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Desperate Rohingyas turning to crimes

They cannot be cooped up in camps forever

THREE years after the largest ever influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, crimes like murder, abduction, extortion and narcotics smuggling continue to burgeon at the world's biggest refugee settlement in Cox's Bazar. In 2018, 208 criminal cases were filed against members of the Rohingya community. That figure rose to 263 last year. And in the first seven months of this year, 178 cases have already been filed against the Rohingyas. This, according to law enforcers, is only the tip of the iceberg, as a large number of crimes including murder, abduction, and sexual harassment go unreported inside the camps.

Three years after the Rohingyas were brutally forced out of their country by the Myanmar authorities, there are still no signs of any environment being created for their safe return. Despite pretending as if it would work with the Bangladesh government to facilitate the return of Rohingyas now living as refugees in Bangladesh, the Myanmar government has done nothing towards that end.

Three years of hardships and uncertainty have left the Rohingyas increasingly more desperate. This has led to an explosion of drug trade involving Rohingyas living in the Cox's Bazar camps. Along with abductions related to unpaid money brought in through hundi, the drug trade is responsible for a large share of the crimes that have been happening inside the camps. As the number of crimes involving Rohingyas increases and their effect spills over even outside of the camps, locals are becoming more apprehensive.

This is not how any individual, let alone an entire community, can be expected to live, year after year, with no end in sight. The Bangladesh government has done all it can, with its limited resources, to give shelter to the Rohingyas. However, the international community must recognise that Bangladesh does not have much more to give to these tormented people. With that in mind, and after recognising that it is the Myanmar government that has been their tormentor, the international community must hold the Myanmar authorities responsible and convince them to create an environment that will allow the Rohingyas to safely return to their homes. The longer the situation persists, the more crimes will occur in the camps, and more Rohingya lives will continue to be lost or scarred.

Torture in police custody must stop

Cops who assaulted a female student in Ukhiya must face justice

ACCORDING to a report in *The Daily Star* on August 27, a female college student was tortured inside Ukhiya police station by the OC and some other cops. Reportedly, the 22-year-old girl from Maheshkhali upazila was in a relationship with a constable of the station and when she asked him to marry her, he left her. As the girl went to the police station to lodge a complaint against the constable, the OC, instead of recording the complaint, assaulted her physically. And not just the OC, several other cops who were present there also beat her up, leaving her injured. She was released from the police station the following day.

Torture in police custody has been happening regularly in our country. But the guilty police personnel have hardly been punished according to the law. Although our government enacted the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act in 2013, unfortunately, the police has been demanding to amend the law for long.

While in most cases the victims do not have the courage and connection to file cases against the law enforcers in question, in this case, the girl who was tortured has filed a case with Cox's Bazar Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-3 against the four police personnel, including the OC of the Ukhiya Police Station, which is a very positive development. The court also took the case into cognisance and ordered the Police Bureau of Investigation in the district to investigate the case and submit a report to it.

We now demand an impartial investigation into the case and hope that the guilty police personnel will face justice for the crime they have committed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Stop child marriage at all costs

Child marriage has not stopped due to lack of proper awareness and effective measures. In fact, the number of child marriages has increased during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Poor parents want to be absolved of their responsibility by marrying off their underage daughters for a variety of reasons, including extreme financial hardship, lack of social security, etc.

Although the government has enacted strict laws to prevent child marriage, the number of cases refuses to decline. This has to stop. There is no alternative to creating public awareness in order to prevent child marriage. Besides government initiatives, the role of teachers, religious leaders and influential community members is also very important in this regard. In addition, those who allow or encourage child marriages to occur must be punished severely. If this scourge cannot be contained, the expected development and prosperity of our country will be hampered.

Abu Faruk, Bandarban

Time to develop a reliable flood forecasting model



SHAIFUL ISLAM

MOST of Bangladesh is located within the floodplains of three large river systems: the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna (GBM), with over 90 percent of the basin area outside

Bangladesh. Flood is thus a natural phenomenon here, and people have been living with floods for centuries. Yet, not all floods are created equal, so to speak, nor all floods lead to a flooding disaster.

Currently, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) of Bangladesh Water Development Board provides one official five-day deterministic forecast and experimental probabilistic forecasting guidance. The five-day forecasting relies on detailed hydrologic modelling and is resource-intensive. A longer lead-time forecast will help minimise the impact of flooding disasters through better preparation and mitigation efforts.

This year, flood started somewhat earlier than usual. The Brahmaputra water crossed the danger level (DL) on June 28, subsided after a week, and then crossed the DL again on July 13 and continued for 26 days. It inundated over 30 percent of the country. In early August, there was a fear caused by the prediction of several forecasting agencies that a third wave of flood may come in August. Fortunately, it did not materialise. The Brahmaputra did not cross DL in August, and the Ganges and the Meghna did not cross the DL at all this year. Hopefully, the devastation of the flood season is nearly over for 2020.

The question is, how can we have a more reliable flood forecasting model for the future?

The three major rivers—the Brahmaputra at Bahadurabad, the Ganges at Hardinge Bridge, and Meghna at Amilshad—contribute over 80 percent of the water flow into Bangladesh. Given that over 90 percent of the GBM river basin is outside Bangladesh, it is critical to know upstream rainfall conditions, as well as the expected water flow into Bangladesh, to develop an accurate flood forecasting system. For example, rainfall at the farthest part of the Ganges basin may take 20-25 days to reach the Hardinge Bridge, while rainfall in Bihar may take only a few days to arrive at the bridge. A real-time data sharing of rainfall and water flow conditions across three major rivers from upstream countries like India, China, and Nepal can significantly enhance the accuracy of flood forecasting within Bangladesh.

In reality, however, such data sharing is not common. It is not helpful to engage in endless conversations about the power and politics of data sharing. We need to act with the capacity and constraints we have. For example, with the increased availability of satellite data and global model predictions of rainfall, data sharing, although desirable and useful, may become less and less relevant with time. We need to invest in a different type of flood forecasting platform.

day deterministic forecast while the ReqSim is providing a 10-day forecast. These two complementary activities can provide the basis for an operational flood forecasting model. Such a model will expand the narrow narrative of water crossing the danger level to include other essential attributes of an effective early warning platform for actionable outcomes.

Often, it may not be the type of flood but the timing of flooding that creates

Monday, August 24, water levels were flowing below the danger level at 27 points. Yet, over 30 percent of the country remain inundated. In other words, the crossing of danger level may not be a useful indicator of a flooding disaster.

Information about other natural, societal, and infrastructural factors is essential to forecast whether a flood is likely to create disastrous flooding and to minimise the associated impact. Following the guidelines of



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FILE PHOTO: STAR

Such a flood forecasting platform will recognise the unavailability of data from upstream countries and utilise the large-scale rainfall patterns captured by the satellite and global models to develop a data-driven model. A new forecasting approach, called Requisite Simple (ReqSim) Flood Forecasting model, has been issuing a 10-day water level forecast for multiple river points in Bangladesh for the 2020 flood season, using easily available satellite data and global model output. The forecasting accuracy of ReqSim has been found to be comparable with or even better than existing models, as demonstrated during 2017 and 2019 flood seasons.

The functional capabilities and demonstrated success of ReqSim can be integrated with the experience and institutional strengths of the FFWC of Bangladesh Water Development Board. The FFWC is currently providing a five-

disastrous consequences. For example, a flash flood in the Sylhet region in April may cause more damage to crops than a monsoon flood in Sylhet in July. Over the last 35 years, the Brahmaputra at Bahadurabad has crossed danger level a total of 29 times. Yet, not all 29 crossings had similar flooding in northern Bangladesh.

In the summer of 1998, over 60 percent of Bangladesh was inundated as the three major rivers exceeded the danger level almost simultaneously and created one of the most disastrous floods. In 2017, on the other hand, a significant amount of rainfall in the Brahmaputra basin created havoc in the northern region, but the Ganges and the Meghna did not cross the danger level, and the overall impact of the 2017 flood in Bangladesh was not as severe as that of 1998. Of the 30 river points monitored by the FFWC in the Ganges basin last

the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, an operational flood warning platform needs to include four components: I) risk knowledge, II) monitoring and warning, III) dissemination and communication, and IV) response capability. Just having a high-quality forecasting model is not enough to reduce the impact of flooding. Failures in minimising impacts usually come from the "communication" and "response capability" elements as well as from the lack of public and political awareness of "risk knowledge".

To effectively address flooding disasters in Bangladesh, it is, therefore, essential to invest in developing a reliable flood forecasting model that will integrate processes, people, and politics.

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Improving the quality of online education is the priority now

MAHDE HASSAN

WHILE many universities in Bangladesh planned to return to an in-person fall, this dream is crumbling. If they do it, students will be at high risk as the Covid-19 pandemic is still far from over. Given the situation, improving the quality of online education is more important than hastily opening up in-person classes.

When it comes to making remote learning effective, two factors play a crucial role: how well-equipped teachers are, and how proactive students are.

Many teachers are very successful in on-campus classes but not so much in online classes. This is because of their inexperience in remote teaching. Around 95 percent of the universities were not familiar or associated with online teaching in Bangladesh prior to the outbreak of the coronavirus. As a result, they have had little training on teaching online, resulting in often frustrating performances. However, if the authorities arrange mandatory online training on how to make e-learning more effective, interactive and productive, learning will be more interesting for the students. Besides, the quality of teaching will also improve to a large extent.

Imagine a teacher who incorporates short questions, MCQs, games and quizzes on the chat box of Zoom in between classes. How interesting learning would be for their students! But it requires proper training for the teachers to employ such methods and strategies to make classes more engaging. Unless they are well-equipped and well-trained for conducting online classes, the time spent as well as hard work of both teachers and learners will be in vein.

Once university authorities ensure quality teaching by offering teachers adequate training, the challenge is for the students to be proactive and stay focused. However, when a student has to stay before a laptop screen for a quarter of a day, they are unlikely to perform well or show the same level

of concentration. So it is important to ensure that students feel less stressed and exhausted.

The first thing to consider is the duration of a class. Students have little room for relaxation as long as online classes continue for 50-90 minutes like their offline versions. It seems that this longer period of class not only impacts learners physically, but also mentally. For instance, if a student takes three courses, the minimum required credits, he or she needs to attend classes for

nearly six hours per day.

Study shows that spending more than four hours a day in front of a computer or TV doubles the likelihood of dying or being hospitalised for heart disease, and exercise will not reduce the risk. Harvard Medical School researchers have shown that excessive use of computer or smartphone that emits blue light can disrupt sleep patterns by suppressing secretion of the hormone melatonin. Once sleep patterns are interrupted, students are prone to



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PHOTO: REUTERS/SHANNON STAPLETON

two-three hours per day except for weekends.

What is more, as the coronavirus outbreak is yet to be contained in our country and staying indoors is still the best option for staying safe, around 70 percent of the students find studying e-books comfortable. In that case, if a student spends one hour daily, for example, for each course, he or she has to dedicate an additional three hours a day to self-studying. As a result, a tertiary-level student is required to stay in front of the screen for an average of

physical illness easily. According to a study by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, US, spending six hours or more a day using computers is associated with a higher risk for depression. Apart from that, excessive screen time results in obesity, blurred vision, chronic neck and back pain coupled with the loss of cognitive ability.

Time reports that more screen time is linked to poorer progress on key developmental measures such as communication skills, problem-solving

and social interactions among young generations. It is undeniable that the fewer soft skills a student has, the less likely they are to be hired by the employers of prestigious organisations, potentially resulting in failures in their professional life.

I have conducted a survey involving over 100 participants from 11 universities. Out of them, 96 agreed that a long period of online class can be taxing, both physically and mentally. Mohammad Nabeel Iqbal, a lecturer at North South University, stated, "Long-time classes cause fatigue and eyestrain so the duration of online class needs to be shortened." Samara Yasmin Aurpa, a student of the department of English at East West University, said, "After participating in classes for a long period, I become so tired that I feel lost and can't concentrate on self-studying."

Embracing online learning does not entail overlooking the demerits of this system. We cannot encourage an abrupt return to on-campus class, nor can we remain blind to the pitfalls of online classes. We need to be practical, innovative and open to changes in whatever we do. Students are evidently struggling to pay thorough attention to their study because of our traditional approach to class duration. The health and safety of the students should be prioritised. What about the learners who will have to go out to attend in-person classes? Will the government, the university authorities or the UGC be willing to take responsibility if they catch Covid-19? Hastily opening the universities, along with all other educational institutes, could have a disastrous consequence for our next generation of leaders.

So it is high time the government, the Ministry of Education and the UGC paid attention to raising the standard of online education, by taking the students' wellbeing into account, instead of opening the educational institutions immediately.

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