

BIRTH REGISTRATION

A child's passport to protection

PASCAL VILLENEUVE

AT seven months old, baby Johir is one of Bangladesh's newest citizens. His mother in Jagannathpur, Sunamganj has registered his birth.

As per national policy every child in Bangladesh needs to be registered within 45 days of birth. To improve birth registration, the 2004 Birth and Death Registration Act provides a legal basis for the use of a birth certificate as proof of age to access services. A recent amendment to the Act creates a permanent structure to oversee the registration of birth and death. Also in Bangladesh, the online Birth Registration Information System means that birth and death certificates are issued through a web-based application and stored on a secure central database.

But further progress needs to be made as Bangladesh is among the 10 countries with the largest numbers of unregistered children (under five years old) in the world, according to a new report by Unicef. Some 10 million children under five in the country do not officially exist.

From the moment a child is born, she or he has rights, including the right to an identity. But birth registration is more than just a right. It is the child's passport to protection -- a way to ensure that no child is excluded from vital services like education, health care and social security.

Unicef's new report, *Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and trends in birth registration*; shows that globally the births of nearly 230 million children under five have never been registered. That's about one third of all children under five in the world.

An even larger number might have been registered but have not been issued an official birth certificate, an important step to prove that registration took place.

Although the world has made some progress in increasing birth registration rates, still only 65% of all children globally have been registered. Much of the progress has been seen in just a handful of countries.

The good news is we know what needs to be done to increase birth registration rates, starting with addressing the many reasons why children do not get registered. Sometimes the costs are prohibitive or the birth registration



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services are located too far away for families to be able to access them. Sometimes families are simply unaware of how to register a birth, or the importance of doing so. In Bangladesh, parents only tend to register their children when they are ready to go to school as a birth certificate is needed for school enrollment.

Many countries are employing straightforward solutions to tackle this issue. In Bangladesh, a strategy was adopted to integrate health services and birth registration during immunisation sessions where children received vaccinations. By linking birth registration with immunisation, children are being simultaneously protected from illness and from abuse and exploitation.

Cultural barriers, or the fear of discrimination or marginalisation, are other factors that deter families from registering births. There are often legitimate concerns about the misuse of personal or sensitive information such as race, religion, or birth out of wedlock to instigate discrimination.

The lack or loss of a formal identity is one of the most significant reasons why a child becomes 'invisible' or excluded. Without birth registration, children may not be able to go to school, be treated in hospital or access other social services.

If they are separated from their families during a natural disaster or armed conflict, or if they are exposed to forms of exploitation such as trafficking, reuniting children is more complicated if they were never registered and have no official proof of the links to their families.

Later in life, it is often difficult to apply for a job, get a passport, vote, open a bank account, get a marriage license or even get a mobile phone without a birth certificate.

That is why we call on the relevant authorities in Bangladesh to step up efforts to achieve universal birth registration for all children, especially accelerating registration of children within 45 days of birth as mandated by the 2004 Act. This is a first step in making sure children have the best start in life. If children disappear from view and societies fail to register them, they are often made even more vulnerable, with lasting consequences not only for their own wellbeing but also for the development of their communities and countries.

The writer is Representative of Unicef Bangladesh.

SARWAR JAHAN CHOWDHURY

The 'Forbidden State'

THE Union of Myanmar in our south eastern neighbourhood is a strange and complex country, going by its nature as a state and record of the past few decades. It has multiple domestic problems, which it has not been able to solve over many decades now. It also has issues with some of its neighbours, and its handling of those cannot be praised. Largely secluded in the past, the nation is in a state of transition without much clear indication of the direction it is heading, with the military very much holding on to its grip over the state both tacitly and explicitly despite handing over power to a controversially elected president who also happens to be an ex-general. It has recently allowed the most popular political party to operate again and also opened up to the rest of the world, in a limited way though.

For Bangladesh, being a neighbour, especially being one with issues with a state like this, hasn't been a pleasant experience. For an oriental country in democratic transition, it is often difficult to ascertain the real and would-be power centre. This is the case with Myanmar these days and it's puzzling to determine whom to talk to. Bangladesh appears to be in such discombobulation with this bizarre neighbour.

Myanmar military, like their Pakistani counterpart, occupied their own country instead of the enemy's. The taste of blood (read undue power and authority) is a thing hard to give up easily for the Myanmar military. Democratic propriety was no object to them. But the Myanmar military has realised the hard way that in this age of globalisation and economic growth, the latter mostly in the East where it belongs, it would be difficult for them to meet public expectation and deliver accordingly, being in the government and being taboo to the democratic West and many others.

Then came this pseudo democracy, leaving aside the long proven popular leader Aung Sun Suu Kyi and her party. But they have opened the flood gate of foreign investment and the immense potential for more. A share of the revenue is needed by all, including the men in uniform. Everyone wants the glittering shine of prosperity. Military-socialism just can't satisfy the appetite anymore. But freedom for Suu Kyi and her party was the pre-condition set by the international actors. The Myanmar military had no choice but to swallow the bitter pill for the time being. Temptation for wealth reigned over obsession for totalitarian power.

But what's next? Could there be a proper democracy in Myanmar where all kinds of people of this diverse nation would be represented? If Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) wins the next election, which they very much are poised to do, would the military relinquish real power to the elected representatives of the people? What about institutional reform? Presently, about a quarter of the members of the powerful lower house of the parliament are designated by the military from its officers corps. This is an unprecedented state of affairs in a parliament and nothing but a mockery of democracy.

The answer to these questions could not be ascertained as of now. There are also lingering insurgencies in many ethnic minority inhabited parts of the country; the Shan and Kachin insurgency in the north and the Kiren in the east along Thai border are the notable ones. Bamar-Buddhist chauvinism is on the rise, very much similar to the Sinhala-Buddhist one in Sri Lanka many years back. Bamars, also popularly known as Burmese, are the predominant ethnic group consisting about 67% of the populace. They live in the deltaic flood plains and in the central region. The Rakhine majority in the Rakhine/Arakan state of the country belong to the Bamar family broadly, although they have a dialect of their own. The peripheries in different directions of Myanmar are inhabited by various ethnic minorities who are largely the excluded groups in the state and society.

A quarter of the population in eastern Rakhine/Arakan state is Muslim Rohingyas. Despite living there for centuries many Rakhines and Bamars like to consider themselves as Bengali infiltrators and don't want to be recognised as Myanmar citizens. They are persistently discriminated against and persecuted. Few hundred thousands fled to Bangladesh in late 1970 and in the 1990s. Many had been returned through diplomatic and UN agency efforts. Thousands of them still live in UNHCR refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar of Bangladesh. Recently, a few hundred thousand more have fled their homes and started living in domestic refugee camps in the Rakhine state after rioting against them by the majority Rakhines. Hundreds of them were killed, thousands injured and their homes and villages destroyed.

Incumbent Myanmar authority turned a blind eye to this humanitarian catastrophe and keeps reiterating the old clichés about the citizenship of the poor Rohingyas, who never saw any other place than Arakan for so many generations now, and even have their own language that is different from Bengali. The majoritarian notion among the establishment and certain powerful quarters of the populace is so pervasive that none dares to speak out in Myanmar in favour of this suffering minority. This inapt approach may play into the hands of intending Jihadist from South Asian countries, ever ready to twist the already deteriorated situation further. However, fortunately, they could not find headway yet; thanks to the caution and vigilance of the Bangladesh government and agencies.

Bangladesh is still struggling to establish a proper connection with the Myanmar leadership with the hope that they would take a judicious stand on the Rohingya issue. That has so far seen very little ray of hope. Even a towering figure like Suu Kyi is careful not to antagonise the military and the majoritarian chauvinists on this matter despite watching the pathetic miseries of these hapless beings. Everything, including a solution to this, appears to be tied with the transition to a proper democracy and real transfer of power to liberal democratic forces. Unfortunately, the time line for this cannot be predicted by anyone.

The writer is an Associate Research Fellow at Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies. Email: sarwar558@gmail.com.

International Mountain Day, 2013

NABA BIKRAM KISHORE TRIPURA

UNITED Nations calls on member states and other organisations to mark a set of days, as well as weeks, years and decades, to help focus the world on the issues in which UN has an interest and commitment. United Nations General Assembly designated December 11 as International Mountain day in 2003. The General Assembly "encouraged the international community to organise events at all levels on that day to highlight the importance of sustainable mountain development." Every year, the day is celebrated with a different theme relevant to sustainable mountain development.

FAO is the mandated UN entity to lead observance of International Mountain Day.

Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs (MoCHTA), in partnership with FAO, ICIMOD, UNDP, ILO and some other organisations, is going to celebrate the day for the first time in Bangladesh. The events of the day include rally, seminar, photographic exhibitions and special supplements in the national dailies and local dailies of three hill districts. The theme of International Mountain Day 2013 is "Mountains: Key to a Sustainable Future."

The observance of the day strives to achieve a stronger engagement of all actors and the civil society with a view to mobilising resources to improve the livelihoods of mountain communities. It also envisages the linkages between rural and urban development with an eye to the implementation of a green economy in line with the Rio+20 Earth Summit. We also believe the observance of the day will strengthen the commitment and will too advance the cause of mountain agenda at all levels.

One quarter of the world's surface is covered with mountains, where 12% people live. Mountains are characterised by vast global diversity -- from tropical rain forests to snow-capped peaks. Mountains are the water towers of the world that provide fresh water to at least half of world's population. Beside being a source of key resources, minerals, forest products, agricultural products and recreation;

mountains are essential to the survival of the global ecosystem as a major ecosystem representing the complex and interrelated ecology of our planet, a storehouse of biological diversity and endangered species. Mountains are also high-risk environments; avalanche, landslides, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and floods threaten life in mountain regions and surrounding areas.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), founded in 1972, is an agency of the UN that coordinates UN environmental activities, assisting developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. On mountains UNEP has this observation: "Mountains are crucial to life, whether we live at sea level or the highest elevations, we are connected to mountains and affected by them in more ways than we can imagine. Mountains provide most of the world's fresh water, harbour a rich variety of plants and animals, and are homes to one in ten people. Yet, each day, environmental degradation, the consequence of climate change, exploitative mining, armed conflict, poverty and hunger threaten the extraordinary web of life that the mountains support."

Studies show that mountain people are among the world's poorest and most disadvantaged. They often face socio-economic and political marginalisation and lack access to basic services like education, health and other modern amenities. Their hardships are compounded by current global challenges, such as climate change, industrialisation, population growth etc. Sustainable approaches to devel-



opment are therefore particularly important in mountain regions. Mountain people have learned, over the generations, how to live and cope with the threat of natural hazards and have developed well-adapted and risk-resilient land-use system. Just an example -- many settlers from the plains die of land and mud slides in CHT during monsoon whereas such hazards do not occur in case of ethnic peoples who know how to build safe houses in hilly terrains.

Mountain agenda includes sustainable development and protection of mountain regions and the improvement of local livelihoods. Mountain specific legislation is needed to address the protection of ethnic minorities and the cultural heritage of mountain people, and to recognise community-based property rights. As many mountain ranges are transboundary, international cooperation is needed for sustainable mountain development. To achieve that objective it is essential to have the involvement of all concerned stakeholders and to raise awareness about mountain eco-system, their fragility and the ways of addressing them.

The importance of observing International Mountain Day lies in the fact that more than 50% of the world's population depends on water sourced from mountains, which also provide high-quality natural products, rich agro-biodiversity, habitats for rare and endangered flora and fauna, and resource for tourism and recreation. However, climate and global change are having serious adverse impacts on mountain eco-system, particularly water and atmospheric circulation. So it has become an urgent need to raise awareness and promote policy actions to ensure the critical contribution of mountain ecosystem in meeting adaptation and sustainable development goals.

We believe the observance of the Day in Bangladesh will be able to trigger actions and create awareness among the people on issues relating to sustainable mountain development.

The writer is Secretary, Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and Member, Board of Governors, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

BALI PACKAGE

Hope for Bangladesh

A.K.M. ZAID UDDIN

THE Ninth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) ended on December 7 in Indonesia with approval of a significant "BALI Package." 159 member countries came to a consensus that would allow duty-free access of a country's exports to all developed and developing countries.

Several important matters were hashed out in the conference, including export of duty free and quota free products to developed nations by LDCs. Bali package incorporated three main matters -- trade facilitation, agriculture and cotton, development issues. Preferential rules of origin for LDCs, monitoring mechanism for special and differential treatment, subsidies in agricultural, trade facilitation among the member countries, easing red tape, reducing business cost, and ensuring food security were discussed under three criteria.

Bangladesh demanded four facilities for LDCs. The most important demand was for Duty Free and Quota Free access (DFQF) and waiver of export services to US market. Relaxation of rules of origin got priority as well, which will help 49 countries to identify products as their own and ensure quality in importing countries.

After losing the Generalized System Preferences (GSP) facility, Bangladesh government was criticised by national and international economists. Though GSP facility was for non-clothes products like tobacco, sporting equipments and plastic products, it reduced cost of business to US. Bangladesh paid \$2 million duty on \$35 million goods under GSP in 2012, while 15.3% duty has to be paid for garment products to US market. The problem is that Bangladesh won't get DFQF facility in garments sector to US due to staying out of 97% products.

"The benefits to the world economy are calculated to be between \$ 400 billion and \$1 trillion by reducing costs of trade by between 10% and 15%, increasing trade flows and revenue collection, creating a stable business environment and attracting foreign investment." This is quoted from draft declaration of "Bali package." Actually, WTO is very hopeful of enhancing world business, where LDCs like

Bangladesh will get facilities to spread trade over the world.

Another decision of giving DFQF facility to 97% products of LDC countries to developed countries remains unchanged. The countries that are not giving this facility have to give it before the next conference of WTO to facilitate trade of developing countries. So, Bangladesh will be able to take this chance to get free access of 97% products to rich countries by the next summit.

Subsidies in agricultural products are necessary for developing countries. Every developing country including India can subsidise any product to boost up agricultural production to ensure food security. This will continue for the next four years, and will expand if needed in future. So Bangladesh may subsidise agricultural products that are imported from India on large scale. But there is a limitation on cotton production, which can raise the price of apparel products in Bangladesh. After all, it will help to avoid trade dependency on India and make Bangladesh a food secured country.

There is 1 year to materialise the "Bali package" the WTO president said. In the meantime, Bangladesh needs to take some preparations in this regard. First of all, it should maintain contact with the other 48 LDCs to create pressure on rich countries to follow the decisions of Bali package. Secondly, Bangladesh needs to regain GSP facilities to enhance trade. Another crucial challenge is to ensure secure workplace for garments workers to avoid accidents like 'Rana Plaza' and 'Tazreen fashion' to get facilities in US and EU markets. This will help to get priority in world market as well.

At the end of the day, it is clear that we need to go a long way for gaining these facilities. Implementation depends on rich countries mostly. Some trade analysts are confused about ensuring of these facilities by WTO for LDCs. After all, we may hope to avail these facilities to increase our trade. We may say someday in the future, after getting these facilities, what WTO President Mr. Azevedo quoted from Nelson Mandela after the historical consensus: "It always seem impossible, until it's done."

The writer is a student of the Department of Development Studies, 6th semester, University of Dhaka.



By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Scatter
6 Summon
10 Stash of valuables
11 Studio output
12 Sized up
13 Sun-dried brick
14 Spirit
15 Shish kebab need
16 Stop lasting
17 Here, to Henri
18 Cunning
19 Not too quick
22 Opera highlight
23 Disco
26 Spurring on
29 Golf goal
32 Tokyo, formerly
33 Antique auto
34 Relaxed
36 Bird bath spot
37 Hooded snake
38 Like some checking accounts
39 Rival
40 Deduce

DOWN

1 "The Iron Lady" star
2 Refrain bit
3 Shoulder muscle
4 Tied up
5 Tie the knot
6 Programing output
7 Attests
8 Defame, in a way
9 Suspicious
11 Coping

Yesterday's answer

15 Bio, or chem.
17 "It seems to me..."
20 Brief drop
21 Mercury or Mars
24 Tall grazer
25 Common pay period
27 Exalted poem

28 Ducks
29 Harness to a race horse
30 Make amends
31 Defy authority
35 Base group
36 Solitary
38 Wee bite

11-13

A XYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

On letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

11-6 CRYPTOQUOTE

V M W F P B H R P B X Q H P M T

X T X F X S P D N W P B X O W N V H S O

A T M S P M S L D N W P B X R N J T

N D P B X Z B H T L. — Z M W T C J S O

Yesterday's Cryptoquote:
TO GIVE VICTORY TO THE RIGHT,
NOT BLOODY BULLETS, BUT
PEACEFUL BALLOTS ONLY, ARE
NECESSARY.

- ABRAHAM LINCOLN

BEETLE BAILEY

GREG + MORT WALKER

PACKAGE FOR BAILEY

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

I HEAR COOKIES!

HENRY

HENRIETTA IS AS PRETTY AS A PICTURE

ART EXHIBIT TODAY

HENRIETTA IS AS PRETTY AS A PICTURE

by Mort Walker

by Don Tranchte

QUOTABLE
Quote

"If you have ideas, you have the main asset you need, and there isn't any limit to what you can do with your business and your life. Ideas are any man's greatest asset."

Harvey S. Firestone