

Compensation must not trump probe

Govt must hold Ad-din hospital management to account to set an example

The findings of Ad-din Medical College Hospital's internal investigation into the deaths of six newborns on May 27 comes as a surprise. The hospital probe committee blamed the deaths only on two lower-level staff members: a nurse for not properly monitoring the newborns, and a janitor for not being responsible enough in transferring the babies from the post-operative ward to emergency. This finding is in stark contrast with the Directorate General of Health Services' (DGHS) investigation, which found several instances of negligence not just by the hospital's nurses and staff, but by the hospital authorities and the absent on-duty physician. The DGHS probe also pointed to overcrowding in the post-operative room and the lack of an alternative ventilation system when the air conditioner was switched off.

When the two findings are compared, it becomes obvious that the hospital is trying to shift the entire blame onto two people who played relatively insignificant roles. This appears to be a blatant attempt by the hospital to absolve its management of any corporate responsibility for the newborns' deaths. What adds another layer to this deflection of accountability is Saturday's press conference, organised by Supreme Court lawyer Shishir Manir, who claimed to be acting as a pro bono mediator between the hospital management and the victims' families. There, in the presence of both the hospital management and the victims' families, Manir announced discussions on a compensation package for the families, and on Sunday, it was announced that the hospital would provide each family with Tk 80 lakh. However, at the conference, Manir said the victims' families wanted those responsible for the deaths to be punished but did not want the hospital's services to be suspended. Later, the lawyer also termed the DGHS' show-cause notice to Ad-din hospital as "unlawful," adding that the hospital would seek a personal hearing with the DGHS regarding the notice. This raises several questions.

First, how can mediation between the aggrieved party and the defendant take place when a family member of one of the victims has already filed a criminal negligence case against the hospital? Manir said the mediation would not affect the ongoing criminal investigation. However, given the corporate conglomerate that owns the foundation running Ad-din, his claim appears far-fetched in the context of our country's reality. Besides, a mediator's role is supposed to be neutral, so it is unclear how he can call the government's action against a private entity "unlawful."

The deaths of six newborns within a span of two to three hours in a hospital room require a proper investigation, not a face-saving operation that scapegoats the easiest targets. While we are not asking that private medical facilities offering low-cost treatment be shuttered, their charitable services cannot be an excuse for running low-quality or substandard facilities. We cannot afford to continue overlooking the alleged medical negligence. The government should remain firm in its stance, and take the necessary and appropriate measures so that incidents like the one at Ad-din hospital never occur again.

Tackle the rat infestation in Dhaka

Keeping the city clean is essential to reducing public health risks

We are quite alarmed to learn how poor waste management is creating ideal conditions for disease-carrying rats in Dhaka. According to a report by Bonik Barta, rats are increasingly visible in the capital in broad daylight in wet markets, residential areas, restaurants, drains, and even healthcare facilities—a clear sign that the city's environment has become highly favourable for their growth. Experts have linked this surge directly to poor waste management, including piles of uncollected garbage, open dumping sites, clogged drains, and improper waste segregation, as well as unplanned urbanisation.

City residents are also reporting a growing presence of rodents inside their homes, while major public institutions, including hospitals, are struggling to control infestations. Public health experts warn that rats can spread harmful pathogens through their urine, droppings, fur, and contact with food and water. While direct transmission of some diseases may be relatively uncommon in Bangladesh, rats can contaminate their surroundings and help spread infections. They are known to carry diseases such as hantavirus and leptospirosis, and can also contribute indirectly to the spread of other illnesses.

In a densely populated city like Dhaka, where millions of people live in close proximity and sanitation standards remain inadequate, these risks become even greater. Zoologists have also warned that a growing rat population can disrupt the urban ecosystem by attracting predators such as snakes into residential areas. At the same time, the conditions that allow rats to thrive also encourage the spread of mosquitoes, flies, and other disease-carrying pests. This is a matter of serious concern.

Dhaka continues to rely on an outdated waste management system in which organic waste, plastics, hazardous materials, and household waste are often mixed and dumped with little processing. Experts have long stressed the need for separating waste at the source, followed by proper collection, transportation, treatment, and disposal. Yet, their advice has gone mostly unheeded.

The two city corporations in the capital must urgently adopt a comprehensive, science-based waste management strategy supported by adequate resources, clear timelines, and strict monitoring. Waste segregation at source should be a priority, while illegal dumping and the accumulation of garbage in public spaces must be tackled through stronger enforcement and improved services. Citizens also have a role to play by disposing of waste responsibly and cooperating with waste separation efforts. However, public participation can only succeed if the authorities provide the necessary infrastructure and ensure regular and efficient waste collection. The growing rat infestation can only be addressed through proper waste management and a long-term commitment to keeping the city clean.

True sustainability for ports means going beyond green



AHAMEDULKARIMCHOWDHURY

Ahamedul Karim Chowdhury is adjunct faculty member at Bangladesh Maritime University.

Ports are key gateways of trade and economic growth around the world, and they are increasingly embracing the idea of going green. Efforts to cut emissions, control pollution, and improve energy efficiency are now central to port development strategies. In Bangladesh, too, this conversation is gaining momentum as we modernise our maritime infrastructure.

However, an important question remains: is being environmentally friendly enough to make a port truly sustainable? The increasingly clear answer is: no.

A port may succeed in reducing emissions and meeting environmental standards, but it may still struggle with labour concerns, community dissatisfaction, or economic inefficiencies. It may become cleaner but less competitive, or more efficient but socially unbalanced. In today's complex and interconnected world, focusing on environmental performance alone no longer provides true sustainability.

This is why global thinking on port reform is evolving beyond the idea of the "green port" and towards a broader and more balanced framework known as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL). This approach looks at sustainability through three interconnected lenses: environmental protection, social responsibility, and economic performance. Instead of treating these areas separately, it brings them together into a single framework for decision-making.

For Bangladesh, this shift in thinking is both timely and necessary. The country is in the middle of a major transformation of its port sector. Chattogram port continues to expand in capacity, while large-scale projects such as the Matarbari deep-sea port and the Bay Terminal promise to redefine the country's connectivity with global trade networks. These investments will have long-term consequences not only for economic growth, but also for communities and the environment.

At present, however, the way sustainability is approached in Bangladesh's port development remains somewhat fragmented. Environmental issues such as pollution control, dredging impacts, and energy use are typically handled within regulatory frameworks. Economic performance is measured in terms of

cargo throughput, turnaround time, and operational efficiency. Social considerations, including labour conditions and community impact, are often addressed indirectly or receive less structured attention.

This separation creates a gap in decision-making. When environmental, social and economic factors are treated in isolation, it becomes difficult to see the full picture. A port may perform well in one area while falling short in others, yet still be considered successful. Over time, this imbalance can lead to inefficiencies,



Ports are complex infrastructures tied to not only trade performances, but also social well-being and environmental resilience.'

FILE PHOTO: STAR

conflicts, and missed opportunities.

The TBL approach offers a way to address this challenge by bringing these dimensions together. It does not suggest that every objective can be achieved perfectly at the same time. On the contrary, it recognises that trade-offs are inevitable. The key is to make these trade-offs explicit, informed, and transparent.

For example, investments in cleaner technologies may increase costs in the short term but deliver long-term economic and environmental benefits. Expanding port capacity may boost trade but also place pressure on local communities and ecosystems.

Likewise, improving labour conditions may require changes in operational practices. These are not simple decisions to make, but they are better managed when all dimensions are considered together rather than separately.

Adopting a more integrated approach does not require complex or unrealistic reforms. It can begin with relatively practical steps. Port authorities could develop simple dashboards that track performance across environmental, social and economic indicators simultaneously. Investment decisions could be evaluated not only on the basis of financial returns but also in terms of their broader impacts. There is also an opportunity to align port operations more closely with the SDGs, providing a clear and internationally recognised framework for measuring progress.

Perhaps most importantly, a shift in mindset is needed. Sustainability should not be seen as a checklist of separate requirements but

rather as a continuous process of balancing different priorities in a changing environment. This requires coordination between regulators, port operators, businesses, and communities, as well as a willingness to engage with complexity rather than avoid it.

As Bangladesh seeks to position itself as a key player in regional and global trade, the importance of getting this balance right cannot be overstated. Ports are systems that connect economies, shape livelihoods, and interact with sensitive natural environments. Decisions made

today will influence not only trade performance, but also social well-being and environmental resilience for decades to come.

Yes, the idea of a green port remains important and should continue to guide policy and investment decisions. But it should be seen as one part of a larger picture, not the end goal. A port that is environmentally compliant but socially strained or economically inefficient cannot be considered truly sustainable.

Sustainability is not only about reducing emissions or protecting ecosystems, important as those goals are. It is also about ensuring that economic growth is inclusive and that the benefits of development are shared fairly, while maintaining long-term competitiveness. A truly modern port is one that finds balance—among the environment, society, and economy. For Bangladesh, embracing this broader vision of sustainability will be essential as we move into the next

phase of port reform.

The author expresses his gratitude for the insights from Prof Mojahid Chowdhury of Bangladesh Maritime University (currently pursuing his PhD at the Australian Maritime College, University of Tasmania), whose research on sustainable port management through the TBL framework brings together environmental, social and economic practices in a structured way, offering valuable guidance for aligning port development with the SDGs.

Reflections on elder care, responsibility, and understanding



Tahera Jabeen is a development practitioner.

TAHERA JABEEN

The recent death of an elderly woman in Dhaka, reportedly found to have been living in distressing conditions despite having several educated and financially capable adult children, has triggered widespread public outrage and a painful national conversation about family responsibility, elder care, and the values we claim to uphold as a society.

What has struck me the most is not only the tragedy itself but also the sharp polarisation between the opinions that followed. Some have been quick to condemn the children without reservation, while others have rushed to defend them, arguing that no outsider can truly understand the complexities that exist within a family's dynamics.

I believe there is truth in both perspectives, but perhaps there is also a deeper conversation we need to have. My own views are shaped by my experience caring for my late mother during her battle with dementia. Having walked that path, I know firsthand that caring for an ageing parent, particularly one experiencing cognitive decline, is not always easy. Dementia is not simply

forgetfulness. It brings with it mood swings, confusion, suspicion, anger, frustration, and behaviour that can test even the most devoted caregiver. There were days when my mother became agitated, stubborn, or difficult to reason with. In the beginning, I often focused on the behaviour itself. Over time, however, I realised that the real challenge was not changing her, but rather changing my own perspective.

Gradually, I learnt to look beyond the words and actions to understand the emotions behind them. One of the most valuable lessons I learnt was that many elderly people, especially those facing illness, dependency, loneliness, or cognitive decline, often hide their vulnerability behind resistance and anger. What appears to be stubbornness may actually be fear. What looks like aggression may be a shield protecting someone who feels frightened, confused, or increasingly powerless.

Once I began seeing my mother through that lens, things changed. I became more patient, empathetic, and more attentive to her emotional needs. Love, reassurance, affection, and patience gradually achieved what

frustration never could. The mother who sometimes seemed distant or agitated slowly began relying on me more and more. Trust deepened and communication improved, too. Our relationship evolved into something even more meaningful than before.

Looking back today, I feel blessed to have been able to care for my mother in the best way I could during the final years of her life. The journey was far from perfect, and the early days were undoubtedly challenging. Yet, as my understanding grew, so did our bond. What could have been years remembered only for illness became years filled with warmth, shared laughter, heartfelt conversations, and precious memories that I now carry with me every day.

Perhaps that is why this incident affects me so deeply. It reminds me that elder care is about far more than providing food, medicine, housing, or financial support. Those things matter, but so do patience, dignity, emotional presence, and the willingness to understand needs that may not always be expressed gently or clearly.

At the same time, my experience also makes me cautious about passing judgement on any family from a distance. Every family has its own struggles, and caregiving itself can be physically, emotionally, and mentally demanding. But acknowledging those realities should not prevent us from asking difficult questions about how we care for our elderly loved ones and whether, as a society, we are adequately prepared for the challenges of an ageing population.

We celebrate academic achievements, professional success, and economic progress, but perhaps we spend too little time discussing compassion, caregiving, and the responsibilities that come with family bonds. The true measure of a society is not simply how much wealth it creates or how educated its citizens become. It is also reflected in how it treats those who are most vulnerable.

For me, the lasting lesson is a simple but profound one: sometimes the greatest act of care begins with understanding the fear hidden behind another person's anger. And one of life's greatest blessings is being able to look back, after a loved one is gone, with the peace of knowing that you gave them not only support, but also your time, your patience, your affection, and your presence when they needed it most.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy would be if the recent incident generates a few days of outrage and then fades from public memory. Instead, I hope it encourages each of us to reflect on the elderly people in our own lives. Most are not seeking extraordinary gestures. They are looking for our time, our attention, a listening ear, and the reassurance that they still matter. One day, if we are fortunate enough to grow old ourselves, we too will hope to receive the same kindness, patience, and understanding from those around us. Perhaps that is the most important question this incident leaves us with: are we giving our parents and elders the care, dignity, companionship, and sense of belonging that we would wish for ourselves?