

In solidarity with 16-days campaign

We should not forget that the main perpetrator that helps violence against women to go on and on is our silence. The more the people start talking about it the better is the possibility of redressing it. So let all of us express solidarity with the 16 days campaign against violence against women.

MOHAMMAD MAMUNUR RASHID

THE period November 25 to December 10 has been marked as international fortnight to protest violence against women. The United Nations declared November 25 as International Day to Protest Violence against Women and December 10 as International Human Rights Day. This specific period of time, popularly known as 16 days campaign against violence against women, symbolises the link between violence against women and human rights.

Each year millions of people from all corners of the globe take part in this campaign to spread the message that violence against women is actually a breach of human rights and that everyone has a role to play in order to stop it. In 2009, the campaign has been dedicated to those individuals and groups that are working to defend women's human rights.

They are working to encourage all to come forward to extend support, and also to attract international attention and support to redress violence against women. They are demanding accountability

of the international and national instruments that are responsible for upholding people's rights. This year the theme of the 16-days campaign is "Commit? Act? Demand: We Can End Violence Against Women!"

Violence against women, or gender-based violence, is a human rights and public health crisis around the world. The United Nations Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one of every three women is beaten, raped, or otherwise abused during her lifetime. In some countries, approximately one in four women and girls over age 15 may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner at some points in her life. A 2005 World Health Organization study found that at least one in five women reporting physical abuse had never before told anyone about it.

Among the most common forms of violence against women in Bangladesh are physical and mental torture for dowry, murder, rape, abduction, early marriage, trafficking, forced prostitution, sexual harassment and eve teasing. A survey conducted by UNFPA in Bangladesh and South Asia reveals that one of every two

women is victim of domestic violence. UN World Development Report says that South Asia has the highest domestic violence rate and Bangladesh stands 28th in the world. Around 60 percent women are subject to torture at the hands of their husbands. Women are also subject to marital rape. The husband thinks that, as the wife is married to him, she is bound to obey all his wishes and orders without any question.

In fact, the problem is so deeply embedded in the society that it is almost impossible for the government alone to solve it. Therefore, it is increasingly being recognised that all individuals, groups and institutions are responsible. For that, all traditional attitudes and values, customs and cultures that tend to restrict women should be protested against and removed.

As conscious citizens we all are bound to combat violence against women. There is no way to avoid violence against women by considering it as a personal issue because family, society and state all suffer in the end. Such a belief is now increasingly being shared by people throughout the world.

In the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, all governments took part and jointly adopted the Beijing Platform For Action (PFA). The year 2010 will mark the 15th anniversary of that historic event. However, the progress so far is only a little. We need to demand implementation of all international and national instruments, including the Beijing PFA. Governments must allocate more money and resources to combat violence against women, and ensure punishment of all



United, we can win our rights.

perpetrators.

We need to remember that the cost of violence against women is huge. Those children who grow up in families that experience violence against women are more likely to fall behind children who are brought up in a happy family atmosphere. There are huge health costs implications too, due to the treatment of physically abused women and children. Women and girls experiencing violence are mentally troubled. It is really hard for them to be rehabilitated in the mainstream society or take part in economic activities. So society misses out their valuable contributions that could have been vital for the development.

If we want a violence-free society, then we need to remember that it's not enough to keep ourselves free from oppressing others. Rather, it is necessary to act or protest against any incidents of violence that may happen around us -- individually and collectively. We should not forget that the main perpetrator that helps violence against women to go on and on is our silence. The more the people start talking about it the better is the possibility of redressing it. So let all of us express solidarity with the 16 days campaign against violence against women. Let's make the world a better place for living. It is time to spread the message to all. Don't waste time

-- express solidarity now!

You all can contribute

- You can work as a volunteer with those organisations that provide assistance or shelter for the victims of domestic violence or sexual harassment;
- Encourage the local representatives of your areas to express solidarity with the 16-days campaign against violence against women;
- Motivate local teachers and school management committees to address the issue in the class lectures and through other special initiatives;
- Organise your friends in a group and discuss the areas of violence against women in your locality. Take joint initiatives;
- Write in local newspapers, wall magazines on the issue;
- Arrange funding to assist the women victims of violence and collaborate with others working for the same;
- Develop and publish posters, leaflets, stickers, T-shirts.
- Arrange discussions and sharing sessions in your organisation and take part in similar activities initiated by others;
- Join in debates and discussions on violence against women on Facebook or other web-based social networks and engage your friends and others;
- Wear a white ribbon and encourage others to express solidarity with women human rights defenders around the world.

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Elimination of violence against women

So, considering the reasons of violence against women, the government, civil society organisations, international communities and all of us must work hard to enter into the enlightened world from the present darkness where we and the women are living inhuman lives. I do believe that "we shall overcome one day."

PARVEZ BABUL

THE United Nations declared November 25 the International Day for Elimination of Violence against Women on December 17, 1999 during the 54th session of the General Assembly. The General Assembly instructed "governments, relevant agencies, bodies, funds and programs of the United Nations system, and other international organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to organise on that day activities designed to raise public awareness of the problem of violence against women." The general assembly expressed "concern that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace, as recognised in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which recommended a set of integral measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women, and to the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Reiterating that, according to Article 1 of

the Declaration on the CEDAW, the phrase "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." The General Assembly decided to designate November 25 as International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Alpha Arzu reported in October 22, 2009 in The Daily Star that 36 percent women in Bangladesh say that "wife beating is justified." This shows how unaware the women of our country are about their human rights. The report added that 49 percent married women have experienced some form of physical violence by their husbands, 53 percent have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence while 13 percent have experienced both types of violence.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad President Ayesha Khanam told The Daily Star: "Vigorous campaigns about the rights of women are the best way to stop such violence. It is really unfortunate that male partners or husbands here think that

without torturing their female partners their power is not being exercised." On the other hand, there is no alternative to empowering and making women aware of their rights in the family. "The law enforcement agencies should come forward to

stop such heinous spousal violence," she added.

Another report by Apha Arzu recently published in The Daily Star said that women repression was unabated despite stringent law, and that 1,479 rape cases



Please help me.

were recorded in six months. The report added that repression on women had increased manifold over the last few months. The brutality was inflicted on them mainly for dowry, disputes over wedding and land.

UNDP held a meeting in Caracas, Venezuela, on April 21-22 to address gender-based violence in. It highlighted that violence against women reduced the capacity of the victims/survivors to contribute productively to the family, the economy and public life; drained resources from social services, the justice system, health care agencies and employers and lowered the overall educational attainment, mobility and innovative potential of the victims/survivors, their children and even the perpetrators of such violence.

The cost of violence against women is very large according to all studies made in different countries and with different methodologies. Women's overall empowerment depends on their individual, familial, social and national empowerment, and includes access to food, clothing, shelter, education and treatment/ health care. Millennium Development Goal (MDG) No.3 aims to promote gender equality and empower women by 2015.

The women development policy of Bangladesh 2008 says that Articles 27, 28, 29 and 65 of the Constitution of Bangladesh ensure equal rights for women. The women development policy also mentions that the main aims of the policy are to include women in every sector of mainstream development and to establish their equal rights. The government and the organisations working for the betterment of women should address

gender inequality and inequity, social inequality, economic inequality, and political and legal inequality.

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid, Executive Director of United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), writes in the foreword in the report State of the World Population 2009: "Important are fundamental questions about how climate change will affect women, men, boys, and girls differently around the world, and indeed within nations, and how individual behaviour can undermine or contribute to the global effort to cool our warming world."

In reality, women are treated as second-class citizens and as subordinates to men, making them dependent on men. Men with a negative attitude towards women should immediately change their mindset to welcome girl children and recognise women as human beings, and provide opportunities to them to practice their due rights pursuant to the constitution. In fact, women are deprived in many ways and their valuable contributions are not monitored, evaluated or recognised.

Even in this modern world women face many superstitions, and are even blamed for giving birth to girl children instead of sons! So, considering the reasons of violence against women, the government, civil society organisations, international communities and all of us must work hard to enter into the enlightened world from the present darkness where we and the women are living inhuman lives. I do believe that "we shall overcome one day."

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Dhaka's traffic: Where is the jam?

These mindsets are clogged with decrepit ideas and notions about what is good for the nation. Lacking in ability and intent, they are the root causes of the woes of the citizenry. In these clogged minds, I believe, is where the real traffic jam lies!

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

RECENTLY I was timing a car trip from Gulshan to Dhanmandi. As I reached my destination, I looked at the watch: it took exactly 11 minutes and 28 seconds. Surprised? Well, it was around 11:30 PM and the traffic was light. Not surprisingly, the social hour in some circles begins at unearthly times. Perhaps corporate executives who have much at stake will begin to reschedule their office hours in the not too distant future. Then schools, colleges and shopping malls may follow. Matching time slices with road capacity and traffic jams could become the norm one day.

Today's traffic woes are truly mind-boggling. Pretty soon walking to offices may be quicker than a car ride, the downside being that one could be asphyxiated on the way by the obnoxious fumes from thousands of idling vehicles nonchalantly belching poison into homes and communities. If there's anything positive about traffic jams, the snail's pace could result in fewer deaths from accidents!

But let's face reality: the cost of traffic jams is horrendous. If one lists the exter-

nalities (defined simply as the positive and/or negative effects of a decision -- such as buying a car) the negatives jump out glaringly: pollution, disease from pollution, deteriorating hospital services from increasing numbers of sufferers, productivity losses, cost of time, inconvenience to others (missed meetings, being late to schools, etc.), physical and heat exhaustion, problems of the physically afflicted (e.g., diabetic and ambulance patients), emotional stress (witness the daily verbal assaults of one citizen on another), and so on. The list can easily be amplified ten-fold.

It is abundantly clear that there are too many vehicles on the streets that usurp every inch of road capacity. Space constraint is critical and can be addressed in several ways: i) Widen the roads to increase capacity, ii) Reduce and replace the number of vehicles on the streets or iii) Allocate street usage to certain vehicles types at certain time slices in certain locations. The best solution is to effect changes in all of the above.

The first option will require razing to the ground many boundary walls, if not

dwellings, that have encroached legally permissible space, unless people voluntarily "give up" this space. In congested areas, this may have to be mandated. In addition, an "irresponsibility tax" could be levied on those who have built edifices without making any allowance for parking and expansion of road capacity. Businesses may also have to pay a surcharge to help build multi-storied parking lots in the crunch areas.

These ideas require behavior change -- to contribute -- that is often alien to many. This contention is supported by the poverty all around that could be easier to alleviate if more people met simple basic obligations, e.g., paid taxes, gave to charity, thought of community, shared their bounties, and displayed minimal empathy for the poor. Many, unfortunately, earn a failing grade on all counts!

Non-motorised vehicles (NMVs) are the primary cause of traffic jams. They do not follow traffic rules, clog up most intersections, and slow down faster traffic by occupying valuable road space while contributing to tremendous inefficiencies -- note how much space a rickshaw takes up relatively to a bus, the number of passengers each can transport, and the speed at which they move people from point A to point B. The NMVs must be phased out.

To do so requires a simultaneous program of rehabilitation. For example, the displaced persons must be absorbed into the motorised transportation sector,

employed in road maintenance work, given other alternatives in their home districts where building and construction projects (roads, schools, hospitals, government facilities, etc.) should be planned, given loans to start up business activities, etc. Most importantly, they must be uplifted from their current state of poverty that is perpetuated by confining them to the type of manual labour they provide. The government should participate here by allocating funds to buy out the vehicles and offering loans to their owners to support other gainful activities.

The next offending class is the private car. Their huge numbers relative to available road capacity only make it more imperative that private cars be replaced by mass transportation. But, will the private car owners voluntarily give up their prized possessions? Again, perhaps not!

There are two options here: i) manage the importation of cars and ii) levy higher taxes on private cars. On the first point, it is imperative to severely limit imports by tying the number of imported cars to the number of old and polluting cars that must be retired from the streets according to their year of manufacture. Even better is to retire more old cars than the number of imports allowed. A moratorium on imports may be mandated initially until a certain proportion of old cars are retired and perhaps recycled.

On the second point, taxes should be

raised to a point where it is uneconomical to own a car. This must be dove-tailed with incentives, especially for the private sector, to invest in mass transportation facilities. There is a very real apprehension that corruption will increase amongst those who are affected by higher taxes. Others will complain about the security situation arising from using public transportation. Both issues will need to be addressed simultaneously in the complex network of causes and effects.

The third point involves managing traffic flows through a system of incentives and disincentives by considering streets as resources. Much of Dhaka city should be metered, installing a park and pay system. In addition, timeslices ought to be introduced to determine which vehicles types can ply at what times and at what locations. Going into Central London today involves paying a hefty fee. Similarly, "congestion fees" should be charged of vehicles that are to be discouraged from going into certain areas at certain times or even days of the week.

The idea of odd-even license plates can also be introduced, where cars with odd-numbered license plates can ply on the streets on certain days (or locations) while those with even numbers on other days. This should halve the number of cars on the streets (or in certain locations) while encouraging car-pooling. Give Dhaka residents a three-month notice, implement, and see what happens. I am

confident people will adjust their ways.

A big piece of the traffic conundrum lies in Dhaka-centric development. The way out is to move most development activities to the districts. That means no new schools, factories, shopping malls, housing schemes, etc. should be permitted in already crowded areas of the city. Dhaka is "the" big magnet that draws people from all over the country. It's time to parcel out economic activities to other districts and develop them as economic zones to redistribute the pressures on Dhaka.

Most importantly, it is the mind-sets of those in charge of policies and their implementation that must change. Many good ideas fail because of wrong people being in the wrong positions of authority. They lack knowledge, ability, good judgment, and the inner desire to change things for the better. Dhaka city -- in fact much of the nation -- today reflects the mindsets of these people who run its affairs. These mindsets are clogged with decrepit ideas and notions about what is good for the nation. Lacking in ability and intent, they are the root causes of the woes of the citizenry. In these clogged minds, I believe, is where the real traffic jams lie!

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