



The expectations among people from the Labour government will be high and if not delivered, the frustration may set in early. PHOTO: REUTERS

UK ELECTION

# Labour's challenge after landslide win



Dr Selim Jahan is the former director of UNDP's Human Development Report Office at UNDP in New York.

SELIM JAHAN

The British election is now over, and the results are in. According to latest reports, the Labour Party has won a landslide victory with 412 seats in the 650-seat House of Commons. The Tories have lost 251 seats, and they are now left with 121 members in the new parliament. But beyond the numbers, there are some trends worth taking into account.

The voter turnout was about 60 percent, the lowest in 20 years. The apathy among the voters about the political process is clear. The theme of "change" of the Labour Party has resonated with the voters, who seemed to be sick and fed up with the Tories and their policies. Smaller parties like the Green Party or Reform UK have remained, as usual, marginal. The expectations among people from the Labour government will be high and if not delivered, the frustration may set in early. Finally, what can be done will depend not only on domestic dynamics, but also on international events. As the Labour government sets to tasks, there are a few formidable challenges they will have to tackle.

To start off, apart from socio-economic divisions, the British society has become highly divisive along ethnic, religious, regional, immigrant, and non-immigrant lines. Britishness, in terms of value and tradition, has decayed a lot. If the new government wants to succeed, it has to restore the social cohesion among various groups. Diversity, if managed well, can be a strength. But mismanaged, it can lead to divisions.

Despite having always boasted about being a welfare state, Britain's social services are decaying. The National Health Services (NHS) is a prime example. There is a dearth of

doctors and nurses, hospital beds have become a scarce commodity, patients have been on the waiting list for necessary surgery, and there are shortfalls in resources. But the problem is not only in terms of resource shortage, but also of the abuse of the system. Abuses are prominent in all kinds of social assistance systems. However, privatisation of the social services is not the solution. Rather, the British social service system requires fundamental structural reforms.

There is no doubt that the inflation rate has come down significantly, but that has not solved the economic challenges that common people face in their day-to-day life. Joblessness is a problem, energy prices are still high, the housing market is not friendly to common people. At the macro level, economic growth is sluggish and with Brexit, Britain has become isolated and deprived of the benefits and the privileges of the European Common Market.

Beyond all of this, immigration remains a hotly debated issue in the British society. It is now recognised that it is not always illegal immigration which is the problem; it is also legal immigration. Through the loopholes in immigration laws and the lenient policies of the British government, it is not only people needed by society who have entered the country, but also people who are dependent on the social assistance system, which has put a heavy burden on it. But the more important problem is the perception that this has opened a door to fundamentalism and terrorism.

The effectiveness and the success of the Labour government will depend, to a large extent, on the

international scenario. One of the defining issues in this regard will be the American presidential election later this year. If Donald Trump becomes the US President in November, the US-UK relationship under a Labour government cannot be expected to be warm and cordial and the environment may be tense. In addition, war in Ukraine and the Palestine crisis would have a lingering impact on the British economy. The past UK government had doled out huge amounts of resources to Ukraine, which has put pressure on the British exchequer. On the Palestine issue, the position of the Labour Party is rather hazy and unclear. The Labour government has to bring clarity to it.

Some of the election results indicate certain challenges as well. For example, the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) has got only nine seats in the new parliament, down 38 seats from the last parliament. It raises question on the standing of the Scottish independence. Have the Scottish voters lost appetite for this issue? Or do they think that the British parliament is not the appropriate platform for the concerns of Scotland? Similarly, Liberal Democrats have achieved the best results in 100 years, and have gained 60 new seats to become the third largest party in the Parliament. It is well-known that this party is strongly supported by the younger generation. Even though the Labour Party has absolute majority in the parliament, one challenge the party will have is how it interacts with Liberal Democrats in the broader policy contexts. People have not forgotten as to how in the coalition of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, the latter was marginalised by Labour.

In the coming days, the British people will observe with high expectations how the new government tackles all these challenges and steers the country forward. The honeymoon period will not be long. The theme of "change" is a healer, but if change is not delivered, it could be a "killer" too.

# How to reduce dengue and related out-of-pocket costs

Abdur Razzaque Sarker and Md Mohin Uddin Mizan are health economist and publication and communications professionals, respectively, at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

ABDUR RAZZAQUE SARKER and MD MOHIN UDDIN MIZAN

Despite efforts by the two Dhaka city corporations to control dengue over the past few years, the number of cases and deaths has risen significantly. In 2019, there were 101,354 cases and 179 deaths. By 2023, these numbers had surged to 321,179 cases and 1,705 deaths. This increase indicates that the measures taken have been inadequate, and more needs to be done to address the issue effectively.

One study estimates that globally about 96 million dengue cases are clinically manifested per year, mostly found in urban and semi-urban areas in tropical and subtropical climates. Also, the burden of dengue infections has dramatically increased over the past decades, with the number of symptomatic dengue infection reports doubling every 10 years between 1990 and 2013.

Bangladesh is situated in the tropical and subtropical regions, and like other Southeast Asian countries, it has become a suitable habitat for the dengue vector and has experienced increased transmission in recent years. The disease is

records. A large number of dengue cases are treated at the community level. Therefore, the actual number of cases and deaths is still unknown and even under-reported in Bangladesh. Experts estimate that about 2.4 million people suffers dengue infections annually, with most cases belonging to major cities like Dhaka and Chattogram.

Dhaka is often recognised as one of the poorest megacities, grappling with many problems such as pollution, horrendous traffic jams, unregulated construction work, brick kilns, and vehicles running on fuel containing higher levels of sulfur and other detrimental substances that pose grave threats to public health. Further, migration to urban megacities may impact individuals' hygiene, working, and living conditions, directly affecting city dwellers' health status. Thus, dengue infection is an emerging public health concern in urban Dhaka, and the cost of dengue infection is higher in metropolitan Dhaka than in other parts of the country due to livelihood costs.

A growing body of literature

resources from their regular income (62.3 percent), borrow from others (47.7 percent), use savings (41.7 percent), rely on family donations (18.9 percent), and even sell permanent assets (1 percent).

There is an urgent need for an effective national prevention strategy to achieve considerable cost savings and reduce morbidity from dengue. Policymakers should consider the OOP cost of dengue infections, particularly among low-income people, while balancing the benefits of introducing potentially effective dengue preventive programmes in dengue hotspots like urban Dhaka.

Different preventive measures such as water and waste management strategies and community education campaigns focusing on these risk factors should be taken to tackle dengue infections in metropolitan cities including Dhaka. The measures at household levels may include eliminating mosquito breeding grounds, effective solid waste disposal, using mosquito coils, aerosols, mosquito nets, cleaning larval habitats weekly (overhead tanks, groundwater storage tanks, air coolers, refrigerators, flower vases, earthen jars, cement tanks, plastic drums), applying insecticides, and using window screens, coils, and vapourisers. A joint effort involving public, private, and non-



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Policymakers should consider the OOP cost of dengue infections, particularly among low-income people.

expected to expand its geographical range due to favourable conditions provided by rapidly growing high-density urban areas along with socio-economic changes, increased worldwide travel and trade, and climate change. A risk factor study on dengue infections in urban Dhaka found that nearly 82 percent of identified immature mosquitoes were *Aedes aegypti*, responsible for dengue. Dengue fever is painful and affects people of all ages, including infants, young children, and adults and data indicates that Dhaka city is at most risk and requires urgent preventive intervention measures.

Dengue cases were highly prevalent in Dhaka division in 2023 and more than half of the total cases and most dengue-related deaths occurred in Dhaka city alone, indicating a health hazard for city dwellers. It should be noted that these numbers come from hospital

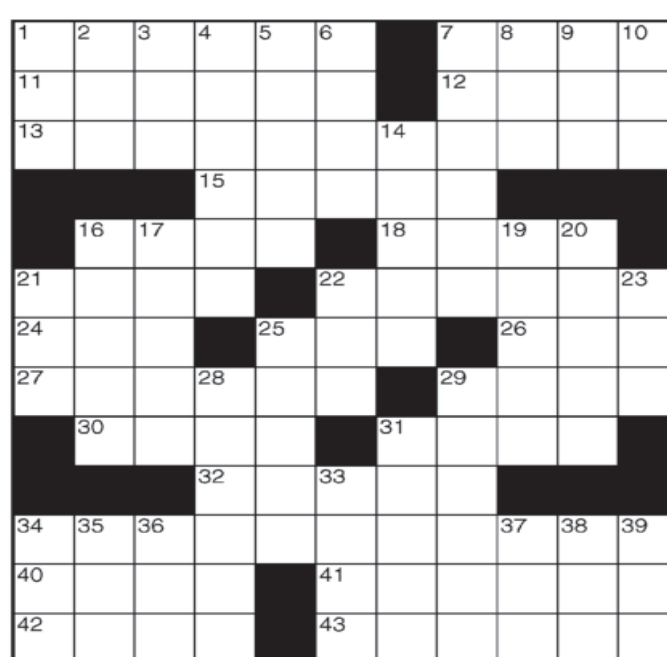
shows that dengue imposes an enormous socio-economic burden on households, healthcare systems, and government health expenditures in endemic countries, particularly during outbreaks. A recent BIDS study titled, "Economic Burden of Dengue in Urban Bangladesh: A Societal Perspective," published in 2023 in the *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, provides a detailed analysis of this economic burden. The average out-of-pocket (OOP) cost of dengue was about \$316.51, representing 56 percent of total monthly household income. For the poorest quintile, this cost exceeded 139 percent of their total household income, while the wealthiest quintile spent only 36 percent of their household income, highlighting a severe financial disparity among city dwellers. To mitigate the OOP cost of dengue, urban dwellers need to exhaust

governmental organisations is necessary to tackle the burden of dengue.

Another potential short-term solution is introducing a vaccine against the dengue virus in dengue hotspots. Vaccines are often considered the "best-buy" as they reduce disease incidence and case fatalities, saves OOP expenditure, avoids productivity losses, mitigates excessive pressure on the health system, and ensures equity. While the dengue vaccination programme is yet to be conducted in Bangladesh, such a preventive programme has proven cost-effective in many countries like Indonesia, Brazil, and Thailand. As dengue is emerging in Bangladesh, various preventive strategies should be considered year-round and not just at the beginning of the monsoon season to halt dengue infections and improve health outcomes.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**  
1 Phone button  
7 Track event  
11 Meeting slate  
12 Mideast sultanate  
13 Flying copycat  
15 Foster of film  
16 Conks out  
18 St. Louis sight  
21 Small change  
22 Patriotic song  
24 Switch setting  
25 Drill part  
26 Mine yield  
27 Beyond what's acceptable  
29 Expand  
30 Screws up  
31 Mires
- 32 Region of northern India  
34 Wee hoverer  
40 "Got it"  
41 Aviator Earhart  
42 Household critters  
43 Milk buy
- DOWN**  
1 Flock father  
2 Sense of self  
3 Winter mo.  
4 Printer type  
5 "Bye!" in Baja  
6 Touch down  
7 Poet Frost  
8 French friend  
9 Sedan or SUV  
10 Purpose  
14 Ferber novel
- 16 "Robinson Crusoe" writer  
17 Due to get  
19 Guitarist's concern  
20 Long sandwiches  
21 Barracks bed  
22 Melody  
23 Kitten cry  
25 Deep singers  
28 Picture holders  
29 TV's Bryant  
31 Molten rock  
33 Unexpected problem  
34 Stylish  
35 Try out  
36 Got together  
37 Unwell  
38 Carnival city  
39 Dapper fellow



## THURSDAY'S ANSWERS

