

Big budget, small impact

Crores spent on dengue control in Dhaka but without satisfactory results

It is unfortunate that despite spending hundreds of crores of taka on dengue control, Dhaka continues to suffer from repeated outbreaks of the disease. Reportedly, in the past nine months, the two city corporations have spent Tk 707 crore—on pesticides, cleaning weeds and water bodies, and equipment purchases—to protect residents from dengue and other mosquito-borne diseases, but have had insufficient results. We have frequently pointed to poor planning and coordination and the absence of a comprehensive policy for the deteriorating dengue situation, but those calls have often fallen on deaf ears. Instead, the two city corporations have continued to carry out their same old mosquito control activities. Experts say that such outdated methods won't work anymore, especially with the changing climate.

When dengue was first detected in Bangladesh in 2000, it was a seasonal disease. Now, it has become endemic, with infections occurring year-round. Therefore, our strategy to fight dengue must also evolve. In this connection, experts claim that targeting Culex mosquitoes is the wrong way to go about it. While Culex breed in dirty water like drains and sewers, Aedes mosquitoes, which cause dengue, breed in clean water around homes, offices, and construction sites. However, these places are difficult for control teams to access, leaving many breeding spots untouched. These areas require targeted interventions. Moreover, experts recommend using larvicides and eliminating breeding sources instead of widespread fogging. They also warn that repeated use of the same insecticides may be ineffective, as mosquitoes have likely developed resistance to them.

Amid such a situation, the two city corporations have proposed their budgets for mosquito control activities for FY2025-26. The DNCC has proposed allocating Tk 135.5 crore for the purpose, with Tk 80 crore set aside for insecticide purchase, while the DSCC has proposed Tk 46.50 crore, with Tk 45 crore allocated for buying insecticides. Since the lion's share of the budgets is spent for insecticide purchases, it is crucial to ensure they procure the right ones, effective against Aedes mosquitoes. Moreover, for better dengue management, we must know the true scale of the outbreak. Currently, the DGHS reportedly collects data from 59 public and private hospitals in Dhaka and 80 district- and divisional-level hospitals, while around 16,000 hospitals, clinics, and diagnostic centres across the country provide dengue care. This limited surveillance is inadequate and must be expanded.

We urge the authorities to heed expert advice and adopt a holistic, science-based strategy. Establishing a specialised vector management department with a specialised team of scientists to lead research, monitor mosquito resistance, and guide insecticide use is essential. Without coordinated action, our dengue control initiatives will remain ineffective and fragmented.

Stop crimes by suspects out on bail

1,108 mugging suspects secured bail in just three months in Dhaka

We are deeply concerned about the trend of suspected criminals being released on bail, raising questions about the effectiveness of police investigations, prosecution, and the overall justice system. According to sources cited by *Prothom Alo*, 1,108 mugging suspects secured bail in just three months in Dhaka. Among them were accused caught red-handed, those arrested after their names surfaced during investigations, those apprehended while preparing for mugging, and even some whose names appeared in the final charge sheets. At a time when mugging has become a constant source of insecurity for many residents, the releases of so many suspected criminals come as a double blow, as freed suspects often return to crime.

This forces the police to chase the same criminals repeatedly, thus not only draining public resources but also emboldening criminals. In the months following the uprising, there has been a surge in crimes amid the security vacuum left in its wake. In particular, mugging, robberies, and violent attacks were frequently reported, with viral videos of such incidents often causing widespread alarm. While subsequent months have seen greater efforts by law enforcement agencies, crimes, especially violent crimes, still persist. In Dhaka, according to court sources, seven people were killed in mugging related incidents alone between last August and March. Mugging suspects being granted bail only exacerbates the situation.

The question is, why is this happening? Part of the problem lies in weak case-building. Cases are sometimes filed under less severe sections of law, making bail easier. In some cases, suspects are arrested under old cases, giving defence lawyers room to argue for release. Case investigations are also often either weak or slow, with charge sheets in mugging cases taking as much as a year to be filed on average. Moreover, prosecutors often fail to present strong arguments against bail. Even magistrates have pointed out that mugging case files often lack detailed accounts, paving the way for bail. In other words, negligence and procedural lapses on the part of both police and prosecutors are responsible for this situation.

While bail is a right and cannot be denied if a case for it exists, the challenge is to ensure that anyone who is a threat to society does not come out by exploiting loopholes or without supervision. Experts say that correct drafting of charges under the appropriate legal sections, timely filing of charge sheets, and greater efforts from prosecutors can make a difference. We, therefore, urge the authorities to undertake necessary measures in this regard. They must prevent accused offenders from securing undeserved bail or re-engaging in crimes.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Viking 1 launched to Mars

On this day in 1975, NASA launched Viking 1, the robotic spacecraft that would make history nearly a year later as the first successful lander on Mars, touching down on Chryse Planitia.



EDITORIAL

How NGOs can help build a democratic welfare state



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The political moment following the July uprising has opened a crucial conversation about the constructing a democratic welfare state in Bangladesh. It is the culmination of years of deepening inequality, stagnating wages, and a growing sense that the economy serves a privileged few while leaving many behind. The democratic welfare state is not charity-led, but rights-based, ensuring secure access to basic needs.

The role of NGOs is largely absent in post-July discussions on reimagining institutions. The vast network of economically active NGOs and microfinance institutions (MFIs) holds untapped potential. With 724 MFIs managing a credit portfolio of Tk 1,594 billion and serving 32 million borrowers, these organisations have the reach and resources to reshape markets. This is also true for the food and housing markets.

Oligarchic structures have long dominated food supply chains and property markets. If the state's welfare ambitions are to be substantive rather than rhetorical, economic NGOs and MFIs could be repositioned from primarily providing credit, services and charitable relief to becoming organised and accountable market actors delivering public good functions, such as stabilised food prices, guaranteed farm incomes, and genuinely affordable housing. However, this should not encroach upon the vital space of civil society organisations engaged in voice, advocacy, mobilisation, and accountability.

Breaking the oligarchy through cooperative markets

A major driver of persistent inflation is soaring food prices. In June 2024, food inflation reached 14 percent, the highest in a decade, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) reveals that food accounts for 45.76 percent of family budgets, down from 54.81

percent in 2010, but still the single largest share. Farmers, however, receive only a fraction of what consumers pay. The missing value is captured by intermediaries who dominate storage, transport, and wholesale trade.

NGOs could disrupt this system by establishing farmer-owned cooperatives and retail chains. For example, Spain's Mondragon Corporation demonstrates how

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bargaining. Second, investments in shared cold storage and transport networks could reduce post-harvest losses, currently estimated at 20 percent. Third, a national digital marketplace could connect growers directly with buyers through MFI-managed escrow