

# Children are still victims of apathy and neglect

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

**A**RIF, 10, toils more than 12 hours a day in a metal factory near Dolaihkhali in the Dhaka city. Blackened by grease, smoke and baked by furnace blasts, he looks haggard and run-down. Arif earns 50 taka a day that hardly helps him to support his old parents who can't work now crippled by age and disease. Jharna, 10, works 16 hours at a stretch as a domestic help in a Dhamondi house. Even after working for such long hours, she was never appreciated by her masters, rather often was put to inhuman torture causing burns to her fingers, back and leg by the demonic mistress. Reports of a young Mustaqin working in the house of a doctor couple in the Shahbag area of the city as a domestic help subjected to beating, burning fingers that almost crippled him has caught public attention through media reports in the recent time.

People only wonder what is the nature of crime that a young child driven by poverty and hunger working as a domestic help has committed that would cause an educated and affluent family to gang up on a defenceless child. Sometimes it so happens that such young domestic helps, just on suspicion of taking away some money left on the table or small gold ornaments kept in open drawers are subjected to such tortures for eliciting a confession. In most cases they are honest and try to earn the confidence, love and affection of their masters through their service. Strangely enough, if a child makes the slightest mistake, he/she is made to pay for it through scolding or in most cases physical abuses of the worst kind.

Statistics of staggering number children, to the tune of about 30 million under six years remaining uncared for without proper food and schooling in the country point to a grim future of the country. Although the number of children initially enrolled at primary schools range upto 75 percent, almost 60 percent of them drop out mainly due to poverty and cruel environment. Only 40 percent of these colossal number can somehow

cross the primary stage of schooling. The number of street children in the country, as revealed in a report by the UNICEF would rise to a staggering figure of about 18 lakh and out of these numbers there would be about five lakh children loitering in the streets just as errand boys other than a vast number eking out a miserable existence without food, nutrition and shelter.

There are about 1,50,000 children working as domestic helps in Dhaka city alone and a vast majority of the remaining are engaged in about 430 types of works, mostly degrading. While other countries in the world talk about the need to

still thousands of children now in the country eking out a living under oppressive situations in other vocations. These are the children who are working either to support themselves or their families. The number of children doing such odd jobs as splitting stones for the construction workers, or picking trash from the streets or packing groceries, working as hotel boys or coolies in bus and railway stations etc. outnumber those 10,000 childworkers just withdrawn from the garments factories. Haroon, a boy of 12 who works in a hotel in the busy Motijheel area of the city had high hopes in life. He wanted to

protect the administration and society at large because they were born poor. In spite of the fact that the country has stricter laws to stop such abuse, we have hardly been able to ensure protection to these teenagers.

The condition of the children lacking support of the family or parents in the country beggars description. They wander homeless in the streets of big cities often surviving by thieving or begging in absence of any means of living. They die by the thousands every day of preventable diseases like Malaria, T.B. diarrhoea etc. Whether society and the adminis-

prohibits employment of children under 14, it is seldom enforced. With the enactment of stricter laws that would put an end to child abuse, repression and trafficking, one can only envision a happy and prosperous future for the country. Because when the children are happy, educated and did not suffer from diseases and malnutrition, there would be no terrorism in the country.

Statistics revealed that if the world leaders could urge people in their countries to spend only pennies per child, that additional annual expenditures of \$2.5 billion a year worldwide could prevent 50 million deaths, mostly children in this decade. That amount is equivalent to what world's military establishments, taken together, shell out each day.

There is some reason for optimism. Almost two thirds of the yearly deaths in children caused by diarrhoea and dehydration are due to contaminated food and water.

All these can be treated or prevented at low cost. In case of diarrhoeal disease which accounts for 30 per cent of deaths, the life saver is a 7 cm packet containing a dry mixture of salt, sugar and potassium that when mixed with water, is used in oral dehydration therapy. If administered in time ORT which costs 3 to 4 Taka a packet stops diarrhoea and restores vital electrolytes before the affected child goes into fatal shock.

Despite the success we have attained in immunisation programme, the children of the country suffer inexorably. Presumably, penicillin and vaccines are no antidote to the abuse, neglect and denial of opportunity to these unfortunate teeming millions who continue to lead a life of misery, squalor and exploitation because they are born poor. Unless we can affirm the right of children to a life free from exploitation, neglect and abuse guaranteeing them access to food, health care and education and ensuring protection, our commitment to democracy and national prosperity will remain a distant dream.

Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher and controller of examinations, BUET.

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invest in their youth, much of Bangladesh has converted its youth into a pernicious capital investment. In a host of small scale factories and work houses, it is children who dip matchsticks into phosphorous, mix the gunpowder for fire crackers, roll the bidis and weave the carpets.

Child labour is hardly a new concern, having been fiercely debated and mostly withdrawn from the West long ago. The phenomenon still persists in the developing world and lately it has been receiving world attention. Even in India, because of the prevalence of child labour in carpet and rug industries German and US buyers boycotted the Indian carpets. Shockingly, so far 58 of India's 2500 registered carpet manufacturers have been approved by Rugmark, a certifying body giving a label that the products were not made by children.

Despite the fact that child labourers have been withdrawn from the garments sector following international pressure, there are

study and help the family through a meaningful employment, but with the death of his father in a road accident all his hopes have been dashed to ground. He now works on a monthly pay of 400 taka with free food and lodging.

His mother who works as a maid in a house in the Dhamondi area in Dhaka could not avoid exploitation by the traffickers. Most disquieting, despite sanctimonious pronouncements by the government and in some cases passing tougher laws, child sex industry is booming up in the country. Girls born of poor parents are being put into this trade by some human predators inside the country. They are the ones who are never caught and punished because of their cosy nexus allegedly with law enforcers and political masters.

Grim accounts of poor girls under 14 being taken away from around the country and sold to prostitutes are pouring in. They have to sell their bodies in different areas of Dhaka, Narayanganj, Chittagong and Khulna often unno-

tration has cared to see or not, the fact remains that they are the most disadvantaged children of the country. If the present trend that reflects lack of serious monitoring and funding continued, many of these youngsters will die of illness or mainly malnutrition in the long run. Their neglect by the government has led to such a colossal and hopeless state of things. The plight of these homeless children bereft of any educational support and family backing can be as sad and shocking as could be possible. The city's garbage dumps are home to many of them. These rubbish pickers spend their days sifting through mountains of obnoxious refuse, looking for recyclable objects. But how can society and the administration face such a cruel fact that God's best creation, because they were born poor or with no father or mother to support them in the most formative years of their lives, are destined to end up in garbage dumps or in cardboard shanties?

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# Importance of Hajj

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

**S**INCE the next lunar month is the holy month of Zul-Hajj all eligible, adult and resourceful Muslims living in various countries of the world are preparing themselves for going to Saudi Arabia with a view to performing Hajj (pilgrimage). What do we mean by the term "pilgrimage"? It means a journey to a shrine or a holy place. In case of Muslims of the world it is a pilgrimage to a shrine of vast congregation and unique character, that is, the Holy Ka'ba, the Harem Sharif, the Masjid-e-Nabobi (the Mosque of the holy Prophet) and other holy places including his holy "Rouza" (the last resting place). It is obligatory on the part of all eligible, resourceful and adult Muslims to visit their shrines for performing Hajj at least once in their life time.

Hajj may be mentioned here is

one of the five "Rokons" (pillars) on which the grand edifice of Islam stands. Other pillars are: (1) Faith ("Iman"), (2) Hajj (Daily 5-times formal prayer), "Siam" (Fasting) and "Zakat" (Poor due). Great importance of Hajj can be gauged from the fact that out of total 114 Suras (Chapters) of the Holy Qur'an there is also a Sura known as Sura Hajj (pilgrimage) which Almighty and Merciful Allah has revealed unto our Holy Prophet (pbuh). And this Sura is very much connected with the background of selection of the site of the Holy Ka'ba (the Sacred House of Allah) and its construction by Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah (friend of Allah) and his son Hazrat Ismail (A) and subsequently Hazrat Ibrahim's (A) proclamation of pilgrimage and asking people around him to visit the holy Ka'ba. In this context it will be worthwhile to refer to Ayat no. 26 and Ayat no. 27 of Sura Hajj wherein Almighty Allah declares:

Ayat 26, "Behold! We gave the site to Hazrat Ibrahim (A) of the (Sacred) House (saying): Associate not anything (in worship) with Me, and sanctify My house for those who compass it round or stand up or bow or prostrate themselves (therein) in prayer."

Ayat 27: "And proclaim the pilgrimage among men. They will come to thee on foot, and (mounted) on every kind of camel lean on account of journey through deep and distant mountain highways."

In this connection we may recall here the valuable commentary of the noted translator and commentator of the Holy Qur'an Allama



Abdullah Yusuf Ali on Sura Hajj. He comments:

"Purity, Prayers, Honesty and Faith are complied in Pilgrimage; in solemn sacrifice we express our gratitude and reverence to God, and our desire to share good with our poorer brethren, striving and fighting in defence of Truth when attacked, are necessary as tests of self-sacrifice".

Right from his departure from his home town till the time of his coming back to his country the pilgrim has to pass through a number of stages. At the beginning while leaving his country for the holy city of Mecca he has to put on at the first stage a special unsewn loose white dress called "Ehram" after shaving his head. And after his arrival in the city of Mecca he is required to circumambulate seven times the Holy Ka'ba (the Sacred House of Allah) and its construction by Hazrat Ibrahim Khalilullah (friend of Allah) and his son Hazrat Ismail (A) and subsequently Hazrat Ibrahim's (A) proclamation of pilgrimage and asking people around him to visit the holy Ka'ba. In this context it will be worthwhile to refer to Ayat no. 26 and Ayat no. 27 of Sura Hajj wherein Almighty Allah declares:

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Kazi Aulad Hossain is a retired govt. high official.

Alah (peace be upon him) after realising that he would not live in this mundane world longer said among other things while delivering his famous and historic farewell Pilgrimage address in clear and unambiguous terms before a vast concourse of his followers:

"Do not join any partner with Allah Rabbul Alameen;

"Do not steal other person's money and wealth;

"From now on father will not be punished for the offence of the son, nor the son will be punished for the offence of the father;

"Adultery is a heinous crime;

"If a slave is capable and is of better calibre then he can be selected as a leader of the society;

"Give the same food to your slave the food you take yourself, and give him the same dress to put on the dress you put on yourself;

"Remember as you have your full rights over your wives, your wives have similar rights over you".

Finally, we find millions and millions of devout Muslims assemble in the historic and famous open field of Arafah from all over the world including Bangladesh every year on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar month of Zul-Hajj and stand up, bow and prostrate before Almighty Allah, and they offer such prayer after circumambulating the Holy Ka'ba 7 times while in Mecca. And while doing this they place them then go to the historic Arafah, a vast plain encircled by hills on all sides and situated at a distance of 7/8 miles from the holy city of Mecca, on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of the lunar month of Zul-Hajj. There all pilgrims offer their mid-day ("Zohar") and "Asar" (afternoon) prayer together in the vast field of Arafah and beseech Merciful Allah to forgive their sins.

It may be mentioned here that the Plain of Arafah has a special significance for here the Messenger of

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# India's UN prospect

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

**T**HE United Nations is passing through a lean period caught in a subdued role. Its importance and standing as the apex world body is increasingly under question for its ineffectuality in the face of US stubborn independent action in Iraq. The reality of the decline of Russia as a superpower has affected the structural equilibrium of UN. Britain is being ridiculed as America's 'poodle' because of the unquestioning compliance of Blair government. France's independent role is not backed up by its own global sphere of influence to exact difference. Rather it is seen as an errant ally to chastise. China still has a way to go to attain global might. She does not have the worldwide economic and geo-political interests to defend in carving for itself a global role. It is in a way integrated into the American market economy with America as its important economic partner. As things are, America stands tall over the UN body. This is not going to change soon.

The politico-economic map of the world has changed a lot since the United Nations was founded on 15 October 1945. It is a fact that the changes are not reflected in the world body. Although the status quo is being maintained, the UN body, more precisely the Security Council is no longer a fully representative body. Understandably the frustration about the ineffectuality of UN is growing and the need for the expansion of the Security Council is voiced with genuine conviction. The European lobby is asking for the inclusion of Germany; Japan's candidature as the second largest economy of the world is also being heard. India's profile is no less credible having one fifth of the world population with over one billion people, when its economy is considered as one of the prospective economic miracle of the world, and its nuclear capability is growing in strength. India has the credentials and the leverage to pursue its candidature, at least for a non-veto permanent member of the Security Council. Questions may be rightly raised about the prospect, obstacles, and the sensible course of pursuing its candidature to fruition.

Presently, it does not have any openly sympathetic global patron to sanctify its candidature and to endow it with bite. Its traditional ally Russia does no longer have the prime profile of worldwide influence and also has to consider its ties to European Union. Russia will not want to commit its influence for

generally identified with a policy tilting towards Pakistan. Besides, G.W. Bush is believed to have close workable relationship with Pakistan. Furthermore another contender Japan enjoys far greater leverage with the American administration. Japan as the second largest economy of the world has important economic ties and is strategically a committed defence partner of America. It would be more compatible with American interest to have Japan as the new non-veto permanent member of the Security Council if she at all favourably considers the idea of expansion of the Security Council. America will also not want to take the socialist and non-aligned legacy of Pandit Nehru which she at times finds uncomfortably embarrassing to handle. By that standard Japan will be suitably compliant and China will be strategically resourceful for vital tradeoffs.

Considering the configuration of geo-political realities India's candidature does not appear bright for a

vigorous campaign forcing a favourable result in the immediate future. India has to wait. The groundwork has to be undertaken in the home turf to make its candidacy credible. South Asia is a region of 1.5 billion people having two nuclear countries outside the council of five big powers. India's sphere of influence may as well extend to Central Asia and under favourable condition of confidence building may also find support among Arabian Sea countries. Besides, the area in South Asia stretches over a far greater area than Japan and Germany can hope to claim as home turf with common historical and cultural ties.

Japan is still regarded as an insular society. Its immediate neighbours China and Korea have strong historical aversion of Japan as a brutal invading and occupying power. China has bitter memories of 'Rape of Nanking' during the late thirties of the last century. Korea has to assuage the fears of the other countries of domination. In fact other than Pakistan, India enjoys leverage with all other countries of South Asia. Simply it is a matter of historical and cultural ties.

The lone arbiter here is America. A Democratic incumbent would have been historically attentive of India's candidature. On the other hand a Republican incumbent is

Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and her possible political heirs, her children Priyanka and Rahul. As for Pakistan, it is equally an important breakthrough that its people have shed the mental makeup fed on hatred of India. It was not orchestrated neither it is the bait Musharraf has offered. The goodwill will be on display from Karachi to Quetta, from Lahore to Peshawar. No amount of public relations gimmick convinced the dour and straight thinking Beluchis to cheer for Indian hockey team and the Pathans to applaud the Indian cricket teams, cheerfully chanting for Balaji.

The time is ripe for making South Asia a region of peace and cooperation at all times. India alone is larger than the combined area of the rest of the members of South Asia including Afghanistan. Besides at the international level India has more to gain from this closer and trusting interaction than the other countries. She has to grow to deserve this stature. India's largeness and past are indeed parts of her heritage but the perception of her higher standing should not constrict her bilateral ties with her smaller neighbours. India's UN prospects depend on how well they cultivate this realisation to benefit their profile and candidature.

Turning South Asia into a peaceful region of cooperation, goodwill and justice will endow India to lay a genuine claim for a non-veto permanent membership of UN Security Council. Given an enduring friendly climate of trust her neighbours may even lend support to her candidature. It is principally India's mission and she has to grow to deserve this stature. India's largeness and past are indeed parts of her heritage but the perception of her higher standing should not constrict her bilateral ties with her smaller neighbours. India's UN prospects depend on how well they cultivate this realisation to benefit their profile and candidature.

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## বেসিক ব্যাংক লিমিটেড

বর্ষেল শাখা, ২৩০, নর্থ সাউথ রোড, ঢাকা ১১০০।