

Gaps in measles death reporting alarming

Revised figures expose weaknesses in health surveillance

The revised figures for confirmed and suspected measles deaths reveal a deeply troubling failure in data management and coordination within our health sector. The revised data released by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) on Sunday raised the total number of deaths to 409, up from the previously reported 352. This means that, prior to the revision, roughly one in every eight deaths went unreported, serving to mask the true scale of the ongoing outbreak. If the discrepancy stems from inefficiency, the government must confront these inexcusable shortcomings and take immediate corrective measures.

According to media reports, the established protocol requires civil surgeons—responsible for district-level health monitoring and reporting—to regularly update the DGHS headquarters. However, the reporting mechanism for state-run medical college hospitals appears to have been inadequately addressed within this framework. Reports indicate that the latest revision in measles fatalities became necessary after figures from three state-run medical college hospitals were added. Until Sunday, cases from those hospitals had not been reported to the DGHS.

There are suggestions that administrative hierarchy may have contributed to the lapse, as directors of medical college hospitals rank above civil surgeons and report directly to the DGHS. This clearly exposes a serious gap in communication and coordination within the health management system. Medical college hospitals are widely recognised as having a greater service capacity than other public health facilities and, therefore, receive a far higher volume of patients. Any weakness in their reporting practices can easily be perceived as deliberate underreporting, creating unnecessary complications and undermining public trust.

Questions have also emerged regarding the role of private medical college hospitals and independent hospitals. It remains unclear whether suspected measles patients are being denied treatment at such facilities or whether those cases are being recorded by the government. Reports further suggest that data submitted by civil surgeons do not always include individuals without permanent addresses in their respective districts.

The ongoing measles outbreak is increasingly becoming a matter of political controversy as the number of child deaths continues to rise. Few issues carry greater emotional weight than the deaths of children, and any suspicion of data suppression could carry serious political consequences. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the newly elected BNP government to urgently address these communication failures, strengthen coordination in monitoring public health outbreaks, and ensure the production, maintenance and timely reporting of accurate data.

So far, the government's response appears to have focused heavily on vaccination efforts, while insufficient attention has been given to providing emergency treatment for suspected cases. Expansion of treatment facilities, including the establishment of field hospitals outside Dhaka, should be seriously considered at this stage. Such measures would not only help save lives but also reduce the suffering of families forced to travel long distances to access treatment at medical college hospitals and other major healthcare centres.

End culture of extortion in slums

Authorities must not allow political shielding of extortionists

We are alarmed by the allegations of extortion and intimidation emerging from Kalyanpur Porabosti, highlighting a culture of criminal control over the capital's vulnerable communities. According to a report by this daily, several groups allegedly linked to ruling party affiliates have been involved in extortion, forced evictions, and grabbing of shops and homes in the slum area. Victims claim that police have turned a blind eye to the allegations instead of taking legal action. Our reporters came across about 15 such incidents, which show how political identities continue to be used as shields for criminal activities in Dhaka's slums.

For years, slums and informal settlements in the capital have been defenceless against domination by politically connected groups. Control over shops, housing, utility services, transport, scrap businesses, and local contracting work often creates opportunities for extortion and violence. The latest allegations from Kalyanpur Porabosti point to a deep-rooted system that has survived political transitions and continues to thrive through fear and impunity. Victims have described being assaulted, abducted, threatened into signing documents, dispossessed of property, or forced to pay regular extortion money simply to continue living or running businesses in the area.

In at least one instance, police were accused of pressuring a victim to settle with the accused, while others said they received no remedy even after filing general diaries or cases. Such inaction further emboldens the criminals. According to the victims, some residents were threatened or evicted based on allegations of participating in Awami League rallies. The entire situation is worrisome. While the accused individuals claim affiliation with the ruling party, local BNP leaders have denied any organisational link with them. Whether these individuals genuinely belong to a political party or are simply exploiting political branding for influence, the responsibility ultimately lies with the political leadership as well as the state to ensure that no one can use party affiliation as a licence for extortion, land grabbing, and violence.

Residents of slums and informal settlements are often the easiest targets for extortionists because they usually lack legal protection, political influence, and financial security. These areas cannot be allowed to become places where criminal groups operate as parallel authorities. The law enforcement agencies must thoroughly investigate the allegations of Kalyanpur Porabosti residents, ensure protection for the victims and witnesses, and bring those responsible to justice regardless of their claimed political affiliations. Failure to do so will only normalise the extortion culture that has plagued the country for far too long.

Before another education reset, let schools catch up first



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Bangladesh's education system is once again on the brink of a major change. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) recently announced a major pivot for the upcoming academic year. Following the July-August 2024 mass uprising, the interim government halted the rollout of the 2023 competency-based curriculum and ordered a return to the 2012 curriculum framework. This transition resulted in significant changes to textbooks, historical narratives, and assessment methods for the academic years of 2025 and 2026.

Now, the BNP government is again extensively revising primary and secondary-level books. The new books will be introduced to incorporate new subjects like "Joyful Learning" and "Sports and Culture." Historical content, prominently featuring the July 2024 uprising and other key political events, will also be added to the new books.

This restructuring of the curriculum or redesigning of examinations again and again shows intent to modernise learning. Such ambition is not new. The issue, however, does not lie only in the motive for reform but also in its pace.

It has to be acknowledged that the latest wave of reform proposals does not come without merit. BNP government's 12-point agenda aims at modernising the education system, giving importance to skill-based learning, extension of technical education, enhancement of governance, and re-evaluation of assessment arrangements. Also, there is a renewed focus on how education can be aligned with employability and global competitiveness. Notably, the agenda is an indication of a greater fiscal commitment with plans to increase education spending to five percent of GDP and to allocate up to 15-20 percent of government expenditure to the sector, as indicated in a recent report on the reform roadmap.

If taken in isolation, it will indeed be hard to argue that these are not timely and necessary directions. The difficulty, however, is not necessarily in the ideas themselves, but in the interplay between these ideas and reforms that are already underway. Meanwhile, an alternative set of proposals is also gaining traction: reinventing SSC exams with a revised number of subjects while scrapping previous public exams and re-

evaluating structural factors such as subject streams as a part of recent secondary reform plans. Each of these ideas might seem well-intentioned, individually. But together, they run the risk of producing a system in which the change will come more quickly than it can be comprehended, much less sustained.

The actual risk that we need to worry the most about is not the isolated gaps of training or infrastructure, but something less visible to the naked eye: the system's inability to build institutional memory. Reforms are



FILE VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

being rolled out faster than the system can absorb their intended benefits.

Teachers are being instructed to adapt to new pedagogical approaches just as they begin to make sense of the previous ones. Students are getting exposed to constantly shifting expectations from the system, often without clarity on how they need to perform or how they will be assessed. Just imagine a child who was a third grader back in 2020; before reaching grade ten in 2027, they will have already gone through at least three different types of education formats. The cost may prove far greater in the years ahead if we hesitate to slow down for a moment and reflect on what these fast, "get-set-go" reforms have actually accomplished so far. And in terms of clarity among the parents, they are also

happening towards a more holistic and employability-focused education.

But, to ensure their success, we also need to shed some light on the context where they are introduced. Educational reforms of Bangladesh from the recent past have echoed elements of systems like Finland's competency-based curriculum, which was established after years of consultation and phased implementation. Furthermore, suggestions regarding multilingual education and technical pathways resonate with features of India's National Education Policy 2020, as well as vocational models seen in countries like Germany, among others.

Even though Bangladesh has managed the courage to go down the policy borrowing road, which is actually commendable in this global era, a burning question still

in sustained teacher preparation are surely not freshly brewed recommendations, but they do not stop being essential, especially during phases like this. Just as important is policy continuity that allows time for the stabilisation and development of policy reforms.

We do not have to choose between ambition and caution when we have the chance to bring them together. The true strength of reform exists not only in its vision but also in its ability to take root deep in the classrooms and grow over time. The growing influence of global educational models underscores the critical need for local adaptation. To avoid performative reforms and ensure tangible outcomes, policy customisation must be treated with the same importance as policy borrowing.

Chattogram's waterlogging is a planning failure



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"This waterlogging is no one's fault; it is our fault, for being born in this country," said a frustrated citizen in response to a journalist's question on waterlogging in Chattogram. It is as if a remake of a famous drama is staged every year, directed by the city authorities. Rickshaw pullers navigate streets that turn into rivers. Children miss school. Businesses lose thousands in a single afternoon. And after the water recedes and the mud dries, everyone waits for it to happen again.

This is more than a natural disaster. It is a failure of planning.

Chattogram has been battling waterlogging for years. Crores of taka have been spent to resolve it. Projects have been launched with great fanfare and completed with little impact. The real problem is not a lack of investment but the fact that we keep attempting solutions before properly diagnosing the disease.

To figure out why Chattogram gets flooded every year, you have to

understand the unique nature of this city. It is not flat. It is not far from the sea. And its rivers are not like any other rivers. The Karnaphuli, the Halda, and other rivers that run through or around the city are tidal rivers; their levels fluctuate with the rise and fall of the Bay of Bengal. Even with a properly designed drain, water cannot flow out during high tide. Add heavy monsoon rainfall to a high tide, and the city simply has nowhere to remove the water. This aspect has been largely overlooked in previous projects.

With years of urban development, wetlands filled in, canals encroached on, and green belts paved, you have a city that has systematically destroyed its own natural drainage system and failed to replace it. This is not just Chattogram's problem but a national problem, with other cities including Dhaka suffering from a similar lack of foresight in urban development.

The solution begins with the right interpretation and use of data. In Chattogram's case, before a single

drain is widened or a canal dredged, the authorities must build a precise, scientific picture of how water actually moves through the city. The first step would be creating a high-resolution Digital Elevation Model (DEM), essentially a precise 3D map of the city's terrain created using Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)-equipped drones. Add to this a comprehensive soil study and research on land use changes in the last 30 years via satellite data, and a survey of the existing drainage system. Then model all of this together, overlaying rainfall patterns, tidal cycles, and the physical reality of the city's built environment. What you get is a 3D simulation that tells you exactly where water collects, why it cannot escape, and what interventions will have the greatest impact. No more guesswork, no more political decisions dressed up as technical ones.

Any serious plan must confront what has happened to the port city's network of canals that once drained the city's low-lying areas. Years of encroachment, illegal construction along canal banks, and accumulated silt have rendered many of them useless. Restoring these canals is not glamorous work. But it will be foundational. No amount of new infrastructure can compensate for a drainage network that is blocked at its most basic level.

Another factor to consider is

climate change. Chattogram's rainfall is becoming more intense and less predictable thanks to the climate crisis. Sea levels are rising, which will worsen tidal backflow over the coming decades. Any drainage master plan built only around today's conditions will be obsolete within a generation. The plan must be designed incorporating future climate projections so that the infrastructure built today does not need to be rebuilt in 20 years.

Everything described above is entirely achievable. The technology is commercially available. The approach is globally successful. Other cities in Asia—from Ho Chi Minh City to Jakarta to Chennai—have employed these methods to create efficient, data-driven drainage systems.

Chattogram does not lack technical know-how. It lacks institutional will. It requires the national and local governments to commit to do this well. It requires agencies to coordinate, to share information. It requires the courage to evict canal encroachers and the patience to implement a phased, multi-year programme, rather than chasing quick wins before the next election.

The people of Chattogram have waited long enough. They deserve a city that does not flood every time it rains. That city is possible. The only question is whether those with the power to build it have the will to try.