

## Rising threat of pornography

*Youth and children are particularly vulnerable*

**I**N the absence of appropriate laws to check it, pornography has grown into a vicious social menace and a grave threat to the safety and healthy growth of the youth and the children.

The demoralising impact of unchecked growth of the porno business with the help of CDs, porno websites and mobile phones on the juveniles has already cost the lives of a number of young people. This new danger to society is equally leaving its devastating impact on the community in the cities and rural areas alike. Video show business in particular has become the main carrier of the pornography in the rural areas.

Young people often unwittingly fall victim to traps set by criminals making a brisk business exploiting the technology available in the market. Unsuspecting women, young or adult, are sometimes preyed on in this manner even by their male friends or acquaintances and the videos thus taken find their place in the porno market or on the websites.

Different studies that interviewed dealers in porno materials and cyber café owners have found that computer repair shops, some porno websites on the Internet as well as videos recorded with the help of mobile phones are their sources of porno materials.

But how are we to fight this new menace out to swallow up society, especially the youth? The laws in existence are not specific to the problem at hand. The relevant section of the Penal Code, for instance, makes no mention of children. 'The Children Act 1974', too, is mum about the issue. The Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Act 2006, on the other hand, has no provision to deal with offence committed by or against juveniles.

In the circumstances, the government needs to equip itself with appropriate laws and crime busting units to deal with this growing menace. The law-enforcement units may track down the sources of the crime through mounting closer watch on the cyber cafés, the electronic market, the local Internet service providers, and the video show shops. The threat that the mobile sets with built-in cameras pose should be dealt with through heightening watch on the children using those by teachers in the school and parents in the family.

Apart from policing, efforts should also be there to launch public awareness campaign against this mortal danger to society. The government's publicity wings, the media, various advocacy groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should join hands in this awareness campaign.

However, the focus should be on plugging the routes through which pictures, films and videos on child porn infiltrate the websites and their distribution channels in the market. And the technology is already there to take care of this matter. A note of caution would not be out of place here. It is that while conducting the drive, utmost care is taken so that it does not turn into an excuse to slap any ban on the use of Internet, as it is the largest window of our access to instant information and knowledge from the world at large.

## Diarrhoeal concern

*Need for precautions*

**T**HERE has been an outbreak of diarrhoea marking a deviation of sorts from the known pattern of incidence. As many as 484 patients were hospitalised in the city on last Wednesday alone. Usually, this water-borne disease is mostly reported during sultry summer followed by monsoons. Its severe form is associated with receding flood waters. But this time, as late as in October-November we see it occurring in parts of Dhaka city and Pabna district.

Actually, a total of 1580 persons suffered from the disease in October and 1467 in September this year. The figures for last year in the same months were 618 and 668 persons respectively.

Although the incidence of the disease is localised; yet, since it is on the rise, this should be treated as an early warning for the health authorities to raise their level of preparedness. What causes an extra bit of concern is that certain areas of Badda near Basundhara residential area seems to have been afflicted. To add to the worry, laboratory investigations of samples collected by ICDDR,B found 60 percent of the patients suffering from cholera.

Experts have a new explanation. In addition to poor sanitation, drainage, garbage disposal and overall contamination of drinking water, there is now the change in climatic pattern which has exacerbated the negative impacts of the known factors. By all accounts, the present outbreak is a glaring instance of heightening aggravation of water contamination and food adulteration. Besides, dense concentration of people within a limited radius has wreaked havoc on whatever little amenities the city has leading to a sharp deterioration in the living conditions of city dwellers.

The special measures to be taken to contain the outbreak should include distribution of water purification tablets and WASA's supply of potable water through lorries to the affected areas. People's awareness level needs to be raised to comply with simple rules of health and hygiene and to ensure use of ORS and boiled water.

On the treatment side, it's time that the rush to the ICDDR,B which has played a remarkable role in managing diarrhoea and cholera patients be shared by other health complexes, in the private and public sectors.

## Export is a critical component for our growth

Diversification of our export potential is crucial. We have to move away from being virtually dependent on readymade garments alone. The European Union funded Global Enterprises Network of Iron and Metal Industries (GENI) project, in all likelihood, will help us in achieving this scenario. The other sector that needs to be given special attention is the agriculture sector.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**O**UR Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and the Ministry of Commerce, both organs of government, have set ambitious targets for fiscal 2009-10 (FY10). They feel that despite clouds on the horizon, our economy can generate around US dollar 17.5 billion of exports during the current fiscal. In comparative terms this means almost 13 percent growth over that of the previous year (which stood at US dollar 15.565 billion).

Various stakeholders -- leaders of trade bodies, economists, entrepreneurs and industrialists -- involved with export and relevant government officials were consulted before setting the target. The EPB, it is understood, while fixing the target, also took into consideration the existing bottlenecks and the prevailing situation in other regional countries like Vietnam, Cambodia and India -- particularly with regard to apparel export (our main thrust sector).

EPB's decision in setting the target appears to have been based on cautious optimism. They have relied on the views of analysts that despite the worst recession in living memory, the Bangladesh economy has managed to avert a major economic slowdown and has relatively emerged unhurt compared to its competing Asian peers. In this context, it has been noted that despite dampening demand exacerbated by slower growth, export statistics last fiscal did not show signs of retreat into negative territory. This has been attributed to its natural resilience.

It is also this awareness that has driven the US-based Citigroup to state in its latest projection that Bangladesh's export is expected to grow at a rate of 9.0 percent in the current fiscal (less than EPB estimates but still very healthy). There has been a slight re-adjustment in this figure. Earlier, in June, the same body has projected a 10 percent growth. They have explained this downturn through the suggestion that international economic demand recovery will be slower than expected. This group has also factored in import growth at 5.5 percent and believes that the steady growth of inward remittance from our expatriate migrant workers will result in a current account surplus and economic growth at

around 5.7 percent (as opposed to Asian Development Bank's forecast of 5.2 percent). They believe that remittances will increase despite slight loss in employment and that this will partially be due to Taka assuming a depreciating trend.

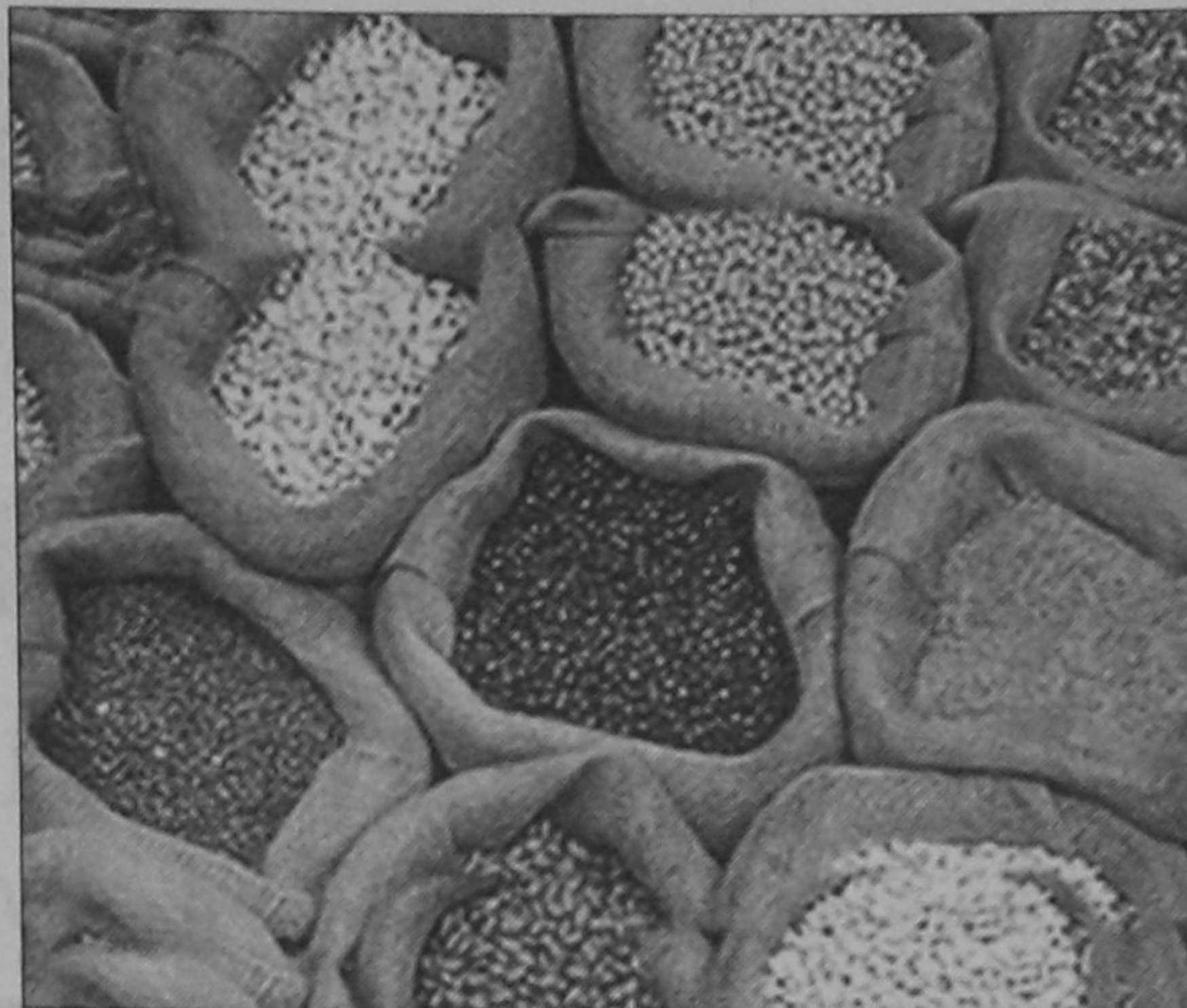
It is clear that within the mixed signals are rays of hope. It is this which persuades me to state that time is opportune to plan realistic steps for initiatives to be eventually undertaken over the next critical six months.

From this point of view, it is significant that the government has formed a task force to counter recession in the country's textile sector. It has been a correct step. This body will assess the impact of the global meltdown and recommend remedial measures by this October. It will also consider the effects on this important sector being brought about because of uncertainty in the steady supply of gas and power. The task force hopefully will also seriously examine the causes for the growing uncertainty and insecurity within the labour force within the garment sector.

It is anticipated that if the government agencies, economists and industrialists work together, there is likelihood of increasing investor confidence within this important sector. Such investment will be required if we are to move up the ladder from basic items to accessories and high end products.

The BGMEA has been critical of the government for not having channelized sufficient financial support towards them. They have pointed out that of the total amount of the government's stimulus package' of Taka 3,424 crore announced on April 19 this year, about Taka 450 crore will be spent on supporting three export sectors -- the jute and jute goods sector, the leather and leather goods sector and frozen foods sector. This will be done by raising the cash incentive for these sectors by another 2.5 percent above existing rates. The BGMEA feels that comparably, they are being neglected. The government will, hopefully, through this newly constituted task force, carefully review the entire scenario so that the meager resources available at its disposal are suitably spent.

It is however very obvious that if Bangladesh is to enhance its export perfor-



Agriculture can be given special attention.

mance, there is need for diversification. This will require planning and also closer public-private sector cooperation. It will be difficult, but it can be done.

In this context one has to welcome the latest initiative by EPB modeled on the principles being followed in certain parts of Japan and China. Three products have been selected within this 'one district one product' (ODOP) scheme.

It has been decided to provide special support to Moulvibazar for production of Agarwood, to Sakthira for production of clay tiles and to Chittagong Hill Tracts for production of rubber. While doing so, care would also be taken to ensure that the products are consistent with global standards. It is being hoped that this will be achieved through the provision of technical consultancy at the grassroots level. Success in such diversification will also create additional employment opportunities within the rural heartland.

Diversification of our export potential is crucial. We have to move away from being virtually dependent on readymade garments alone.

The European Union funded Global Enterprises Network of Iron and Metal Industries (GENI) project, in all likelihood, will help us in achieving this scenario. The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) who have been focusing on this will need to be very professional in their approach. The success of this project can stimulate and increase trade between small and medium enterprises in Bangladesh and

European companies not only in Sweden and Denmark (associated with the iron and metal sector) but also elsewhere. It will also help our nascent shipbuilding industry. I feel that this scheme would be greatly facilitated if we bring China and South Korea into the loop because of their better understanding of market conditions and product possibilities.

The other sector that needs to be given special attention is the agriculture sector. It is true that the government plans to provide 20 percent cash incentive for export of agro products, but this needs to be expanded to include processed agro products (consistent with phyto-sanitary standards). We should in this regard think of hiring consultants from Thailand so that we can replicate their success.

Our export potential is also slowly emerging in products like pharmaceuticals, home textile, electronics, light engineering products and table ware. The export volumes of these products, still relatively small, can be improved upon by streamlining the applicable import regime tariff and tax structure.

To succeed in our export diversification efforts will require improvement of our inadequate infrastructural facilities by attracting investment. This, however, will only be possible, if we reduce the cost of doing business in Bangladesh. That will then enhance our global competitiveness.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador and can be reached at [mzamir@dhaka.net](mailto:mzamir@dhaka.net)

## Wall at Wagha

Sooner or later, America and Europe are going to withdraw from the area. Both India and Pakistan need to chalk out a policy where there is no vacuum like the past when America left all of a sudden and did not even collect the arms which the Taliban used to come to power. A joint India-Pakistan policy on Afghanistan, if reached, will lead to many things.

KULDIP NAYAR

**C**OMPARISONS are odious. Still when Europe celebrated early this week the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, I thought of the border at Wagha, drawn more than 62 years ago. It has no wall. Yet it is difficult to scale it because its brick and mortar is that of distrust and bias. The Berlin Wall was built to separate the two Germans. It was a forced division. In the case of India and Pakistan, the partition came about after a willing compromise. Still the fact remains that the wall stands between the two countries to remind people how they have wasted some six decades in hating each other and in letting the opportunity for development together go by.

Founders of the two countries wanted relations to be friendly and amicable. Mahatma Gandhi told the Indians that he would go and live at Karachi. Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah said that Pakistan and India would be like Canada and America and have the same proximity and easy travel and trade as the later had. Both the founders have been betrayed.

Liberals and intellectuals on either side should assess what they have lost and what is still achievable. We, nicknamed as peace knickers, have hit a plateau and we find it difficult to move further. We go over the same exercise when we meet at seminars or colloquiums. We express lofty thoughts and we feel good in ventilating them. Yet we have made little progress because those who enjoy power find it beneficial if the two countries do not go ahead politically, economically or socially. One leading Pakistani businessman, recently in India, said that Pakistan had been stumped by the fauji (military) and India by netas (leaders).

The common man, groaning under the burden of rising price and lessening income, has no reprieve from the anti-propaganda doled out day in and day out. He is fed up with the same slogans and shibboleths raised for 60 years to instill in

the public mind that the enemy lived across the border and should not be trusted. The media has been a willing partner to spread hatred and venom. I am more concerned about the youth which in India is getting indifferent to Pakistan.

When Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said at Srinagar a few days ago that India was willing to have talks with Pakistan and laid down no conditions, Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Reza Gillani should have picked up the telephone to request him to fix the date for talks. Instead, Pakistan Home Minister Rehman Malik said that India was behind the Taliban. The evidence produced was a few India-marked arms, which are available anywhere, and "a stack of currency notes" sent to Baluchistan. How does New Delhi gain by backing the Taliban who have said that India was their next target?

On the other hand, Pakistan has little to show on the action it has taken on the perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai attack even after one year. The case has been adjourned on one reason or another. True, the court cannot be harried. But does it explain all the delay? The latest is the plot unearthed by FBI. National Defence College at Delhi was sought to be attacked by Pakistan expatriates David Coleman Headley and Tashawar Hussain Rana. Manmohan Singh was justified in complaining that Pakistan never informed India about the plot. The disclosure by former president General Pervez Mushraff that ISI had a hand in every act of violence is, indeed, disconcerting.

True, Pakistan is in the midst of a do-or-die struggle. It needs all the help and understanding. Yet it has not yet realized that it can face the situation more firmly and confidently by making up with India. And this is not possible until Islamabad stops behaving as if India is its enemy. Fortunes of the two are so inter-linked with each other, as Manmohan Singh says, again and again, that they have no go from friendship. This means that they have to cover the



Wagha: The wall is in the mind.

journey to the future together. Both have at least 70 per cent of their population extremely poor, hardly affording two square meals. They have a long way to go.

Often it is said that India must solve Kashmir first. New Delhi has said many a time that it wants to have a peaceful settlement. But Kashmir is not the cause but a consequence. There is so much suspicion piled up against each other that even if you were to solve Kashmir, there would be another Kashmir unless the mistrust goes.

It is contended in Pakistan again and again that India does not regard Kashmir as a disputed territory. When New Delhi talks on Kashmir it concedes the point without spelling it out. After all, it does not hold talks on Tamil Nadu, West Bengal or Kerala. India has said many a time that the Kashmir question is yet to be settled. The official-inspired meetings to discuss Kashmir indicate that New Delhi wants a settlement with all the elements sooner than later. However, Pakistan must know that the Indian polity cannot go through another partition and that too on the basis of religion.

The priority of the two countries should be to have an accord on Afghanistan. With Abdullah Abdullah withdrawing from the contest for presidency because of rigged polling, the country's leadership has got ruptured. Even a united Afghanistan is not

strong enough to confront the Taliban. The divided one has no chance.

New Delhi and Islamabad may be able to bring the divided leaders together, including Gulbadin Hikmtayar or who is Pakistan's prodigy. America's stake in Afghanistan is only to the extent of fighting against Al-Qaida and the Taliban. India and Pakistan have a long-term interest in Afghanistan. They should help the country become strong so that it can fight against the forces of terrorism on its own.

Sooner or later, America and Europe are going to withdraw from the area. Both India and Pakistan need to chalk out a policy where there is no vacuum like the past when America left all of a sudden and did not even collect the arms which the Taliban used to come to power. A joint India-Pakistan policy on Afghanistan, if reached, will lead to many things. It will give Pakistan access to the markets beyond Afghanistan and, more importantly, the Indian markets. Confidence between the two will bring about that.

If the two countries or, for that matter, the region picks up rhythm of free trade and travel other problems would become easy to solve. Then I do anticipate that the wall at the Wagha would come down and the border would become soft for people in the region to travel at will.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.