures. It is the jet stream a narrow band of strong wind in the lower atmosphere that generally

thus unlikely that we will see more cold snaps in the future, but the ones we are experiencing now are more likely to be persistent, or at least last a longer amount of time. In other words, in the future, in addition to extreme summer temperatures, winter temperatures will gradually warm across the globe.

As for the fog, it is due to temperature inversion a phenomenon where ground-level pollution causes the ambient air temperature to increase with altitude instead of decreasing, giving rise to colder air near the ground and warmer air above it. This creates a warm air lid over cooler air. Temperature inversions

begins. Nonetheless, depending on the severity of pollution, the duration of inversion can vary from a few hours to several days.

In conclusion, the message from the recent cold waves is loud and clear. Our romance with fossil fuels has fundamentally changed the global weather systems to the point where we have to do something drastic if we want to live on the only habitable planet in the solar system beyond the 21st century. Therefore, we should not take the bait from climate change deniers that global warming is a hoax, because they are the ones with an interest in protecting the fossil fuel industry.

The cost of a complaint

To become a complainant is to become the location of a problem



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In 2013, in the case of Dilip vs State of Madhya Pradesh, the Supreme Court of India said, "The prosecutrix was supposed to attack the appellant like a wild animal, but she did not even resist. Thus, her conduct suggested only and only, her consent and will."

In the case of Raja and others v State of Karnataka, while acquitting the appellants in a case of gang rape, it was held, "Her [the victim's] post-incident conduct and movements are also noticeably unusual. Instead of hurrying back home in a distressed, humiliated and a devastated state, she stayed back in and around the place of occurrence, enquired about the same from persons whom she claims to have met in the late hours of night, returned to the spot to identify the garage and even look at the broken glass bangles, discarded litter etc... Her avengful attitude in the facts and circumstances, as disclosed by her, if true, demonstrably evinces a conduct manifested by a feeling of frustration stoked by an intense feeling of deprivation of something expected, desired or promised. Her

confident movements alone past midnight, in that state are also out of the ordinary... The medical opinion that she was accustomed to sexual intercourse when admittedly she was living separately from her husband for one and a half years before the incident also has its own implication."

For rape victims, their body, soul, and integrity are not only stripped off behind closed doors, they are also decimated in an open forum. Either way, there is no going back. That's the cost they pay for filing a complaint. It dehumanises them and no material recompense or punishment can fully restore the intangible, invisible harm.

When a complaint of sexual violence comes as a formal allegation, how we hear the stories in those complaints matters. When institutions and people in power dismiss such stories because they think the victim was not "victimised enough," it effectively dismisses the trauma that they went through.

A complaint is a path towards resistance. The institution becomes what you stand up against. At times, it

feels like one is getting somewhere. At other times, the wall comes down and we realise that no matter how far we go, we would not go far enough. It will be as if the trauma never happened. You might make a complaint because you are in an intense and difficult situation, and a complaint can be an effort to get out of that situation. But trying to get out of a situation can sometimes make it even more intense

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and difficult.

The word complaint derives from Old French, *complaindre*, "to lament," an expression of sorrow and grief. Lament is from Latin, *lamentum*: "wailing," "moaning," "weeping." Through a complaint, those who challenge power become sites of negotiation.

Making a complaint about harassment can often feel like being

harassed all over again—being subjected, again, to another's will. You know that what is happening is not what was supposed to happen. You can feel that something or someone is pulling the strings. But you don't know what or who it is. You experience a disconnect between paper and practice.

The person who makes the complaint—who is often already experiencing the trauma or stress of the situation they are complaining about—ends up having to direct an unwieldy process. The person who puts the complaint forward ends up having to scream the same facts again and again, reliving the trauma over and over again. Yet, somehow that's not sufficient to prove that she's "enough" of a victim.

So many complaints are not made because the person who would have to make them knows that to complain would be to be derailed; it would mean not being able to go where you want to go. You worry that to complain would be to suffer being seen as "causing drama," that to complain would lead to a questioning of your integrity.

In rape and other sexual violence cases, often the court is hearing complaints but in actuality the complaints are not being heard. It takes work to hear complaints, because you have to dismantle the barriers to understand what is said, what is done, both invisible and inaudible. By barriers, I mean internal biases and prejudices, because when complaints are not heard, the complainant leaves, but the crime stays and mutates.