

Civil society interventions to improve policing

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MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

EXPERIENCE shows that the police organisations of South Asia including Bangladesh have been more focused on using aggressive tactics to ensure law and order. This attitude and resultant tactics, though unfortunate, have stemmed from the colonial and feudal mindset and has placed a premium on control and suppression. It is thus no wonder that the South Asian countries, professedly democracies, do not have policing that reflects liberal democratic ideals.

Concerned citizens are of the view that instead of having the desirable law enforcement for safeguarding individual rights, the South Asian countries have willy-nilly fostered the growth of unaccountable and unprofessional police organization. Such citizens hold the view

that since the politicians in these countries have not demonstrated adequate will to improve law enforcement, it is incumbent on civil society to play a more active role to achieve better policing.

The question therefore, is, can civil society organisations improve police professionalism? To come to specifics if the civil society sees any value in engaging with police and what could be the possible mechanisms to establish an effective and productive relationship with the police. In the same vein, the type of probable assistance the civil society can provide to police could be an area of interest. Similarly, such society's using of benchmarks to hold the police accountable for misconduct may be relevant for responsive policing.

Related to the above ideas could be the strategies the civil society may like to employ to assist in the vitally required

oversight of police conduct. Similarly, one needs to know if the nature of internal oversight mechanism of police is understood. Can the civil society address the "brotherhood" within the police that often permits impunity to flourish? A considered view is that since external oversight in South Asia is not desirably effective, the civil society needs to address the scenario.

Observers believe that while it is right to denounce the human rights violations committed by police, it is also important to focus on the desirable course by engaging with the police and participating in the security debate. If this is accepted then the relation between police and civil society, most often characterized by caution and distrust, may hopefully evolve into a less polarized and more cooperative process. However, this cannot happen without supportive developments.

The civil society needs to understand that for long term positive impact on police practice, it would not be sufficient to comment from the sideline. In fact, extended commitment would be necessary. For their part the police need to enhance their responsiveness to the community they serve and understand that cooperation from the public is vital

for tactical reasons. For effective crime prevention and detection, sharing information with willing members of public is a vital necessity.

It needs to be remembered that civil society's engagement with police and the latter responding proactively cannot happen in isolation. The desirable intervention can take place within the context of broader reforms aiming to enhance the democratic orientation of the government. In other words, measures like adoption of human rights oriented legislation, general security sector reform, appointment of reform minded police leadership, international police cooperation etc are deemed as facilitating factors.

One cannot lose sight of the reality that engagement with police poses some dilemmas. The first dilemma is about how to find a balance between engagement and criticism. It is indeed difficult for non-governmental organisations dedicated to protecting human rights to learn to work with, as well as against, the police. Engagement should not be seen as jeopardizing the organization's ability to condemn police misconduct.

Another dilemma is about the core function. Civil society organisations mostly act as observers rather than play-



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ers and engagement with police runs the risks of blurring this distinction. Understandably, this is a less than comfortable situation. The real challenge is perhaps how and to what extent to cooperate without losing the ability to condemn abuses.

Improved methods of measuring crime and public confidence in the police

can be taken as indicators for professionalism but very little information is available about the impact of civil society engagement. However, the very phenomenon of civil society engagement may be treated as an indicator of democratic policing.

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Unguided children

The government must wake up to the stark reality that this vulnerable group of population needs care and sustenance to ward off the disasters stalking the society. No wonder, because of the sloth attitude and indifference of both the government and society, these unguided youngsters are roaming the streets with weapons and indulging in violent crimes.

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE National Child Domestic Worker Convention 2010 held on January 12 last under the auspices of the Save the Children Sweden-Denmark and ASK (Ain o Salish Kendra) pointed to the sad plight of the vast mass of unfortunate child domestic workers in the country. According to a baseline survey (BBS and UNICEF) other than 7.4 million working in the informal sector, as many as 400,000 children aged between 6-17 years, 80% of them female, are working as domestic workers (CDW) in different households in the country away from their parents and they are almost invisible and inaccessible to government surveillance, NGO inspection or even to neighbours.

There are reports that many child domestic helps live and work under conditions that are oppressive, exploitative, abusive and worse than adults would accept for the same work. The poignant part of the situation is that as they belong to the informal labour sector, they are excluded from legal protection, which makes them even more vulnerable.

Most worrisome, Bangladesh's young population (under 16) that amounts to about 50 per cent of the total 150 million lie virtually unnoticed. They are a vast untapped wealth of the nation that could be turned into a most effective and potential manpower of the country. Born mostly of poor parents, the male children

supplement their meagre income, while the female children in most cases get into the clutches of child-traffickers and find their ultimate abode in brothels. Reports are there that a very big number of women, mostly in their teens, trafficked to Pakistan and India, are now living a very degraded life in those places.

The summits and discussions that are occasionally convened by the world leaders in an effort to care for the vast multitude of the population of third world countries starting from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Mexico, The Philippines, Ethiopia and Sudan remain confined to taking agenda. Recommendations made to the policy makers in National Child Domestic Worker Convention held on January 12 last in the city about empowering children economically as well as arresting other exploitation, creating job opportunities for parents in the rural areas, and enacting law to protect child workers from exploitation and abuse are fine on paper but implementation of the recommendations seems to be a far cry. Our experience during the last 38 years reveals that the plight of the country's most vulnerable group remains unchanged.

Children who assembled in the Osmany Hall on Jan 12 last responded in one voice that they never like to work as child domestic workers as they miss their parents, and cannot have food and breakfast as provided for the children of their employers and have none to share their

emotions. These children also mentioned that if their parents had enough opportunity to work in the villages, and also if they could get any opportunities to work besides having education facilities at village level, they would never have come to the cities to work as CDWs.

A silent revolution resulting from simmering discontent that is brewing up, may in no time, throw us in the web of danger.

How do we fight shy of the problem that warrants our attention most? What a horrifying drudgery and human waste of energy at the prime of one's life due to lack of economic protection, guidance and motivation? Thanks to the electronic media, people in the country watched over TV in recent time that tender aged boys, presumably aged between 8-14 are engaged in hazardous jobs in most small factories in Jamalpur and their daily wages range from Tk 20 to Tk 50 for 12 hours engagement in a day, let alone those working in small factories and workshops in Dolaikhal, Lalbagh and Kamrangirchar.

Juvenile crime in Bangladesh has exploded in recent years along with organised crimes by youth gangs pouring in the city from all parts of the country. Report published in The Daily Star on January 25 last indicated that a family of six members boarding a bus from Sayedabad fell victim to extortion, beating and stabbing by an organised gang of bus robbers, mostly in their teens. With crimes woven into the fabric of the society, the nation has every reason to be wary.

Although international law prohibits child labour under 14, it flourishes on a rampant scale in the country. Studies on the plight of children in all the third world countries including Bangladesh make a very disquieting revelation. Unremitting poverty is the lot of the children in all these places. School is a luxury till now especially in Bangladesh, although the present government is making desperate efforts to put all such children in the

school.

However with such a precarious economic viability and scant resources at the disposal of the government, we can't get rid of the dreaded scourges like disease and poverty vis-à-vis the grotesque problem of the youngsters crippling the growth of the nation. Stephen Evans, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh made it plain at the graduation ceremony of a youth leadership training programme at Dhaka on January 9 last that the future of Bangladesh does not belong to the 'type' of education imparted, it belongs to the youth leadership that comes through education. Precisely true, education is imperative in achieving any type of developmental goals in the country. Cherie Blair, wife of former British Prime minister while speaking at a function of the first Asian University for Women at Chittagong on January 9 last called on all to ensure education for girls as well as women to let their voices be heard.

Political leaders and people belonging to all shades of opinion must wake up to the fact that the time for reckoning has arrived. If this country has to prosper, if it has to carve out a self-sustaining future, it should not have a lack-lustre education system, or an infrastructure that is falling apart, it should not have people, especially children belonging to the under privileged class being turned away by hospitals because they do not have money or dying in the street corner of drug overdoses or becoming victims of random crime because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The great society we had dreamt of, meaning a social fabric free of the vile scourges of disease and poverty, and cherished it to come into being, since the days of liberation war, has not come to pass. We are aware of our failings -- our petty self-interests, and narrowness blocking the road to progress and emancipation, but we are not keen to solve them with courage, conviction and nationalistic feeling.



Too hazardous for his age, not to speak of the illegality involved.

Drug addiction and drug trafficking among youths is eating into the vitals of the nation. Many of these youngsters are going to resort to unethical and illegal means of earning a living because of the lack of opportunities of doing anything else. How unfortunate the situation is that the saddest casualties in this trade are children!

The drug trade perhaps or obviously, has shown them that in a little time they can make a lot of money and they have accepted the violence and even killings that go with it. Government effort to curb anti-social and criminal activities like smuggling, vandalism and child-trafficking has been far from satisfactory. Clandestine child-trafficking business is still very much rampant in Gazipur area on the outskirts of the city. With about 12 lakh garments workers living in and around Gazipur and children in these families lying almost uncared for as their mothers are working outside for long hours, they have often fallen easy victims to exploitation and trafficking. A report published in the Daily Bhorer Kagoj on January 26 last indicated that there were 20 incidents of trafficking of tender aged

boys and girls in the Toknagar union of Gazipur in the past year.

The government must wake up to the stark reality that this vulnerable group of population needs care and sustenance to ward off the disasters stalking the society. How unfortunate the situation is that behind the blinding glitter of the new multi-millionaires sprawling up in the posh areas of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi, the rest of the country is ailing with the bulk of its citizens. Alleged corruption in different utility organisations of the government and widening economic and social fissures in the body politic of the nation have soured the rural disadvantaged group on the ruling class. Unhappily crime wave is not confined to the big cities alone, it has travelled in the remotest part of the country. No wonder because of the sloth attitude and indifference of both the government and society, these unguided youngsters are roaming the streets with lethal weapons and indulging in mugging and other violent crimes.

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Spurious fertilizers: A threat to agriculture

Agriculture is the backbone of Bangladesh economy. Any adverse situation created in the sector will have profound negative effect on the whole nation directly or indirectly. The government appears to be in urgent need of taking strong punitive measures against marketing of spurious fertilizers to save the peasants, people and the country.

ABMS ZAHUR

BANGLADESH's soil fertility mainly depends on yearly flood which brings huge quantity of silt in the rivers of the country. But because of improper application of low quality chemical fertilizers the soil is losing due percentage of chemicals in fertility. It has virtually reached the lowest point, less than 1% (ideal 5%). Some officials of the department of agriculture have expressed apprehension that if the natural health of Bangladesh soil continues to deteriorate it may not be able to produce food ade-

quately by 2020 to reach its goal.

The government is aware of the challenge of feeding 150 million people with diminishing arable land, and regular (almost) visitations of natural calamities. The ministry of agriculture is perhaps sparing no pains to support the agriculturists. It is, however, worried about the threat of spurious fertilizers which are (reported to be) flooding the markets, particularly the western part of the country. Its objective for attaining self-sufficiency in food needs maximum utilization of agricultural inputs, more awareness about modern cultivation in

the agricultural department. However, we are hopeful with the aspiration of the government because we have strong faith in the capability of the concerned minister. Last but not the least is people's cooperation in fulfilling the objective.

Some people are desperate about making money through unfair means despite the good intention of the government. It is reported that marketing of spurious fertilizers are growing rapidly. In a recent study by Soil Research Development Institute (SRDI) percentages of spurious fertilizers are as follows: Urea negligible; TSP-60%; ASP-35%; MOP-20%; DAP-30%;

NPKS-87%; SOP-43%; ZS-69%; Boran-30%; AS-25%; and organic fertilizers-70%. Apart from this, entry of low quality chemicals and fertilizers also entering in to the country through unapproved routes like Chuadanga has been reported. No effective step could have been taken so far to stop this illegal trade.

Plants get thirteen kinds of nutrients mainly from soil out of their need for sixteen kinds. Due to cultivation for a long

time quality of soil deteriorates. It needs urgent study to find out the deficiency of the required chemicals in our soil. This will ultimately save fertilizers from wastage, help in maintenance of health of the soil, save it from environmental pollution and improve production.

In our quest for rapid increase of food production let us not ignore the necessity for guarding environmental quality. There are two dimensions in considering fertilizer's role in the environment, in its production and use. Production processes can have effects on both air and water quality. Fertilizer use also raises questions as to the fate of applied nutrients in reference to ground and stream water.

Due to tremendous pressure of population we have to depend much on right utilization of fertilizers. It is extremely unfortunate that some of our people (in this case unscrupulous fertilizer traders) are out to frustrate the government's apparently sincere effort to boost agricultural production.

Agriculture is the backbone of



Hopefully piled up: But who knows how much genuine, how much spurious.

Bangladesh economy. Any adverse situation created in the sector will have profound negative effect on the whole nation directly or indirectly. The government appears to be in urgent need of taking

strong punitive measures against marketing of spurious fertilizers to save the peasants, people and the country.

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