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Child labour

According to census data, children constitute nearly 12% of the total labour force. This figure is quite high compared to the figures for the world (3.8%). Child labour becomes an important developmental issue because poor families have to be compensated for the loss of income. Many of the occupations of working children have some risks of physical injury or other health hazards. Usually, child labour is a sordid reality in Bangladesh. Their working conditions are poor, their wages are less than nominal, and their treatment is cruel. Even many of the workers are not paid at all and they work under conditions of bonded labour. Again children become the frequent victims of domestic and institutional violence. Girls are more vulnerable than boys. Many of them are sexually abused.

Compulsory universal primary education could be one of the effective instruments for the eradication of child labour. At present, nearly 40% of school-aged children are never enrolled in school. The problems of primary education revolve around issues of access, equity and quality. One of the major obstacles towards education of slum children is their insecure living conditions. Although some NGOs have already started the "non-formal education programme" for the terminated child workers, these schools represent no more than 1% of all schools (Ibid, 1990).

In fact, poverty is the principal reason for both child labour and poor school performance. About 30 million children in Bangladesh are living in absolute poverty. So, the government and NGOs should intensify the poverty alleviation programmes for the most needy ones.

Roksana Jahan
Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh



PHOTO: AFP

What's going on?

1971. The year of our liberation war. Attacked by Pakistanis! Torture! Rape! Murder! Blood & blood! Lives & lives! We lost a lot! But one thing remains. And that is unity—the power. Fighting nine months at last on 16 December 1971 we won. A newborn country BANGLADESH emerged on the map of the world. What is happening now? Why are we being rebuked? We have failed. We should try to overcome the problems. But we don't. Why? Have we lost our unity?
Sadat Shahriar
EEE, RUET
Rajshahi

Student-based politics

Many conscious citizens are not happy the way students are used in our politics. Such feedbacks are getting more frequent in the press. The political parties have few options to find voluntary workers to do politicking. The campus atmosphere has been vitiated for long; and the political leaders are not talking about it.

There are several reasons for this short supply of political activists: a typical scenario in the LDCs:

- the majority live in the rural areas;
- the majority are illiterate or barely able to read and write;
- there is no economic security or freedom to devote time to political activities;
- the middle class is marginalised (talking about honest living).
- This class normally acts as the bridge in the vertical and horizontal planes. The rich class are islands, and their percentage is microscopic; but they control the majority of operations in the society. The society is heterogeneous, not homogeneous. Where is the base of politics? We see changing structures and super structures. Who are willing to suffer? The average size of the family is large, noting that the density of population in Bangladesh is one of the highest in the world.
- corruption and terrorism have entered politics, discouraging many to take active part. Bad politics has no respect for institutions. The investment return from politics is highly polarized, controversial, and transient. Those who take the risk cannot get out of this vicious circle.
- now religion has entered (global scenario). There is clash between the head (politics) and the heart (religion). It is a volatile situation. The fall-out will take a long, long time. Our political leadership cannot adapt to changing local and global situations, because the objectives are not in public interest. There is hypocrisy in what is revealed, and what is hidden.
- Leadership is poor, and subjective; and it does not get the

If women want a change...



PHOTO: AFP

justice was done on every issue and to everybody. He was very eager to see that cooperative initiatives were encouraged and all steps were taken so that rural people were benefited. The late Justice was a life long bachelor having no urge for wealth, name or fame. He was a real saint, a solitary religious ascetic all along his life. We pray to God for the salvation of his soul.

Dhiraj Kumar Nath
Retired Secretary
Rural Development and Cooperatives Division

Mockery of law

Recently the BNP led coalition government passed an act to ban smoking in public places. The bold initiative of the government deserves praise. But sadly enough, the law is being shrugged off. The government passed the law without a proper feasibility study. The government does not have the mechanism to implement the law. The government banned the use of polythene bags in our country by enacting a law in 2001. People responded spontaneously. But the act to ban the use of tobacco in our country has not been successful. The law exists only on paper. Needless to say, smoking is very harmful for health. And many people are victims of passive smoking. So to ensure sound health this law is very much timely. The Ministry of Health and Family Affairs took the initiative to pass the law but it did not take adequate steps to enforce it.

I hope the callous smokers will be scrupulous enough to obey the law. The government should take necessary steps to enforce the law without any delay.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen
Dept of English, DU

Communal thinking

It is shocking that the primary students of Bluebird High School in Sylhet are divided into two categories—Hindu and Muslim. Just imagine they divided the students on the basis of religion! It is a very sensitive matter, because from the primary level they are thinking in terms of religious community. After returning home they ask— are Muslims good? They eat beef. "I have a Muslim friend— is it right? I never play with them, should I go to a Muslim friend's home?" -All these are in their minds. They are mentally divided from the beginning and after passing from school they cannot grow up as liberal citizens.

They could make sections by odd or even roll numbers or any other scale, but why religion?

Please look into the matter and publish a report on it.

Himadri Shekor Talukder
One e-mail

Why this delay?

The process of result publication in some departments of JU is intolerably long. The English Dept. most probably tops the list, which, in the recent past, has replaced the Pharmacy Dept. If sincerity and rationality work, 60 days, I think, are enough to go through 48 answer scripts. Recently, the Pharmacy Dept. has improved its performance.

In our dept. the students staged a massive protest against this go-slow process. Then our honourable chairman gave assurance of eliminating this totally unexpected problem. But things have not improved so far.

The JU English Dept has a galaxy of very good teachers.

Building collapse



PHOTO: AFP

We have seen the photograph of Afsana in the newspapers. She was crying over the dead body of her husband. Her husband was the victim of the collapsed building. There are lots of such Afsanas lamenting the deaths of their near and dear ones.

We cannot believe that a nine storey building was constructed without Rajuk's approval. We cannot believe that this private building was built without the advice and supervision of architects and engineers. If it is true then we have to find out those architects and engineers who approved and supervised the construction of this building. They must not go unpunished. We think that there are many such buildings in the city. In fact the safety needs of the workers cannot be overlooked in a civilised setting.

Our country is situated in the earthquake-prone zone. So, there is a possibility of such disasters taking place any time. The government should have the plan and preparedness to face such situations.

Zahir U. Hyder
Dhaka

It's very common nowadays that every

year there will be one or more tragedies in the garment industry, whether it's fire or stampede or building collapse. Why is it happening? The answer is very simple "negligence". The hard working poor people, who are bringing millions of dollars for the country, die under rubbles because there are not enough equipment to bring them out! Malls are mushrooming in our city but we helplessly observed hundreds of lives perishing inside the rubbles! We see big processions are organised for political reasons, but no one stands for these poor people. No one comes out on the street demanding and pressuring the government to bring the culprits responsible for this accident to justice. I believe not only the factory owner, the whole country did not value the lives of these poor people.

Now the question is what can be done to avoid any such future incident? To my understanding, some bold steps should be taken immediately:

1. The culprits behind the recent tragedy should be brought to justice.
2. Industry owners should be forced to follow the safety and building design guidelines. The Ministry of Industries should form a body to monitor and

enforce proper implementation of safety guidelines in the existing and future industries.

3. Apply a limit to the number of floors in an industrial building.
4. Last but not the least, our engineers, architects, industrial workers and general people should start a campaign to put pressure on the government to ensure safety and security of workers.

Nazmun, Canada

We are extremely shocked to hear the sad news of the deaths of poor workers at the Spectrum Garments at Savar. It has become clear from different news reports that the faulty and unauthorised construction of the so nine storey building was the cause and only cause of the crumbling down of the building. The whole construction of the damaged and collapsed building is reported have been carried out in a swampy area in which proper piling was not done, nor was any approval taken from Rajuk.

The government should take immediate steps to help the families of the victims who are left with no means to survive.

Peerzada S.R. Hussain
Hiala Shaheb Bari, Habiganj

However, the undue delay in publication of results is a matter of great concern to the students.

Minhazur Rahman
Jahangirnagar University

Railway collapsing?

Everybody knows that the Railway is the safest and most comfortable and convenient among all the mass-transit systems in the rest of the world (including the neighbouring country). It is only in Bangladesh that we have to witness the crumbling of such a mode of transportation so much that the DS has featured this issue in its front-pages on two consecutive days!

It simply seems to be a telltale sign of this nation gradually turning into a group of uncivilised barbarians— soon to dwell in caves! And this is only due to rampant corruption, theft and pilferage.

CNR
Chittagong

Not that violent!

I have always heard that news reporters have a tendency of exaggerating news but never actually believed it, rather hadn't find any proof to draw myself into such conclusion until a recent incident. The incident was quite an important one to have found a place on the front page.

It was on the 18th last that an unexpected incident occurred on the campus of Jahangir Nagar University. That was my first day at the university. We were having our orientation class when we heard the chaos. Some of our parents including my father were among the audience. I came to know from him that it was barely a fight between two groups of students on a silly matter. They were carrying no dangerous weapons as stated in most newspapers, other than a few hockey sticks and a toy gun. Some of them did injure themselves but were released after first-aid.

You must all be trying to grasp the point of my bragging. The point is that the reports of the next day highlighted the incident to be of extremely violent nature which blurred the image of the university.

So can I take the chance to sincerely request all people related to media to be more cautious, so that we can keep our faith on them intact as ever.

Nusrat Rashida
Department of Business Administration

Jahangir Nagar University

Government's failure

The truly pathetic thing about anti-Ahmadiyya attacks isn't so much that there are bigoted groups out there to oppress a minority community. The real tragedy lies in the fact that our government allows and supports them in the action. And not just tacitly, they actively participate in the mayhem by actually putting up their signboard for them.

When will this government learn that it is these same people,

emboldened by the active and tacit support of the government, that indulge in other forms of terrorism. Does this not "tarnish" the reputation of the country, something that they're so quick to accuse journalists of?

And for the mullahs and their supporters who are quick to call someone Muslim or non-Muslim, who gave them the right to do so? They are usurping the right that Allah has retained for Himself. Do they think they're gods? If not, they should stop making declarations that only God has the right to make.

But in the final analysis, it is a failure of our government to protect the lives and property of its tax paying citizens that has made the problem complex. Why do we have a government if anarchy could govern us better? Will the government respond to such queries?

Saifuddin Ahmed
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Israel's real face

Mordechai Vanunu, a 50-year-old former nuclear technician at Israel's Dimona atomic reactor, has fallen under another ban by Israeli government on leaving his country. Vanunu was freed from prison last April following a twelve-year imprisonment for disclosing the nuclear secrets of Israel to British Sunday Times. Now, he attempts to desert his own country to start his life afresh abroad. But Israel has stopped this fearing he may unveil more information about its nuclear capabilities. Israel's

nuclear capabilities are an open secret even if it is tight-lipped on the issue. From Vanunu's interview with the Sunday Times and the photographs of the Dimona reactor, the nuclear experts reached the conclusion that Israel owns as many as 200 nuclear warheads. So, needless to say that Israel has appeared a real threat to ME peace.

Over this concern, before going to halt Iran's rightful nuclear usage for civil ends, America and the EU should come up with stern action against Israel's possession of nuclear weapons.

NUCLEAR HOSTAGE
Kidnapped!
Silenced!
Incarcerated!

11 years
in solitary confinement
by Israel!

Free
Vanunu

Mosleh Uddin Shamim
Lecturer in History
Chittagong University

