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Women's Day

International Women's Day was observed throughout the globe recently. Bangladesh was not any exception; there were rallies, seminars and different programmes held by different organisations and people of repute in order to spread the message of the day.

Disparity in jobs of all kinds, domestic violence, intimidations, threats and an overall mindset opposed to the women emancipation are, to a great extent, integral part of a patriarchal and poor society like Bangladesh -- women are a more-than-easy victim to the prevalent situation. However, having been on the path of a liberal and developing country, women in Bangladesh have gone quite further: women are getting educated, doing jobs that range from high profile business entrepreneurship to the garment factory work. Women in general are working high and low despite the unwarranted discrimination, harassment and other constraints that they've to face at every step outside

and even inside the home.

Given the prevalent circumstances of work, the bottom line for the complete emancipation of women and guarantee to the equality of rights is that women have to raise themselves to the position of making important decisions at home and society by equipping themselves with education and earning money. Earning money and taking the leading ladder at home and society is the ultimate way out for the women in general. They have to rise up to their needs by dint of efficiency and a competitive approach towards life. They can not afford to accept meek and mild submission to the masculine magic; they have to win/obtain/snatch away their rights. Begum Rokeya's "Dream" yet holds some substance.

The men, however, should remain ready to pave the way for our women upholding the words of wisdom: "Men and women have equal contribution to the progress of civilization."

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

Too many problems

The Bangladeshi nation is plagued by so many maladies! Unplanned and over POPULATION, poor health, very low quality education, one of the lowest per capita incomes, extremely poor infrastructure, miserably poor human development index, mismanagement of national and natural resources, lack of responsibility and planning, dirt and filth all around, lack of proper policies and its execution, and the all-crowning corruption! These are but only a few.

The complaints and negatives are almost insurmountable!

But inactive parliament, continuous boycotting, and equally irresponsible political parties fuel the decay of the nation!

It is an Emergency! We must make and execute some sound national policies to

gradually reduce the damage that we are suffering from.

Education is the Best Recipe.

The present govt. with a huge mandate must sanction more funds for education up to the secondary level. The nation looks upon the govt. with very high expectations! This improvement in training and facilitation in the education sector will help the nation in every way in due course--mid and long term.

Lack of job and basic necessities, lack of education make people mindless, thoughtless, and so irrational! They are then hardened and can be desperate and weak-willed. They become vulnerable.

We can easily find the roots to all social ills, poverty, mismanagement and corruption and so on. It is nothing but lack of sound policies and implementation and lack of education. The epitome of all this is lack of

sound, effective and enlightened leadership! If the head means business, all others will follow suit. Sometimes democracy must be tailor-made to sincerely suit the national interests.

But what do we see now? Nepotism and its ugliness in the fiercest form.

Vicious student politics is the single, worst ever thing that could happen to our society and nation. But the PM and the DU VC support its continuation, forgetting that the odds are far too damaging than its positive role, if any. This is not so pronounced in the other developing countries. This is another cancer in the nation's body politic.

So many letters, so much of TV talks, but to deaf ears!

Bangladeshis love to talk (adda) away the whole day without any action or result.

Can we see any concrete action in the offing to reduce the ever-increasing damage and the unabated militancy

and sword-wielding by 'student' leaders? Can we get some lessons from the recent past and also from our neighbouring countries how to shed our poverty tagged image and turn the corner towards light and action?

It is high time we did so.

Syed Imtiaz Ali
Banani, Dhaka

Postal service

For posting a letter, I, on March 17 last, went to the post office at Lama Bazar in Asadganj, Chittagong. The time was around 3:15pm. An old lady there asked me, "Why have you come at this time?" I said, "why?"

"Because we work till 2:00pm, but we keep the office open till 4:00pm, the government did not allot any extra allowance for our 'tiffin'. So what is the use of working for a long time?" The lady expressed her indignation.

I would like to draw the attention of the authorities concerned to the matter.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
Jamea Rahmania Fadil
Madrasa
Chaitenyarhat, Chittagong

Country in trouble

Perhaps, no one can disagree with me at this point that Bangladesh is passing through a critical phase after the restoration of democracy. Yes, if we look at the mishaps like, BDR HQ mutiny, helicopter crash, blaze at Bashundhara, clashes at Rajshahi University, we will be able to figure it out.

Here, I would like to pinpoint one thing which is very important in the present context. We could not yet find out the real causes and conspirators.

We must remain united to overcome the crisis.

Aiman Bin Shaofiqul Hamid
Dept. of English
International Islamic
University Chittagong

Where is the building?

For years, I have been looking for a particular building that must be in existence now for over 62 years. No doubt it is a huge structure by now because there must have been numerous additions to it, to increase capacity and to take the ever-increasing load over the years. It is certainly centrally air-conditioned because the contents stored there require to be kept safely in cold storage.

Being a government building, maintenance must be minimal and undoubtedly the place will be overrun with insects, rats, cockroaches and other vermin because there is plenty for them to feast on.

The question is: Where is it? Is it deep in the Sunderbans Forests? Somewhere in the Madhu Reserve in Bandarban? Or perhaps on or under one of the numerous chars somewhere in the Bay? That it exists is beyond any doubt. Why?

Because over these 62 years there have been thousands and thousands of incidents, serious and not so serious, and all of them, without fail, have been subjected to enquiries, probes, investigations, examinations, scrutiny, studies, surveys, inspections and searches.

Thousands of dedicated bureaucrats have worked tens of thousands of hours writing the reports, spending millions in public money, but has anyone from the public fraternity ever seen a single report at any time? So, simple logic and common sense tells me that they must all be stored in a secure building far away from prying eyes and I would like to know where.

Because now some gnome will be making additions to the "B" shelf in the building, for the latest reports on the "B" happenings to be sent there in due course.

Sikander Ahmed
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Why saints' names?

Many private schools are using the names of the saints for business purpose. These schools are led by lay people, not missionaries.

A guardian told me that the education standards are not good in those schools. Is it fair to use the names of saints while failing to deliver standard education?

Fabian Corraya
Luxmibazar, Dhaka

Student politics

Recently, campus violence increased considerably in most of the public universities especially in JU and RU.

A few days ago, the JU campus turned into a veritable battleground as different groups of the BCL clashed with each other. The same thing happened on the RU campus.

Now it's high time for the government to frame a policy for smoothly running the public universities. And the ruling party must answer for the activities of its students' wing.

What is going on?
Siddiqur Rahman Apu
Khulna University

No education, no respect?

Reading yet another article on the importance of women's education for their 'emancipation', I am suddenly questioning this oft-repeated assumption.

Now, don't get me wrong! I am passionate about education for all and would not have spent nearly 10 years in Bangladeshi classrooms if I had not been putting my life where my mouth was but why do we find it necessary to give approval (apparently) to the prejudice that women have to be educated before they can be respected? I do not note any mention in statements of human rights that they are limited to 'the educated'! Surely we should be upholding the ideal that, whether someone is educated or not, they still have the right to be treated with respect. Is that asking too much? Surely, if there is no respect at a social level then however much you might develop women's education, the increase in respect will only be marginal and grudging. Why continue to give to anyone the excuse to treat certain women badly 'because they are uneducated'! Even in some educational establishments, one hears the complaint, "Oh, but the parents are uneducated!" At which I growl, "My father left school at 16 and my mother at 14 but they were delighted I had 6 years at Oxford University!"

Like all social reforms, the one-step solution is not to demand money for projects to educate 'the poor' - as though they are the problem. Social training has to cast a wider net than that. In the last 2 days I have visited an NGO in the north of Bangladesh where, once again, I have seen evidence that it is often the less educated who are humble enough to be teachable! An education based solely on passing the right exams (by hook or by crook) is resulting, all over the world, in a graduate class, some of whom are so arrogant that they are unemployable!

Time after time, I have been in the middle of a nice conversation with an 'educated' person and a woman servant has entered the room and the person who is talking to me turns to address her and uses a tone of voice I would not use to a dog! Is it not the more 'educated' classes that have to set the example? Similarly, dowry could surely be stopped in its tracks if the upper classes abjured it loudly and clearly...

Excuse me, sir, but who, exactly, needs to be 'educated'?

However, there is a problem to educating more women. I fear that there would be some men and, regrettably some women also - who might feel seriously deprived if there were no 'uneducated women' for them to shout at...

Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)
Gulshan 1, Dhaka

Bashundhara City

According to the Bangladesh National Building Code, every high-rise building must have a control room at its basement near the main entrance to the building.

Fire service had advised Bashundhara City complex authorities to set up the building's control room at the basement for smooth conduct of fire fighting. But the Bashundhara authorities did not go by the suggestion.

Now the question is how did the authorities of the Bashundhara City take clearance from the fire service?

Acitizen
On e-mail

Global meltdown

The world's financial system is very complicated and is interlinked with a large number of economic and non-economic variables, which tend to affect the global economy from time to time. The financial meltdown of 2008 was the worst of its kind since the Great Depression in the 1930's. It became prominently visible in the last quarter of the year 2008. The US sub-prime mortgage market collapse and the downturn of the housing boom in other industrially developed economies have had a ripple effect around the world. The gravity of the problems has been so severe that some of the world's biggest financial institutions have collapsed and subsequently gone for restructuring. The governments of the rich countries have come out with extensive bail-out policies and rescue packages, pouring billions of dollars into the banking system. Now, the question is how much isolated we are, from this meltdown. Our policymakers might already have identified the various aspects of this crisis along with its likely impact on us. But the most important question is - how shall we address those forces which will have negative impact on our economy? First of all, we should focus on those sectors, which are relatively more sensitive to the global economic activities. Remittance is one of them along with export, import and foreign aid. Globally, jobs have been cut significantly by the industrialized nations. As a result, our manpower export is declining which has been magnified due to unscrupulous middlemen problem. Foreign aid may also be shrunken, as the donor countries are busy with their own economy and stimuli packages whereas it is easier to cut foreign aid budget since we are not their voters. From the media, we are hearing the news of employment decline and retrenchment of migrant workers across the globe. This will continue until the crisis takes a new

look. FBCCI has already sought a Tk 6,000 crore bailout package to deal with the situation. The impact of global meltdown is perhaps much greater than the one, perceived earlier. It is like a shockwave, which is yet to be realized in most of the developing countries around the world.

The new budget is going to be announced very soon. So, we expect our policy makers will take necessary steps to address these issues in line with our economy.

Md. Anisuzzaman Sarker
MBA, Finance
University of Chittagong

The current recession, that started first in the mighty America, has been spreading throughout the globe. The world had faced such tough situation in the thirties of last century. Many industries and business houses had to be closed at that time and the same wave is visible everywhere in the world today.

Bangladesh cannot escape the clutches of recession. Already the expatriates have started to return home as their employers are not in a position to provide their salaries. Our garment industry is facing a serious threat. We cannot wish to welcome larger numbers of tourists as they are running short of excess dollars for travelling.

Since it is the initial stage, we cannot forecast the time when the world will be flourishing again. But by that time a sizable portion of world population will have become poorer.

Last century's recession called 'Great Depression' also originated in the USA but the US government consulting famous economists took up an economic programme called the "New Deal" and succeeded at last. We must chalk out short, medium and long term economic plans for overcoming the odd situation.

Harun-or-Rashid
Sobhanbag, Dhaka



Squabbles in parliament

It is quite disheartening to see our parliamentarians going back to their old habit of squabbling over matters that don't add any value to what our country needs to accomplish at one of the most critical periods of its existence. The gruesome tragedies that we witnessed less than a month ago have shaken most of us at the core of our being and have definitely made us think over and over again about the evils that could be summoned by hatred for others. I held out hope that, of all the people, our politicians will understand the gravity of it all and act in a civil manner towards each other and try to put an end to the violence that is wrought by differences in ideology. I don't think I should be ashamed if I cannot figure out who is gaining by these endless fights over the declaration of independence and overt insults directed at leaders who have been dead for nearly 30 years. Our politicians should understand that in a feudalistic society such as ours, where pleasing the political masters takes precedence over decency, they are running a very high level of risk of creating the environment that could lead to more tragedies; the constant fighting need to stop now because hostilities breed more hostility, lest we want to risk resembling Pakistan.

Anwar Babar
Dallas, Texas

Campus politics

Politics in public run universities and affiliated colleges is a sad reflection on the achievement of these educational institutions. No matter what the basis of student politics is ethnic, political, ideological or religious, regional or even academic the fact remains that it undermines academic pursuits and discipline in educational institutions.

Student politics poses a threat to the academic discipline in a number of ways and in case it succeeds, it makes the continuation of academic activity almost impossible because of disturbances and strikes on campuses. Student politics on campuses grew out of the perversion of the college/university unions, actually designed to support extra-curricular activities on campuses such as sports, art, culture and debates. Student unions exist in advanced countries but with the purpose to highlight the above things as well as to facilitate solving students' problems on campus in collaboration with the administration.

The provision of moral and financial support to student leaders enhances the legitimacy of their political role on campuses. Without the patronage of political parties, students' active participation in campus politics would not have been possible. The majority of students are not involved in student politics and are more concerned with academic advancement. The student leaders, a considerable number of whom have adopted student politics as a

vocation, look for opportunities to enhance the role of the parties they belong to, even if that means polluting the academic atmosphere.

In many of the government run universities in Bangladesh and in numerous colleges (non-professional, professional/technical) where student politics is in vogue some student groups dominate the show.

The irony is that student bodies today are more political and ideological than academic.

The issue deserves a closer look.

Avik Sengupta
Department of Biochemistry
McGill University
Montreal, Canada

Smoking

Along with the pleasures of smoking there are real risks of serious diseases such as lung cancer, respiratory and heart diseases. And for many people, smoking is difficult to quit.

Most people dislike smoky places. That's why we support restriction on smoking in indoor public places including offices, restaurants and bars. A few countries have adopted strong measures, banning all indoor smoking in work and public places. The tobacco companies should fully support laws and regulations prohibiting the sale of tobacco products to anyone under a certain age.

Naeem-ul-Kabir Mafi
Department of Business
Administration
Shahjalal University of
Science and Technology
Sylhet

Child labour



We organise seminars, symposiums and meetings for protecting children from labour but I am not sure of our success in this regard. In my locality, there are many factory where I see most of the workers are children. Besides, there are also many CNG and bike garages where preteen boys are doing very risky jobs. A few days ago, I witnessed a very tragic scene that hurt me a lot. I saw a young child who had lifted scrap iron into a rickshaw van. He filled the van more than its weight and the scrap irons seemed to wait for a soft touch to make a mess. As soon as he pulled the van a little, all the iron which looked like a mound, fell down

his slender body and the result was that he died on the spot. The irons fell down on his body in such a way that no one could do anything. I was so much shocked.

As far as I know, there are many NGOs working on this issue but I don't know whether their activities are well-coordinated. I only see that in my locality, there is a school which doesn't work effectively.

I hope the present government will lay emphasis on establishing the rights of children.

Anis
Pahartali, Chittagong