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Give the state mills a chance

Govt should resuscitate jute, sugar mills by eradicating corruption

It is generally held that poorly-run state enterprises are grist to the mill of corruption. Now a new study has found that corruption, mismanagement and absence of proper planning are indeed responsible for the losses incurred by state-owned jute and sugar mills, leading to the closures of many, while those that still operate are barely limping along. The study report, disclosed at a press conference on Monday, explains the reasons for the closure or poor performance of these state-owned enterprises and debunks the excuse for outsourcing production to the private sector. One may recall that after the closures of all 25 state-owned jute mills in June, the government had promised to train and recruit the laid-off workers by "modernising" and "reopening" the mills under public-private partnerships. Such promises are often hollow, the study shows, as of the 75 industries handed over to private owners from 1993 to 2010, 31 were later found to be closed. Clearly, privatisation was just another excuse for rent-seeking by corrupt businessmen and officials, and didn't lead to the promised expansion of the industries either.

The question is why these state enterprises—on which the lives of thousands of workers and their families depend—keep failing despite massive capital injections and bailouts, and at what cost. The loss in financial terms is often pushed forward to legitimise privatisation. What's conveniently ignored, however, is the cost paid in sufferings by the workers and the region in which the shuttered mills are located. After the closure of the 25 state-owned jute mills, over 25,000 workers became redundant overnight. The government has also shut down six out of the 15 state-run sugar mills, laying off another 3,000 workers. The closure of these mills, located in the northern and south-western parts of Bangladesh, also hugely impacted the local economy, threatening the livelihoods of those involved with nearby grocery stores, hotels, furniture and clothing shops and many other small businesses. The social costs of these closures are no less significant, showing how profound the impact of corruption can be.

Unfortunately, the trinity of corruption, mismanagement and absence of proper planning is a problem that has plagued all our state enterprises. If run properly, these jute and sugar mills have huge economic potential, especially given the rising global demand for eco-friendly industries as well as home-grown products. Increasing sugar production, for example, can reduce market prices and make Bangladesh self-sufficient in sugar. So the government must find a way out of the destructive policies and practices that have led to the closure and underperforming of state-run mills. It must take concrete measures to reduce losses by increasing their production capacity. Corruption and inefficiencies must not be tolerated at all. The government should also immediately reopen the closed mills through the modernisation of equipment and taking legal action against those responsible for their sorry state.

Dumping of plastic bottles in the Buriganga

This is hastening the death of the capital's lifeline

THERE are many ways that the Buriganga is being killed. For a long time, the effluent from the industries on the river bank saw to its gradual demise, particularly the discharge from the tanneries. But then it was also used to dump all kinds of waste. The worst of the pollutants is the large amounts of plastic waste, including sacksful of plastic bottles that have not only choked the river, but have helped kill the marine life as well.

The Buriganga river is one of the three major lifelines that encircle the capital, and the other two, the Shitalakshya and Turag, are in no better condition either. Hardly have we seen another instance where people are so grossly negligent about their own well-being. The fate of the Buriganga is a reflection of the fate of other major rivers that flow by or through many of our major conurbations.

When national resources are not looked after by the people, the administration must weigh in heavily. We have the National River Commission (NRC) but it is virtually a toothless tiger. It has little executive authority, much less the authority to punish. The local administration on which devolves the responsibility to protect the national resources, and which has the enforcement powers as well as the powers to punish, do not do their job with diligence. Had that been so, our rivers would not be in the moribund state they are in. In fact, all these are happening right under their noses. The administration and various agencies of the government have displayed a callous disregard towards the High Court directives of February 2, 2019, which asked for a holistic approach to protect rivers from grabbing and pollution. It declared the rivers as "living entities" and "living persons". The HC issued 14 directives to seven agencies of the government, including the local administration. And the continued grabbing and pollution of the rivers is in breach of the HC's directives. The government should waste no time to ensure that these directives are fulfilled, in letter and in spirit. Further, it should also accord the NRC more authority to carry out the task it is entrusted with.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Climate change conundrum

It is time to create serious climate change talks on the world stage. Volatile weather patterns and climate change impacts have started eating into the growth of the world. Intense tropical storms have become the order of the day. Just as on the American continent, Asian nations have been encountering plenty of storm systems. The international community should get ready to handle these climate challenges through mutual cooperation and strong green strategies.

P Senthil Saravana Durai, Mumbai, India

Breaking the inter-generational cycle of violence

There must be legal reforms and changes in social norms to end corporal punishment of children



LAILA KHONDKAR

ACCORDING to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2019 by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, 89 percent of children (1-14 years) in Bangladesh experienced violent discipline in the month before the survey was conducted. The survey also reported that 35 percent of caregivers believe that a child needs to be physically punished. There is a circular (2011) by the Ministry of Education banning corporal punishment in educational settings in Bangladesh. However, children continue to be beaten and humiliated by teachers. In addition, children are subjected to corporal punishment in homes, institutions, workplaces etc.

Corporal punishment includes any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, as well as non-physical forms of punishment that are cruel and degrading.

The high levels of corporal punishment of children in Bangladesh reflect deeply embedded social attitudes that authorise and approve it. We repeatedly hear that beatings by parents and teachers have been going on in our society for long, and this is a common practice. Some even go on to claim that they would not have been able to be who they are if they were not punished! Nobody knows how they would have turned out if parents or teachers had never hit or humiliated them. Many people deny the hurt they experienced when the adults whom they trusted the most thought they could punish them using brute force.

Some argue that many parents are bringing up their children in challenging conditions, and teachers are often under stress from overcrowding and lack of resources, and thus, they often use corporal punishment as the "last resort." In reality, corporal punishment is often an outlet for adults' frustrations in their personal and professional lives rather

than an attempt to educate children. In many homes and institutions, adults need more resources and support. However, hitting children is never acceptable even when adults face difficulties.

A 2013 review conducted by the Global Initiative to End all Corporal Punishment of Children, which included more than 150 studies, showed associations between corporal punishment and a wide range of negative outcomes, and presented a convincing case that corporal punishment is harmful for children, adults and societies. This violates children's human dignity and physical integrity and is a blatant violation of children's rights. When adults hit their children in the

child and attitudes favourable to corporal punishment and domestic violence in adulthood. If societies continue to allow corporal punishment of children, then it will become impossible to break the inter-generational cycle of violence.

Despite its widespread use and proven detrimental effects on children, corporal punishment remains lawful in many countries, provided that this violence is inflicted in the name of so-called discipline. Till now, only 60 countries have banned corporal punishment of children in all settings including homes. Bangladesh is not yet on the list.

When we have a legal system which states that assaulting an adult

over time once it is fully prohibited. Sweden is a good example.

In 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to prohibit all corporal punishment of children. The Ministry of Justice ran a large-scale public education campaign about the new law. Moreover, parents received support and information at children's and antenatal clinics. Since prohibition, there has been a consistent decline in adult approval and use of punishment. In the 1970s, around half of children were smacked regularly; this fell to around a third in the 1980s, and a few percent after 2000.

Ending corporal punishment is essential if we are to meet the Sustainable Development Goal's target 16.2 of ending violence against children by 2030. The following are some recommendations to end corporal punishment of children in Bangladesh.

The government circular on banning corporal punishment in educational settings must be implemented and monitored properly. A new law banning corporal punishment of children in all settings (homes, schools, workplaces, institutions including alternative care arrangements etc) should be enacted. In addition, initiatives should be taken to enforce and monitor the implementation of the legal ban through relevant policies and programmes, as well as public awareness raising campaigns.

Positive discipline in homes and schools should be promoted. This is about non-violent child-rearing and education, and giving parents, teachers and other caregivers a framework for responding constructively to conflicts with the children. The messages on positive discipline should be built into the training of all those who work with or for children and families, in health, education and social services.

Governments and other actors involved in combating corporal punishment should engage with children and respect their views in all aspects of preventing and responding to corporal punishment. Let us make corporal punishment of children socially unacceptable in addition to prohibiting this in all settings.

Laila Khondkar is an international development worker.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

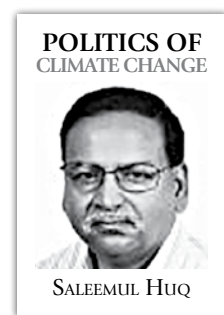
name of discipline, children learn to "behave" only to avoid punishment, but they do not internalise why that behaviour should be avoided. So, it is very likely that they will repeat it. This means that punishment is ineffective as a disciplining technique.

There is overwhelming evidence that corporal punishment causes direct physical harm to children, and negatively impacts their psychological and physical health, education and cognitive development, in the short as well as the long run. This also increases aggression in children and is linked with violence in intimate relationships and inequitable gender attitudes. There are correlations between being physically punished as a

is an offence, but assaulting a child is acceptable, the law is discriminating against the child and there is no equality under the law. Laws that allow adults to inflict violence on children in the name of "discipline" represent a view of children as subordinate to adults. Reforming laws to ensure that children can no longer be lawfully subjected to violent punishment marks a turning-point in society's relationship with children, signaling the recognition of children as human beings and rights holders. In enhancing children's position in society, it advances all their other rights.

Research is showing that corporal punishment is no longer seen as acceptable and becomes less prevalent

Entering the Anthropocene era in a befitting manner



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been a pioneer in terms of developing the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a more balanced way of measuring

human development that goes beyond traditional, simple economic indicators of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They have also been publishing an annual Human Development Report (HDR) which tracks every country's HDI each year. Each year's report also has a theme to it, and the 2015 HDR was on the theme of Climate Change and Human Development, which I had the privilege of contributing to.

The 2020 HDR has just been launched and the theme this year is Development in the age of the Anthropocene. I am sure that most readers will not know what this word means, as it comes from the realm of geology and environmental studies. For those of us working in the environment arena, it is a term that we have become familiar with, as we are entering a new geological era where human beings are affecting the planet at a scale that has never been possible before. This new era can be a force for good but unfortunately, it is more a force for bad than good at the moment. Hence, we need to develop a major paradigm shift in terms of how we value what really matters as we develop. The 2020 HDR has shown very convincingly that even for countries that have gone up the HDI in terms of enhanced development, they have done so at the expense of their own environment. The paradigm shift that is therefore needed is to make sure that HDI is combined with environmental considerations at the same time.

Therefore, business as usual is no longer good enough and going forward, we need to develop a new normal for decision-making where economic indicators are not the only ones to consider. We need to give equal value to equity and social capital, as well as environmental protection and climate change considerations.

How can we make this paradigm shift? At the global level, we need to make a paradigm shift for each and every individual on the planet to think of oneself as a citizen of planet Earth first and of our country second. This was never true before we entered the Anthropocene

era but is now necessary.

At the national level, in Bangladesh, we can indeed be proud that our Parliament was one of the first to declare a planetary emergency. This was not just a climate change emergency similar to what other Parliaments had done, but the recognition of climate change and biodiversity loss together to create a planetary emergency. While this is an excellent example, it does not mean anything if it doesn't lead to more substantive changes in the way we do things in the country in practice.

Another positive feature of Bangladesh is its excellent planning systems under the

southwestern region of the country with the capital, which will lead to significant development. But if we leave it to the business as usual practice, then we will see haphazard industrial and commercial development around the Sundarbans mangrove forest, which is a world heritage site that Bangladesh is responsible for conserving, not only for ourselves but for the whole world. We need to ensure that only nature-based solutions (NBS) are allowed to be invested in that region and prevent the way things are going now. If we fail to take action immediately, it will not be possible to reverse things later.

then we will have learned nothing from our mistakes. The most important point is that the Dhaka Plan is aware of this and we have laws against destroying our wetlands, but that does not stop dishonest developers from breaking the laws and getting away with it. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Finally, let me end on an optimistic note which is to do with the youth, especially the girls of our country. They are, in my opinion, by far the biggest assets in our country and we need to invest in them in a non "business as usual" manner. This will not require a



Haphazard urban planning and drainage congestion means Dhaka is prone to flooding after a heavy downpour. This photo was taken in Dhaka's Doyaganj area in July 2020.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

leadership of the Planning Commission, who have prepared the Delta Plan to 2100 and the 2041 Prospective Plan as well as the regular five year plans, of which the 8th Five Year Plan will start from next year. All these plans have actually taken environmental and social issues into consideration in a very thoughtful manner. However, the problem is again with not being able to implement the plans in a manner that actually delivers the promises made in the plans.

There are two very important opportunities for Bangladesh in the immediate future to make this paradigm shift. The first is to do with the soon to be opened Padma Bridge linking the

The second opportunity we need to make a very quick paradigm shift on is the development of Dhaka city towards the east. While expansion of the capital city to accommodate its rapidly growing population is essential, the way it is done matters a great deal. The whole of the Dhaka region sits on a very substantial series of connected wetlands of rivers, canals and big and small water bodies. The current part of Dhaka city is built over those water bodies and has meant that we have to suffer flooding due to drainage congestion whenever we have a heavy downpour. If the expansion towards the east takes the same path of building over the hundreds of existing water bodies,

single additional Taka or Dollar, but will in fact require a major paradigm shift in our approach to education. We need to turn away from the rote learning approach and make our young people citizens of planet Earth and problem-solvers, not just for our own country but for all of humanity. This may sound ambitious but it is entirely doable if we make the decision to do so.

Bangladesh thus has the opportunity to show the rest of the world what it means to enter the Anthropocene era in a befitting manner.

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