

## Are we looking at a triple health crisis?

Chikungunya concerns add to coronavirus-dengue threats

It was only the other day that we commented on the simultaneous resurgence of coronavirus and dengue, warning how their potential outbreaks at the community level could have devastating effects. As our previous experience shows, Bangladesh is simply unable to handle the convergence of such infectious diseases due to poor public awareness as well as inadequate testing and treatment facilities. Against this backdrop, it is extremely concerning to learn of the resurgence of another infectious disease, chikungunya, which, like dengue, is also mosquito-borne. The emergence of these diseases in close succession threatens to overwhelm an already strained healthcare system, requiring proper interventions.

Chikungunya, however, has yet to reach the level of the other two diseases. According to a report citing data from the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), from January 1 to May 28, at least 337 suspected chikungunya cases were reported in Dhaka. As well as adding to the burden on the healthcare system, one additional problem with chikungunya is that it shares many clinical features with dengue, thus complicating or delaying diagnosis and treatment. Moreover, given the absence of a routine national surveillance system for chikungunya and limited diagnostic capacity in the country, the IEDCR has acknowledged that the numbers it reported may not convey the actual scale of infections.

Chikungunya still seems restricted to urban areas, particularly in Dhaka, but the current trend indicates it may increase in numbers and spread to other areas. This is partly because of the just-concluded Eid holiday during which millions of people travelled across the country, increasing the risks of a silent community transmission. To ensure the disease does not spread unchecked or undetected, it is vital that the authorities act swiftly. First, there must be an effective surveillance mechanism for chikungunya nationwide, especially in high-risk areas. Diagnostic facilities should also be made available beyond Dhaka so that cases can be identified early. Public health messaging—now focusing on Covid and dengue—should also include chikungunya, particularly its symptoms and preventive measures. As experts have told *The Daily Star*, forming a tiered system—comprising primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of care—is also essential to ensure the health system does not get too overwhelmed.

Our reactive approach to public health threats has cost us dearly in the past. With three viral diseases now emerging simultaneously, we can ill afford such an approach now. We, therefore, urge the authorities to treat the triple threat of Covid-19, dengue, and chikungunya as a single, interconnected health emergency and ensure prompt and coordinated interventions.

## Gulshan Lake in an alarming state

Govt must act now to reverse this

It is disappointing that, like so many of our water bodies near urban centres, Gulshan Lake is also being destroyed by the relentless dumping of all forms of garbage and waste. According to a *Prothom Alo* report, waste in the lake accumulates mostly near its final stretch as one approaches Baridhara DOHS. There, a four-to-five-inch thick layer of garbage has formed on the water's surface, emitting a strong foul odour. Because of the unbearable stench, no one wants to sit on the terraces or balconies of the buildings lining the lake. Residents on the second to fourth floors of these lake-facing buildings are even forced to keep their windows and doors shut just to keep the smell out.

Although such dumping has become a perennial problem, the situation has recently worsened due to the disposal of entrails and blood from sacrificial animals during Eid. Reportedly, no government workers have come to clean the area so far. A cleaner hired by a nursery owner said that, in addition to sacrificial waste, his cleaning tools have been pulling up all kinds of rubbish. A resident of a nearby building also stated that garbage is regularly dumped into the lake from buildings on both sides.

According to the president of the Gulshan Society, they have been cleaning floating waste from Gulshan Lake using their own funds; however, the larger issue is that all the sewage from Gulshan Banani and Baridhara DOHS is reportedly being dumped into the lake. He further alleged that, despite repeated appeals to the authorities, no action has been taken. Residents in the area have also expressed frustration with Dhaka WASA, accusing it of allowing waste to be dumped. However, an official of WASA has denied this allegation.

An environmental expert who has conducted research on pollution in Gulshan Lake has revealed that the level of dissolved oxygen in the lake is less than half the required standard. For instance, the minimum amount of dissolved oxygen should be 5 milligrams per litre of water, but in Gulshan Lake it is only 2 milligrams. Additionally, the level of dissolved solids is twice the acceptable limit, which has severely damaged the lake's aquatic ecosystem, making fish deaths increasingly common.

The relevant authorities must explain why they have allowed the situation to deteriorate to this extent. That Gulshan Lake is in a terrible state is clear as daylight. And it is high time the government took action to reverse it. A regular cleaning mechanism must be established, and the government should work with experts to find a scientifically viable solution to the lake's pollution.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

## US-Soviet establish hotline

This day in 1963, the United States and the Soviet Union established a direct communications link, known as the "hotline," to reduce the risk of accidental nuclear war.

## EDITORIAL

## YUNUS IN LONDON

## Who bears responsibility for the diplomatic misstep?



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When the BBC's Rajini Vaidyanathan asked Professor Muhammad Yunus—head of Bangladesh's interim government—during his recent visit to London why he was meeting the king but not the prime minister, it was an awkward moment for most. Yet, without hesitation or irritation, as clearly heard on the radio, Professor Yunus replied: "Well, we would be very happy to meet him. Somehow, probably he is busy or whatever. But that gives me a great opportunity too—now that he is busy, I invite him to come to Bangladesh." A witty remark, no doubt, though hardly a satisfying explanation.

Rajini followed up with a more pointed question: "What reason does Downing Street give you for not arranging the meeting?" To this, Professor Yunus replied: "I don't think we've received any explanation. Probably he is busy with other important things." This exchange highlighted the foreign ministry's failure to secure a key meeting during the chief adviser's visit to a country with which Bangladesh shares a special and historic relationship.

Bangladesh's ties with the UK extend beyond bilateral trade, finance, and its large diaspora; they are also rooted in colonial history. High-level political visits are not merely symbolic—they serve as essential diplomatic engagements. Planning such visits requires meticulous attention to detail: scheduling meetings, setting agendas, and managing protocol and cultural briefings. According to the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, preparations for a full state visit can take up to four years due to their complexity—though this was not a state visit but an official one.

Criticism of the interim government for this diplomatic lapse is not mere politicking. Rather, it reflects genuine concern over a missed opportunity to strengthen vital international relationships. Acting Foreign Secretary Md Ruhul Alam Siddique acknowledged this on Tuesday, stating the ministry bore some responsibility for the failure to arrange a meeting between Chief Adviser Yunus and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Responding to a journalist's question,



Neither the permanent foreign secretary nor even the acting foreign secretary was part of the delegation in Professor Yunus's London visit.

PHOTO: CA PRESS WING

Siddique said: "As it was our responsibility to organise the visit, we are to some extent responsible for the meeting not taking place, as was announced on our side at the beginning of his visit to the UK," according to a report by *daily New Age*.

However, this half-hearted admission leaves key questions unanswered. Was a meeting with the British prime minister ever confirmed or formally requested with an agenda? Was it expected to happen informally? Was the Bangladeshi side aware that Prime Minister Starmer would be occupied with the critical spending review in parliament—a period of intense political activity? Whoever within the foreign ministry approved the upgrade of this trip to an official visit without securing proper appointments must be held accountable for this national embarrassment.

Even more perplexing was the absence of the foreign adviser during

the visit—a departure from long-standing protocol, especially during visits to P5 nations (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council). Neither the permanent foreign secretary nor even the acting foreign secretary was part of the delegation. Organising such a high-level visit without senior diplomatic officials was, arguably, a reckless move.

Charles III Harmony Award and to meet the king in a private audience—would likely have occurred even if he were not currently serving as head of the interim government. The foreign ministry, therefore, should not be credited for his wider engagements in London with politicians, business leaders, academics, and leading diaspora figures. Instead,

In her interview, Rajini also sought a comment from the chief adviser on MP Tulip Siddiq's reported request for a meeting to clear her name of corruption allegations that cost her ministerial post, which she described as a "politically motivated smear campaign." Professor Yunus declined to comment, citing the sub judice nature of the matter and the need to avoid interfering in the judicial process. Yet, in contrast, his interview with the *Financial Times* took a decidedly political tone, with the headline reading: "Keir Starmer declines to meet Bangladeshi leader tracking down missing billions." In it, Yunus argued that the UK should feel "morally" obligated to support the recovery of funds allegedly siphoned off during Sheikh Hasina's tenure.

There is no doubt that Professor Muhammad Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, draws international attention wherever he goes. His London visit—to receive the King

it requires urgent reform to instil professionalism, leadership, and accountability.

While the visit may not have yielded substantial diplomatic achievements, it was politically significant on the domestic front. It helped clarify the interim government's position on a roadmap for restoring democratic governance through elections.

The political uncertainty surrounding this roadmap has been a persistent obstacle to the effective functioning of the non-partisan interim administration. Recently, this ambiguity had become a growing concern. In this context, the much-anticipated meeting in London between Professor Yunus and BNP Acting Chairman Tarique Rahman—long exiled—offered a rare and encouraging signal. Their reported agreement on moving forward with election plans was a welcome development for those seeking a peaceful political transition.

## A reflection on Eid, grief, and quiet compassion



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Eid ul Azha has passed. For many, it was a time of joy and ritual—of family, food, and faith. But for some of us, it was quieter. More reflective. More gentle.

Last Eid ul-Fitr, I spent the day in a hospital, holding onto hope as my father recovered from a stroke. While the rest of the world celebrated, I was surrounded by beeping monitors, whispered prayers, and the unknown. There was no new outfit, no festive recipes, and no cheerful post on social media. Just survival, and the quiet strength it demanded.

This Eid felt different. Not because everything is perfect, but because healing has begun—slowly, quietly. My heart holds more now: both ache and gratitude. I've learned to carry them together. That softness stayed with me through Eid ul-Azha and led me to ask myself, again, what this festival is really about.

Eid ul-Azha is rooted in the story of Prophet Ibrahim's (PBUH) devotion. It is a story of trust, surrender, and ultimately, mercy. The act of sacrifice is not the point—it is the willingness

to submit to something higher, to let go of ego and entitlement, and to choose compassion. But in practice, we often lose that deeper meaning. We focus on the ritual, but overlook the values behind it. And in recent years, a troubling trend has grown more visible: the public sharing of graphic images of sacrificed animals.

**If your Eid was joyful, I'm truly happy for you. If it was quiet, painful, or full of tender contradictions, I hope you found moments of peace. And for all of us, I hope we walk away from this Eid with a little more softness. Because Eid ul-Azha isn't just about sacrifice; it's about what we're willing to surrender for the sake of something greater—like our pride, our need to show off, or our numbness to pain.**

Every year, my timeline fills with such posts, sometimes even before the Eid day begins. They appear without context or care, and they stay long after the meat has been distributed. For some, these images are part of tradition. For others—children,

survivors of trauma, animal lovers, and many just going through a delicate time—they can be deeply disturbing.

This is not about judgment. It's about intention. Sacrifice, when reduced to imagery and shared without thought, becomes something else—performance. The sacred becomes spectacle. And this is where I find myself asking: what are we really offering, if our actions cause distress to others or rob a living being of dignity?

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was known for his kindness to animals. The Quran repeatedly reminds us that compassion is a cornerstone of faith. And yet, during Eid ul-Azha, a time meant to reflect those values, we sometimes stray furthest from them—

this tradition in a way that upholds its spiritual weight? Could we move more mindfully? Could we share less, but feel more? Because not everyone's Eid looks the same. Some people are grieving. Some are recovering. Some, like me, are last Eid, are simply holding on. And some feel deeply for the animals whose lives are part of this sacred offering.

What might it look like to include them in how we show up?

This Eid, I chose to move more slowly. I didn't post pictures. I watched more than I spoke. I held space for both joy and memory—for where I was last year, and where I am now. It made the day feel more honest. More whole.

If your Eid was joyful, I'm truly happy for you. If it was quiet, painful, or full of tender contradictions, I hope you found moments of peace. And for all of us, I hope we walk away from this Eid with a little more softness. Because Eid ul-Azha isn't just about sacrifice; it's about what we're willing to surrender for the sake of something greater—like our pride, our need to show off, or our numbness to pain.

We often say "Eid Mubarak" without remembering what mubarak truly means—blessed, sacred, worthy. So maybe that's the question we carry forward: what would it mean to make this festival mubarak in spirit, not just in name?

Let it be marked not only by what we give, but how we give it. Not just in what we offer up—but in how we carry it through. With dignity. With humility. And always, with compassion.