

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Don't mess up dengue control this time

Pre-emptive measures key to preventing another dengue disaster

When it comes to dengue, it seems we are stuck in an endless loop of despair and failures. Last year, we suffered the worst outbreak in our history, with Bangladesh also becoming the worst affected country in the world in terms of deaths, recording 1,705 casualties. The number of cases recorded was also the highest ever: more than 3.2 lakh. This year, too, the signs are quite worrying: between January 1 and May 6, a total of 2,323 dengue cases have been reported, which is more than double the caseload reported during the same period last year. Meanwhile, 23 deaths have been reported between January and April—again, more than double the death toll during the same period in 2023.

These numbers suggest that we could be headed for an even more dire situation this year unless timely and appropriate actions are taken, as experts have recently pointed out at a discussion on dengue preparedness. One of the speakers, a professor of medical entomology, said research was necessary to figure out if Aedes mosquitoes, the carrier of dengue virus, had gained more transmission capacity. Another expert said testing and controlling the mosquito population were key to tackling dengue. According to another report by this daily, experts suggested having all the healthcare facilities that treat dengue—not just a select few—to report to the health authorities. Complete data is crucial not only to get the real picture on the ground, but also to enable proper interventions.

Indeed, enforcing preventive measures is the best way to keep dengue under control. But can we trust the relevant authorities with this task? Their performance during the previous outbreaks, especially in 2023, does not invoke much confidence. What we saw last year in the name of dengue management was haphazardly taken attempts in response to an escalating infection rate, most of which turned out to be ineffective. What's worse, the authorities even tried to shift the blame for their own failure to the people. But we all know where the problem lies. Lack of foresight, lack of collaboration, mismanagement, and a certain level of incompetence marred efforts to tackle the outbreak.

This cannot be repeated again. It is vital that the relevant authorities learn from the mistakes made last year and take steps to rectify them. To this end, experts have already offered many recommendations. The government must take these into consideration to devise and employ a national plan of action involving all the relevant government agencies, including the city corporations and municipalities. Instead of acting on their own, if these agencies work in tandem following a plan backed by proper data and research, we believe it will be possible to beat dengue this year.

Strict oversight vital to end tree-felling trend

Multiple instances of tree cutting show the need for urgent interventions

The High Court's nod on reining in tree-cutting practices by forming supervisory committees at the district and upazila levels could not have come at a more appropriate time. Despite the recent heatwave that turned out to be the longest in 76 years, tree felling by both public and private entities continues unabated, setting the stage for even a warmer future. You hear news of Bashundhara mowing down trees along the main road of its residential area. You hear of the forest department moving to cut down 2,044 trees on four roads in Jashore, similar to previous attempts targeting century-old trees on the Jashore-Benapole highway. You hear of the LGED felling trees in Patuakhali in the name of canal restoration.

These developments represent a dangerous disregard for trees and forests that keep temperatures down. One particularly disturbing development of late, as reported by this daily on Wednesday, saw over 1,000 trees felled at the Altadighi Lake in Naogaon as part of a project. The multi-crore undertaking—initiated by the forest department three years ago—aims to restore and conserve biodiversity at the historic lake and surrounding areas that now form part of the Altadighi National Park. Part of the plan is draining and re-excavating the lake, which is almost done. The forest department says the trees were removed to facilitate excavation, adding that those were invasive species harmful to the environment.

That may be the case, but why was it done without any prior environmental assessment? Why were those trees planted in the first place? Locals say the forest surrounding the Altadighi lake once boasted diverse wildlife. Subsequently, however, native trees were replaced by invasive or exotic varieties while the pond itself became shallower, causing the disappearance of many native species and even migratory birds.

The whole episode once again highlights how harmful policies and practices, often by government agencies, have contributed to the growing loss of wildlife, biodiversity and ecosystems. The time has come to put an end to this. While the High Court's assessment is rooted in the principle of engaging local experts and communities in decisions to fell trees, we feel it will require strict central supervision to limit harmful tree-cutting practices. For that, the relevant authorities must first be made more accountable for their decisions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Maintaining historical sites

We have not been very good at maintaining historical and archaeological sites in the country. In the past, in the name of renovation, authorities even destroyed the archaeological value of some structures. While sites that are several centuries old need excavation, structures built in the late 19th or 20th century should just require maintenance. The same goes for the Maharishi Charitable Dispensary or the Shilaidah Kacharibari established by Rabindranath Tagore in Kushtia. These historic buildings should not have fallen to their current dilapidated state. It is not too late to restore their lost glory and usefulness if the authorities responsible do their job properly.

Nadia Nazneen  
Rajshahi

A former governor's unpleasant truths about the banking sector



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BIRUPAKSHA PAUL

Economists are always noted for telling unpleasant truths because they go by numbers, research, theory, and judgement. Rarely do politicians—who can manufacture arguments to suit their purpose—endorse economists who are objective. Former Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Farashuddin has unveiled some truths about the country's banking sector where regulations have remarkably been relaxed in recent years. Seldom have we seen such blistering comments coming from a governor in Bangladesh's history. Farashuddin's statement, though commendable at a critical moment, creates enormous doubt over whether the government will really pay any attention to it.

The doubt is genuine because the looters are quite well known to all of us, and they are flocking around the people in power. Not only have they indulged in misdeeds, but they are extravagantly empowered with high positions as well. To the bad luck of the nation, these people have been masquerading as the "true saviours" of the financial industry, if not that of the whole nation. These wolves in sheep's clothing, if not checked, will bring an economy of otherwise high potential down.

It would be a mistake for politicians to label Farashuddin as a supporter of the opposition. He was very well liked by Bangabandhu, who appointed him as his personal secretary. The Awami League government appointed him as governor of the central bank after coming to power in 1996. And most importantly, his performance at the helm of the central bank was academically sound and professionally pro-business.

Few retired bureaucrat-turned-governors could do what he did. Dr Farashuddin remained committed to economic knowledge and the country's interest, not the interest of the willful defaulters whose businesses always pretend to be in the red despite the economy's respectable growth. Sadly, growth is showing signs of a premature slowdown, justifying the clamours of economists who advocate bringing a semblance of law and ethics into business.

The great 18th-century economist Adam Smith once wrote, "Little else is



FILE VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice." Smith was so sure about his articulation that he asserted that all the rest would be brought about by the natural course of things once justice is safeguarded. The history of all developed countries has evidently proven that organised financial corruption and economic prosperity can never be siblings. They are mutually exclusive and many politicians in power seem to have brushed the trade-off aside for a game of personal wealth-making and very short-term interest.

Farashuddin's worry in this regard is quite explicit although he seems to be afraid of being mistreated if he speaks against the financial hooligans pampered by power. He literarily resorted to the poignant lines of Rabindranath Tagore—Morite chahina ami sundoro bhobone (I don't want to die in this beautiful world). So subtle was his sense of melancholy and humour.

The truth hidden under his humour points out that if high-scale bank looters are pardoned so easily, the

banking sector's future must be cancerous, suggesting the emergence of further plunderers under the political coddling of the regime. His warning rightly echoes that of Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud, former economic adviser to the caretaker government, who allegorically labels the default culture as the rotten heart of the nation.

word about anything during their tenure, while most of them are familiar with the art of accumulating personal wealth at magical speed. Thus, simply addressing the banking sector won't solve the current economic predicament. Parliament and the legal system must function better to make the economy as robust as it was before the pandemic.

Some critics have recently labelled Dr Farashuddin's outburst at the seminar of the Economic Reporters' Forum (ERF) as his personal frustration for not being placed in a policymaking position by the regime. This is a defective interpretation of Farashuddin's standpoint. First, we need to judge whether he is statistically right about what he has said. Second, we need to check whether his recommendations don't serve him personally or his business. We get a "yes" in response to both these questions. His concern is that the family-based directorship proposal was passed at parliament without any resolution or debate. In fact, this law has turned many private banks into a mudir dokan—the single family-run petty shops sprawling in villages, fostering a perverse move of private banks from corporate structures to family dynasties.

The sneaky way of passing this family directorship law is the antithesis to the spirit of parliamentary democracy where we hope to see debates over economic policymaking. But there are many members of parliament who never utter a single

Farashuddin is correct in pronouncing that some groups of people are taking bigger slices of the pizza—which we earned through independence. And hence, he is against the trend that brings more retired bureaucrats to politics. It will dampen the quality of bureaucratic services as we have already degraded the quality of our universities by infusing political enthusiasm. He is right in reiterating the unholy triangle of tax dodgers, bank defaulters, and money launderers. They are the same group of people who are dragging the economy to the cliff's edge, and waiting for the time to fly overseas with their trafficked fortunes.

This must be stopped for the sake of the nation where income inequality has been on an unbroken crescendo of unsustainability, defying any sensible records of peer nations. Putting a farmer in jail for defaulting on loans by Tk 1,000, while letting a bank looter sit beside government officials, signal a cancerous future for the financial industry, and Farashuddin's artistic portrayal of the injustice and asymmetry in this regard warrants serious attention from the government.

TRIBUTE

Prof AR Khan: A visionary in financial studies



Dr Md Main Uddin  
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MD MAIN UDDIN

We learnt with great sadness that Professor Dr Md Azizur Rahman Khan, known by many as AR Khan, passed away at around 11:30am on February 16, 2024. After his retirement from the University of Dhaka (DU), he began to live in the capital's Uttara. He had been suffering from dementia for several months before his death. However, at some point, he started feeling better and began communicating with people. Having gathered strength and courage, he came to the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela with his personal attendant. After entering the book fair, he suddenly felt unwell. He was taken to the hospital, but died on the way.

Professor AR Khan attained his bachelor's and master's degrees from DU in 1969 and 1970 respectively. After that, he completed his PhD from Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, India in 1984. His area of specialisation was institutional finance for rural development.

In 1974, he became one of the four founding members of the Department of Finance—the best ranked department for the last 30 years in the Faculty of Business Studies, DU. Later in 1991, he took the initiative to expand the department to the Department of Finance and Banking, sensing the growing importance of the banking sector in Bangladesh.

Finally, he established the Department of Banking in 2004, taking up the position of founding chairman. The department was extended to the Department of Banking and Insurance in 2012. Within this short span of time, it has become one of the reputed departments within the faculty and the university.

When the Department of Finance and Banking was created, most of the books were available in English and they were written in western contexts. Professor AR Khan began to write some books in Bangla, considering the Bangladeshi perspective. He also wrote a number of books in plain, easy-to-understand English for students. His books include *Fundamentals of Banking*, *Higher Basic Banking*, *Bank Management*, *Rural Finance and Banking*, *Business Ethics*, *Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, and *Financing Private Sector Industries*. These books are now taught at undergraduate and graduate levels.

Professor AR Khan used to take classes in the morning at around 8am. He was never late. He wanted students to be punctual as well. He gave us many examples in the class. He used to say that without effort, nothing can be attained. He would say that a date tree, for instance, does not give us the

juice that it bears inside it without effort. According to him, talent is like a sharp knife which will be rusted away if not exercised. Without continuous reading, it is not possible to be knowledgeable even if someone is very talented. He taught us that efficiency without honesty is dangerous and there should be an optimal trade-off between efficiency and honesty. He motivated his students to make

of *Finance and Banking and Journal of Banking and Financial Services*. I had the good fortune of getting to do research with him. I had learnt from him how to carry out a research, aligning the position of research objectives, methods and results.

During the last part of his life, he wrote many religious books which he distributed among his acquaintances. We knew little about his benevolent activities during his life. But now we recognise that he had donated a huge sum of money to educational institutions and religious organisations.

I came across Professor AR Khan when he had taught me a course at master's level. Our relationship further extended when I became his colleague in 2006. Having known him personally, it is really impossible to do justice to the contribution he made to academia and the nation in one article. Being a visionary, he could understand the importance of education in the areas of finance, banking and insurance. When the Department of Banking and Insurance was established, most of the other public universities made similar moves.

He passed away at the age of 76 and is survived by two children. At the same time, he left many bereaved colleagues, students and well-wishers. His wife predeceased him. Before his demise, he was given a formal farewell from the Department of Banking and Insurance. He attended the program with his son, daughter and grandchildren. He was very lively and expressed gratitude to us for the arrangement. He seemed quite okay then and we did not think that he would leave us so quickly. We pray to Almighty for the eternal peace of his soul.



Prof Md Azizur Rahman Khan (1949-2024)

national policies in favour of the poor, the majority population of the country.

As most of the students of Dhaka University come from rural areas and poor families, he took care of students who faced financial and mental problems after coming to Dhaka. He worked as the local guardian of many students who are now established in different organisations.

Professor AR Khan undertook extensive research activities in his long career. He published as many as sixty research articles and monographs. His experience as chief editor extended to various reputed journals like *Journal*