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Nimtoli tragedy and children

It was reported in Amader Shomoy that six children died trapped as they had been kept locked in a bread factory. Areas such as Lalbagh, Hazaribab, Keraniganj, Sutrapur, Jatrabari, Mirpur, Tongi, Wari, Dhalpur, Nawabpur and Kamrangir Char have a large number of child labourers. They are employed in unhealthy and dangerous work environments with extreme exposure to hazardous chemicals.

In Bangladesh, nearly 4.9 million children between the ages of 5 to 15 years are involved in different types of labour. Forty-eight of these categorized as hazardous work. Most children are engaged in factories such as balloon, plastic, aluminium, tanneries, automobiles, chemicals shoe /shoe materials, jewellery, bread, biscuit etc.

The child workers are paid meagre wages, often unpaid and frequently locked during work or even after working hours, playing the role of security guards. In Dhaka, five lakh female children work as domestic help, many of them are locked in every day by working couples, who leave them to tend to their own privileged children.

Keeping children locked is an illegal and highly risky act when it comes to emergency situations such as earthquakes, fires, gas leaks and perhaps even cases of sudden

illness.

It concerns me as to what would happen to thousands of children in our industrial areas such as Lalbagh, Hazaribagh etc, if another incident such as the Nimtoli fire occurs. The locations mentioned have infrastructures which are not work-friendly. The areas have narrow roads, weather beaten and fragile buildings, no water facilities and open illegal electricity and gas lines. Fire alarms, extinguishers or emergency drills are simply not heard of.

As an employee of an organisation working to protect and safeguard Child Rights it upsets and severely concerns me that the highly illegal practice of locking up individuals (children or otherwise) is carried out. The working conditions as mentioned are also highly

unsafe. Also the lack of adequate fire control measures and the practice of storing inflammable materials / chemicals in areas of high population density expose thousands of people, including children to grave risks. Immediate steps need to be taken to ensure better fire safety and implement stringent rules to curb the storage of inflammable chemicals and materials in areas in these areas. Also the practice of locking up children indoors must be stopped.

I would like to request the Honourable Prime Minister and other authorities concerned to see to it that immediate action is taken against such illegal practices.

Anika Rabbani
Communications Manager
Save the Children UK



PHOTO: AFP

Terrorists

It was reported in almost all dailies in Dhaka that the leader of banned JMB Mulana Saidur Rahman has been arrested with his 3rd wife and four other accomplices. The IG himself broke the news to the press. It was further reported in the media that this banned terrorist outfit was training suicide squads to manufacture and hurl bombs to stage a big attack in the capital very shortly. The police have also found in their possession huge bomb making materials, jihadi booklets and sketches of grenades and rifles. The police could also gather that this group had regular contact with Pakistani terrorist groups and evidences of links of this group with a religious based political party in Bangladesh. We were afraid, had this plot not unearthed by our law forcers, there would have been a big attack in Dhaka.

Only a few days earlier, on 19 May, Begum Zia in her address in a public meeting in Dhaka categorically denied existence of any terrorist in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh should ban all her nationals from visiting Pakistan. Pakistan has not accepted Bangladesh as an independent country. The Pakistani businessmen are producing and exporting taka counterfeit just to destabilise

our economy. President Musharraf reportedly met a ULFA leader in Dhaka during his official visit during the alliance government's tenure. The west is sceptical about Pakistan, because they have found that all the terrorists, who were caught in Europe, were from Pakistan. Pakistan is a breeding place of terrorists and we should be cautious about Pakistani terrorist groups for our security and sovereignty.

Shafiqul Islam, NY

A great leader

Thousands of people from all the former Yugoslav republics visited Josip Broz Tito's grave on 25th May to mark the 118th birthday of the communist leader. Citizens travelled from Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Macedonia to pay their respect at the former Yugoslav president's mausoleum at the House of Flowers in Belgrade. Many waved the Yugoslav flag and banners emblazoned with "Proletarians of all countries - unite." The Josip Broz Association and the newly registered Communist Party of Serbia organised the ceremony, which was held to the sound of partisan revolutionary songs.

Tito was an outstanding leader who helped establish the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1943 as his

forces expelled the Nazis from the ethnically diverse federation's territory.

We the Bangladeshis also came through a similar stage in 1971, but unfortunately we all have failed to stand united under our own leaders for the development and well being of the country.

The above news report won't sound that important to the majority of the readers, but I think we all, including our blue collared politicians, have a lesson to learn from this.

Sohel Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Chronicle of a vehicle requisition!

It is good to see that some rules are going to be imposed on requisition. It has been terrifying for the owners, as they often have to endure severe suffering and tension because of their vehicle, when that is taken by the traffic police by requisition.

The High Court also directed the government to stop harassing owners of the vehicles and drivers. I know how important that is because my family is a victim of this requisition anguish! When traffic police had attempted to requisition our microbus a couple of months ago, we requested them not to because my sister's new born baby was severely sick and we

badly needed that microbus to commute a long way to the hospital day and night. Despite our request they paid no heed and took the vehicle saying that what if our vehicle went out of order. Watching our sufferings, our acquaintances said why we didn't you pay them! If we had done that right away, our microbus would not have been taken! However, during requisition our driver suffered even more as according to him he had not been given food or time to eat, rather he had to drive almost 16-17 hours continuously in those three days. Our driver told us our microbus was used for a police high official's wife's personal use for one whole day (Friday), when we were commuting with a severely sick newborn baby.

However, it seems it is now coming to an appreciable end. I am very happy as the next time maybe I would not need to get scared of requisition when I will see a traffic policeman in front of our vehicle, waving to stop at the side of the road.

Arafath Shahriar
Uttara, Dhaka

Can't we do better?

Dumping leaders when they are alive and glorifying them after their death seem to be an affliction of all political parties. Are there not other urgent issues to worry about in Bangladesh? Can the new airports, bridges and structures not be named after one of them? When the Awami League is in power, all the projects and schemes are named only after the Bangabandhu family members. When the BNP is in power, all the projects and schemes are named only after the Zia family members.

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

Gopal Sengupta
Canada

University in Kishoreganj

Kishoreganj is one of the most undeveloped and neglected areas of our country, although it has great contributions in the sectors like agriculture, politics and literature. Nobody can deny its great contributions to our economy. The district is surrounded by seven districts and the area has a huge population. In these circumstances, it is necessary to establish a public university in this district town. The government can turn the Gurudoyal College into a university. It has an excellent and big campus. The government may also select a new place near the town.

Md. Abu Sayed
Dept. of English
University of Dhaka

Traffic jam

It is a very good initiative of the government to open the Ahsanullah Master Flyover to reduce traffic jam.

But it was not planned by this government, it was planned by the previous government.

At the moment, we need some plan from the Digital Government to reduce traffic jam.

Rowshan Ali
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Moral education

Once the moral code or value got the highest priority in our society, but today it is on the verge of extinction! A family teaches morality, standard of decent life but the parents these days are doing nothing in this area.

The parents should assume the role of moral educators.

Firoz Ahmed
Department of English, JNU

Mobile and fatigue

In today's world, many teenagers live in a virtual universe, in which face to face communication rarely occurs, and in which friends are made and kept via social networking websites and via mobile phones. This is definitely not good news on any level - emotional, social or psychological. A very frequent use of mobile phones can cause stress and sleep problems in teens, as well as what is called a 'careless' lifestyle including disrupted sleep, insomnia and frequent energy drink consumption. Teenagers normally have to get a minimum of nine hours of sleep per night, something that doesn't occur when mobile phone usage becomes abusive. In fact, frequently speaking on the phone makes adolescents even more susceptible to things such as stress and fatigue.

Therefore, it is necessary to increase teenagers' awareness of the negative effects of excessive phone use on their sleep-wake patterns, with serious health risks. In fact, understanding is the first step, while moderation is the next move in solving such problems.

S.M. Rumun
West Firoz Shah
Housing Estate
Chittagong

Nimtoli fire

In the devastating fire at Nimtoli in Old Dhaka, at least 117 people have died and hundreds are injured, many of them are in critical condition. It is like the hell breaking loose, the tragedy is of such magnitude that one has to gasp with horror and agony. We pray for the departed souls and express deep condolence for the affected families.

The government must take this incident as an eye opener as to what might happen in the future, if building codes are not followed and the roads remain too narrow making it difficult for the fire brigade vehicles to move fast.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

The fire incident which took place at Nimtoli of Old Dhaka on 3 June was indeed a terrible disaster.

While expressing her instant reaction in this regard, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said, "Fire makes people destitute." She is absolutely right.

We want the survivors to be compensated soon. May Allah keep the departed souls in peace.

Habibur Rashid Ismail
Chittagong

Islam and women

My letter should remove the confusion created by Mr. Ishfaq's article (05/26/2010). I am among those people who are striving for peace, happiness and security of women. Our Prophet (Pbuh) asked his companions in his farewell sermon to behave kindly and mercifully with women. Giving them honour and security is a top priority of Islam. After reading his article, I get the impression that he believes that women should not be allowed to wear veil.

Everybody knows that a veiled woman is seldom targeted. I would request Mr. Ishfaq to reveal one story that a veiled woman was harassed. The picture he showed with

his article tries to prove that Islam (God forbid) gave orders to beat a woman if she keeps her face open. I surely have knowledge of the Holy book. Islam does not allow a stranger male to put his hands on a female, he is not permitted to touch a woman for not wearing veil, forget about beating!

Mufti Abdussamad
Segunbagicha, Dhaka

Eve teasing

Not only does eve teasing shatters the victim psychologically leading to mental disorders or depression, this humiliation often compels the girl to even commit suicide. Society and the administration also try to cast aspersions on the character of the victim, instead of condemning or nabbing the eve teasers. In this sorry state of affairs, it is hardly surprising that scores of victims do not lodge any complaint.

If our society wants to be recognised as a civilized one, then it should urgently and sincerely adopt concrete measures to put an end to the ghastly menace of eve teasing. Since the eve teasers are devoid of all norms of humanity, they should be handed harsh punishment and in cases where the victim commits suicide, the culprits need to be awarded capital punishment.

These types of strict action will surely force such barbaric elements to think twice before committing such a crime. Perhaps it would not be entirely out of context if we take a glimpse of the attitude of the media and advertisers as well. Right from shoe to hair-oil, advertising campaigns for almost each and every product or service generously exploit the female anatomy to attract the consumers. Many of the newspapers and magazines publish obscene, scantily-clad pictures of women to boost up their sales. And the less said about commercial films, the better as it glorifies eve teasing and exposure of female bodies, all in the name of art!

Thus it is natural that if this gross commercialisation of women get socially recognised, feminine bodies will get treated merely as a "sex object", leading to eve teasing and molestation, even rape.

Perhaps in the name of "modernity" and being "liberal", we are losing all norms of decency and sanity. If we want to eradicate this disease of eve teasing from the root of society, not only should the strictest action be taken against those who dare to denigrate women in such a humiliating light, the upcoming generation certainly need to be taught to reverse and respect women as men's equal in every way.

Kajal Chatterjee
Peerless Nagar
Kolkata, India

Development and natural gas

A scholarly and rather abstract, short essay on the subject was published on May 29, in a local daily, but it did not suggest any solution. However, an alternative solution does exist. I believe that an NGO has already installed such a plant in a village, as published in a daily, a few days back. The speedy implementation of this alternative solution rather needs to be discussed in parliament; and not our gas shortage today, which is another issue altogether!

In this important matter of local fuel source, we should preferably on a 'national priority basis' go all out for generating methane (the main gas in natural gas) from local human solid waste! These gas generators, for producing methane from solid waste, can be easily built using all locally available materials! So what are we waiting for?

I would request our government, particularly the relevant "Parliamentary Sub-Committee" to go all out for this cheap local option. We may set up the first gas generators by the government agencies concerned for processing the 'solid human waste' for generating methane in the armed forces, RAB and police barracks to begin with!

We can expend from this and ultimately have it installed in all public buildings, schools, colleges, universities and large apartment complexes, hospitals, hotels and prisons all over Bangladesh! This proposal should be taken up without any further delay, given our shortage of geological sources of methane (natural gas).

This will not require any foreign exchange, needed for exploring geological sources of natural gas, for which we have to depend on foreign international oil exploration organisations. We can go ahead for this geological exploration.

I would finally request our dailies to spread the knowledge on this matter in our overall national interest!

Engr. S.A. Mansoor

Dhaka

Save little Tanha

Just now I have finished reading a touchy article written by the celebrated singer Runa Laila wherein she made a fervent appeal to all to help cure a four and a half years old little girl Tanha, who has been suffering from blood cancer. She is now under the treatment of Prof. Dr. Afiquel Islam of BSMMU. (Ref: The Daily Star Magazine, dt. 28/5/10).

Tanha is presently receiving chemotherapy. Her physicians are hopeful about Tanha's recovery if the costly treatment could be continued. Tanha's father is also sick and her parents and uncle (who is taking care of Tanha at the moment) are facing serious hardship to continue Tanha's costly treatment. Ms. Runa Laila who learned about Tanha's illness from a friend's blog on the Facebook called Tanha and her guardians to her house and talked about her treatment. Runa Laila made the above appeal to all to come forward in aid of little Tanha. I appreciate her gesture of goodwill and endorse the appeal, so that more people can learn about Tanha's illness and come forward to help her.

Anyone who wishes to help Tanha can contribute to the following bank account:
Nahid Jabeed
SB/AC/NO-56997
UCBL Bank
Karwanbazar Branch
(Online bank account holders can send money from any UCBL bank of Bangladesh), or from any other bank, in any currency from anywhere in the world)
Professor M Zahidul Haque
Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka

World Cup fever

I couldn't fully agree with Zafar Sobhan's write-up: "World Cup fever, Bangladesh-style" published in The Daily Star on May 28, 2010.

So far I know, no survey was ever made as to whether people in other countries, particularly in those countries which didn't have the opportunity to participate in the World Cup, react to the world cup football in a similar manner. May we not forget that unlike many other games, competitive football is seen almost like a battle between two clubs or two countries, albeit for an hour and a half or so. It's for this reason that we sometimes hear of street-fights among the supporters of different football clubs even in western capitals like London and Berlin. It rarely happens in case of cricket or other games. No wonder, people of such countries who are not involved in the World Cup football fray would try to identify themselves with the one or the other. It's a very common human nature.

Now the million dollar question is why our people should support Argentina or Brazil and why not Iran or Saudi Arabia or even Britain or Germany? Here again, it's not much difficult to find the answer. Once more

politics and war comes into play. Please don't take our people as so gullible. No matter what our successive governments did, our people and the media vented strong anti-American slogans during US-Vietnam War; they expressed their anguish when Britain attacked Argentina over Falkland Islands and very lately they vehemently rejected Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. All these signify that in general our people are for the oppressed and the exploited. Although the common people are not expected to be vividly conversant with the history of Argentina or Brazil, they have sketchy idea that once these countries were also colonized and exploited by the Europeans, particularly Spain and Britain. Therefore, it's not correct that our people do everything out of sheer emotion. It's not the emotion but the expression of fellow feeling of downtrodden peoples of countries which may be geographically far apart, but psychologically very close!

Hafeezul Alam

A former civil servant

Mohammadpur

Dhaka



PHOTOS: STAR

Killer driver

Your staff correspondent's front-page report of May 29 indicates very clearly that there is a criminal nexus, based on corruption and malpractices between the police and the owners of the transport company! If not so, then as reported why till May 28 police did not contact the owners of the bus to find out all particulars of the driver and helper concerned.

They should be rather held responsible to trace and hand the culprits over for punishment. This was not an accident, but deliberate murder of a knocked down and totally stunned student, trying to recover from an agonising incident, and not physically and mentally fit enough, to move out

from there!

Will the government urgently look into this potentially dangerous situation, and get third parties to deeply investigate the matter; in the overall interest of law, order and justice; to contain the dangerous situation from getting further worse.

By the way, who said that we are short of police personnel? I read something regarding it in the dailies a few days ago, that the police are short of personnel! The photograph alongside the report of the correspondent showed in colour, no less than ten 'very busy' policemen, possibly doing 'important police' duties for protecting law and order etc!

A reader, Dhaka