



Bishwo Shahitto Kendro founder Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed awards a student at an event at the Bangla Academy auditorium yesterday. Bishwo Shahitto Kendro in collaboration with Grameenphone organised the two-day award ceremony of the School Students' Reading Programme. A total of 2,563 students from 31 schools in Dhaka received awards across various categories.

PHOTO: STAR

'Good mosquitoes' may turn tide in dengue battle

Study finds Wolbachia-infected mosquitoes could help curb the transmission; experts skeptical

HOW WOLBACHIA WORKS

VIRUS BLOCKING: Wolbachia can interfere with the mosquito's cellular processes, making it difficult for viruses to replicate and spread within the mosquito's body

POPULATION SUPPRESSION: Wolbachia can also lead to a reduction in the overall mosquito population by affecting their reproduction

NO HARM TO HUMANS: Wolbachia bacteria do not cause illness in humans or animals

HELEMUL ALAM

An international team of researchers has developed a strain of Wolbachia-infected Aedes aegypti mosquitoes, dubbed "good mosquitoes". Tailored to Dhaka's tropical climate, they offer a potential breakthrough in the fight against dengue and other mosquito-borne viruses.

The study, conducted by scientists from Australia's QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, the University of Queensland, Bangladesh's icddr,b, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was recently published in *Scientific Reports* in a British journal called "Nature".

Wolbachia, a naturally occurring bacterium found in butterflies and some mosquito species (but not Aedes aegypti), blocks the mosquitoes' ability to transmit dengue, chikungunya, and Zika viruses. It is safe for humans and the environment, researchers say, and does not spread through bites or contact.

There are two main strategies for deploying Wolbachia-infected mosquitoes. The Suppression Strategy involves

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HELEMUL ALAM

HELEMUL ALAM and DIPAN NANDY

Abdullah Abbas, a resident of Dilu Road, uses mosquito repellents daily in a desperate attempt to protect his family from the worsening mosquito situation in Dhaka.

The situation has further intensified during the dry season this year.

"The mosquito problem here is extreme. I have to stay under a mosquito net the whole time I'm home," said Abbas.

Culex mosquitoes have made life difficult across many areas of the capital. Many residents say they often take refuge under mosquito nets even when they are not sleeping.

Though recent rains temporarily reduced mosquito numbers, locals report that they return in full force once the weather clears.

Putul Rani, from Shewrapara, said mosquitoes have become so unbearable that it's hard to stay at home.

Fatema Khatun, a housewife from Madhubazar in Moghbazar, added, "The city corporation doesn't spray insecticide here. Usually, coils or sprays help, but during the breeding season, even those don't work. We've been suffering for about a month, but there's been no visible action from the authorities."

The infestation has spread across homes, shops, schools, offices, and courts, frustrating residents over what they say is the lack of an effective response from the city corporations.

Despite using coils, sprays, and nets, many find these methods insufficient. In some areas, children are kept under nets even during the day.

Entomologist GM Saifur Rahman said Culex mosquito populations usually drop during rain and storms. However, in dense urban areas where breeding sites remain unaffected, they persist year-round.

"Minimal control during the dry season contributed to the current crisis," Rahman said.

"City corporations should use BTI (Bacillus

thuringiensis israelensis), effective against both Culex and Aedes mosquitoes. But BTI is not yet available in Bangladesh. Instead, we use temephos in drains and malaria oil B, which are often ineffective," he said.

He stressed the need for regular surveillance and consistent control efforts, especially after rain when breeding resumes. BTI is a biological agent that effectively kills mosquito larvae without harming other organisms.

Dhaka North City Corporation Administrator Mohammad Azaz acknowledged the issue, stating that only 70 percent of field workers were performing their duties properly.



"We've decided to involve the army to monitor operations and improve effectiveness. An agreement will be finalised this week," he said.

He said DNCC is also focusing on controlling Aedes mosquitoes.

Meanwhile, Dr Nishat Parveen, acting chief health officer of Dhaka South City Corporation, denied claims of negligence. "DSCC has year-round programmes to control both Aedes and Culex mosquitoes. We've increased insecticide usage and are conducting crash programmes in every ward," she said.

DSCC Administrator Md Shahjahan Mia said, "It's not only the city corporation's responsibility. Residents must keep their surroundings clean. Continuous and coordinated action is essential to tackle the mosquito problem."

Another arrested over Parvez killing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another arrest has been made in connection with the killing of Jahidul Islam Parvez, a third-year student of Primeasia University, in the capital's Banani area on April 19.

A team of Rab-1 and police arrested Faria Haque Tina, a student of the University of Scholars, from her Nodda residence on Thursday night, said Rasel Sarwar, officer-in-charge of Banani Police Station.

The student was produced before a Dhaka court with a 5-day remand prayer yesterday, and the court granted a three-day remand.

So far, seven accused have been arrested in the murder case, OC Rasel said.

On April 20, Jahidul's cousin, Humayun Kabir, filed the case with Banani Police Station, naming eight people, including two leaders of the Banani Thana unit of Students

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Offering hope, shelter and care to cancer patients

BANCAT stands by those in need; NRB Bank extends support

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven-year-old Afifa Khatun's life was upended three years ago when she was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a form of blood cancer that weakens the immune system.

While children her age were attending school, the girl from Jhenidah spent much of her childhood in hospitals, undergoing treatment. Her family, devastated emotionally and financially, struggled to bear the overwhelming cost of care in Dhaka.

Tragedy struck again a year and a half ago when Afifa's father, the family's sole breadwinner, passed away. With no stable income, her treatment faced uncertainty.

Hope came in the form of Bangladesh Cancer Aid Trust (BANCAT), a non-profit organisation that took responsibility for Afifa's treatment. For the past five months, she has been receiving care in Dhaka, fully supported by the organisation.

"We had no one in Dhaka," her mother said at a programme at Mosabir Alok Nibash 2, BANCAT's facility in Bashundhara yesterday. "But this centre has ensured my daughter gets the care she needs."

BANCAT, established in 2021 amid the Covid-19 pandemic, provides free accommodation, food and transport for cancer patients who travel to major hospitals in Dhaka, including Dhaka Medical College and the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital, often with no financial or social support.

The facility can currently accommodate 90 patients and one caregiver per patient, both of whom receive meals and accommodation free of cost.

Yesterday, NRB Bank Chairman Iqbal Ahmed visited the facility and pledged personal support, donating Tk 5 lakh.

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'Inequality in education must be addressed'

Speakers at Bishwo Shahitto Kendro event urge govt to form education commission, ensure equal access

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The interim government should prioritise reducing inequality and ensuring quality education, said speakers at a programme yesterday.

Education is the sector most affected by inequality in Bangladesh. As a result, children and adolescents are being deprived of quality education, which stands as a barrier to building a prosperous country and society, they added.

The remarks came during a two-day award ceremony of the School Students' Reading Programme, organised by Bishwo Shahitto Kendro in collaboration with Grameenphone, held at the Bangla Academy auditorium.

"There is no joy in our textbooks; they are not written to enlighten lives," said BSK founder Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed.

"Textbooks are not really books. If you define textbooks, they are just money. Textbooks mean jobs; textbooks mean

material advancement in life," he added.

Sayed said studying and memorising textbooks often leave students tired and frustrated.

"We dislike many things in this country, but perhaps the thing we dislike the most is books. If I attend a wedding with a gift, do people expect that it will be a book? Books have become the most unwelcome thing for us because we only turn to them during exams," he added.

Speaking at the event, Centre for Policy Dialogue's distinguished fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya said while Bangladesh faces many major issues, the most deep and widespread structural problem is the lack of quality education.

"If we aspire to build a new Bangladesh driven by Artificial Intelligence and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, none of it will be possible without ensuring quality education."

Debapriya expressed disappointment

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'Watching a circus in name of investment'

Khasru slams recent summit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ctg

BNP standing committee

member Amir Khasru

Mahmud Chowdhury

yesterday slammed the

recent investment summit,

describing it as a "circus"

and arguing that no genuine investment would come to Bangladesh without political stability.

Speaking at a seminar titled "Youth Perspectives on Employment and Multidimensional Industrialisation" in Chattogram, he said, "We are watching a circus in the name of investment. Those who understand how investments work know this is not the way forward."

According to him, even foreign participants at the summit seemed more concerned about the country's political future than its economic prospects. "The main question they asked was: When is your election?"

"Only a government elected by the people can ensure accountability, stability, and real investment," he said, adding, "We've removed autocracy, but we've yet to see a truly elected government in Bangladesh."

Commenting on current public sentiment, Khasru said, "There's been a psychological shift after Sheikh Hasina's fall. Those who fail to grasp this have no political future. We understand this transformation – and Tarique Rahman has provided leadership in this direction."

Outlining BNP's economic vision, he pledged to liberalise 10-12 sectors beyond garments, offer bonded warehouse facilities, and simplify business registration through a fully digital process.

"To attract FDI, we will assign young professionals from BIDA as 'captains' to guide each investor throughout the process," he added.

He reiterated, "Bangladesh's top three economic priorities are investment, investment, and investment."

