

Dowry: The continuing crime

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

All governments in the past including the present have promised political and social equality for the sexes, but women are still victimized.

The UNICEF report in recent time stated that one out of every five girls in the country between the ages of 15 and 19 is sexually abused by her partner or husband is alarming. The report further says that as many as 47 per cent of the adolescent girls suffer through physical and sexual violence should give jolt to the administration about the state of girl children in the country. In most cases, house wives and adolescent girls are victims of such cruelty and repression. The capital city has seen 20 per cent increase in murders compared to the corresponding period last year. Every year scores of women are falling victims to acid violence, torture, burning by pouring kerosene, killing by strangulation, beating and stabbing to death. In the last five years commencing from 2009, 1075 women were killed in the hands of their husbands. According to Human Rights Organization ASK, in the last six months of the current year ending in June, 153 women were killed in their husband's house with 112 women being killed by their husbands. But only 71 complaints were filed either with the police or the court. Reports

indicate that in 2009, 197 women were killed by their husbands but only 98 cases were instituted in the court. In successive years from 2010 up to 2013, the number of wife-killing in the hands of their husbands climbed to 225 and 211 respectively as reports by ASK suggest. Evidently it started with money and quickly slid into frequent wife beating sessions ending with either strangulation or kerosene burning. The perpetrators use acid or other weapons against wives, on being refused of their repeated dowry demands, as punishments because a bride did not bring enough money. These men are driven first by greed and then by revenge, but it seems that throwing acid or pouring kerosene over the victim's body has become something like fun for them because they know that they can get away with the crime through the loopholes of the lax criminal justice system in the country.

A World Bank report on women in this region suggests that poverty, coupled with early marriages of girl child, and deeply etched social attitudes have produced a kind of imprisonment of the country's female population. Notwithstanding the fact that women in the country constitute almost half of the population, hardly any major, meaningful effort has been taken to enable them to participate actively in the political, socio-cultural and economic life of the nation equally with men.

The two core issues, elimination of social injustice and economic exploitation of the girl child, can be tackled through motivation, policy guidelines and bold leadership at the government level. The genesis of discrimination and cruelty against women can be traced to the social apathy inherent in the male

population of the sub-continent. Though our constitution provides for equality between sexes with proper protection for women and children, people are still governed by personal family customs and rules that fail to give women their due.

All findings indicate that dowry demands in the country have multiplied tenfold over the last one decade. There is a sticky web of issues surrounding it. Most males belonging to middle class or ultra-poor families, due to lack of proper education and culture and prompted by unusual greed, have realized that dowry is an easy way to acquire wealth.

There exists a toothless attitude in a majority of families who participated in dowry based marriages instead of opposing it. People talk glibly about dowry prohibition and anti-dowry movement but when it comes to their own sons and daughters, most people would do the same thing. In most cases, affluent parents think that big dowries will strengthen their daughter's position in their husband's family. But should the marriage go wrong, there is no way that these fabulous gifts in the form of cash, jewelry and property can be retrieved.

In most cases girls do not have any knowledge of or participation in any deal. Dowry is often a monetary deal between two men - the bride's father and the groom or groom's father. Despite promulgation of dowry prohibition act, the number of dowry related atrocities and deaths are climbing. Most shockingly, the law has not yet been applied to put a halt to this derogatory practice. But what is needed is that women need real social, financial, moral and ideological support to stand firmly against an

age-old system that has almost got an unwritten societal sanction. A big social movement is a must to stop this giving and taking of money.

Reports carried by the dailies in the recent past indicated that in Chittagong on an average marriage settlement the last three years courts are receiving 9 applications daily for dissolution of marriage, several times more than the previous years and seventy per cent of these aggrieved persons are women. In 2009 the number of such divorce suits in Chittagong stood at 952, in 2010 it climbed to 2881, in the last three years the number year-wise surpassed 4000. Most of these aggrieved women are garments workers or working in different organizations and offices. The reasons cited for divorce are torture for dowry, husband's addiction problem and extra-marital affair. All these facts suggest that some women - though in a minority - are fighting back now. More awareness among women has led to a growing resistance to demands for dowry, but it has also increased familial friction. A study by NGO circles and social scientists says 80 per cent of dowry deaths and harassment cases occur among the lower and middle classes.

The odd NGO groups, women activists, human rights organizations and women lawyers' association may pursue one or two cases and rehabilitate some tortured women, but a major breakthrough is hardly possible because social intervention is low and ignorance high. So, despite the stigma dowry continues to be the signature as well as nightmare of marriage.

E-mail: aukhandk@gmail.com

CLIMATE SUMMIT Which narrative will prevail?

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE Secretary General of the United Nations Mr Ban Ki Moon has invited heads of government, business and civil society to a Climate Summit at the United Nations in New York on 23rd September.

I have been privileged to be one of the 38 representatives from civil society invited to participate in the event.

A few days before the summit, on 21st September, civil society will be organizing a massive March for Climate in Manhattan where groups from all over the world will be marching calling for global action to tackle climate change.

I will be joining the march with the Bangladesh contingent on the 21st of September as well the summit at the UN Headquarters on the 23rd.

The outcome of the march and summit will see different narratives of the climate change problem clashing and it is still too early to say which ones will prevail. I am describing below the main opposing narratives that will be aired in New York and the world later this month.

Talk vs action

The Secretary General, quite rightly, has emphasized action over words at his summit. Thus he has asked all the heads of government as well of big companies to share what they are already doing to tackle climate change and pledge what they are prepared to do in future. There will not be any negotiated text but rather a simple report by the Secretary General on the outcomes of the summit. This is in stark contrast to the two decades of talking that has taken place in the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) with precious little real action.

This not to say that the UNFCCC process does not remain important, specially in agreeing global actions and levels of ambition, but that actions by non-government actors have already begun and will gain momentum.

Cost of action vs costs of inaction

Some rich countries and fossil fuel industries have been spreading the message that the costs of action to tackle climate change, including both mitigation as well as adaptation, is high (for them) and that in these economically hard time these costs are too high to bear.

On the other hand the scientific community, most developing countries and civil society make the case that the costs of inaction (in the longer term) will be many times greater than the costs of action (in the near term). This argument is even being made in the United States of America where the fossil fuel industry narrative had prevailed until now.

Rich polluters vs poor victims

The most vulnerable countries to the adverse impacts of climate change are the group of nearly fifty Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the forty plus Small Island Developing Countries States (SIDS) and the fifty plus countries in the continent of Africa. These three groups together, taking account of overlaps between them, account for nearly a hundred countries with a billion people who will be highly impacted by climate change and who emit less than 5% of global emissions. Hence the onus of reducing the emission to prevent catastrophic levels of adverse impacts on these poorest countries fall on the major emitting countries which include both the rich developed countries as well as emerging developing countries such as China, India, Brazil and Indonesia.

Fossil fuel based future vs post-fossil fuel global economy
In the long term the debate is about when (rather than if) the world economy stops relying on fossil fuels and transitions to cleaner energy sources. This was deemed to be far in the future but is increasingly looking likely to happen sooner rather than later. A number of countries, including Maldives, Costa Rica and Ethiopia, to name a few are beginning to plan going Carbon Neutral within next decade. Others will no doubt soon follow as they realize that it is not only possible to do so but in their own long term interests to do so earlier rather than later.

USA vs China

China has recently overtaken the US as the biggest emitter of Greenhouse Gases and together the two countries account for almost half of total global emissions. At the Copenhagen Climate Summit some years ago the deadlock between these two countries was one major reason for the failure to reach agreement then. Things are looking much more positive now with both countries' leaders willing to take significant actions to tackle climate change. However, the level of actions being offered still fall well short of ensuring that the world does not cross two degrees Centigrade warming. So they, along with all the other major emitting countries, will have to enhance their ambitions considerably between now and the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) of the UNFCCC to be held in Paris, France in December 2015 where a new global climate change agreement is expected to be agreed.

The writer is Senior Fellow at the London based International Institute for Environment and development (www.iied.org) and Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (www.iccad.net) in Bangladesh.

The new war against terrorism and the so called Islamic State

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

PRESIDENT Obama's declaration to degrade and destroy the emerging threat posed by the group that calls itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) could not have come sooner. Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria and later spawning of the Islamic militants in the war torn region his critics on both sides of the spectrum have either accused him either of inaction and indecisiveness, or warned him against involving the US in another war in the Middle East. Whether the birth of the so called militant Islamic state is a result of inaction of the US in Syrian war or the consequence of war in Iraq is for history to judge. But the crucial fact is that there is a large body of well-equipped warriors who are committed to establishing a religious state based on their interpretation of Islam and its past. This is not all, more frighteningly the ideology of these warriors is based on religious and sectarian intolerance, violent suppression of opposition, and forceful imposition of laws that do not respect rights of free speech, religion, or gender.

Despite claims from President Obama that this new war against terrorism against ISIL is targeted against this terror group alone, there are challenges that the US faces both in terms of its success and the perception it creates in the Muslim world.

First is the campaign itself against the

so called Islamic State. The success of this group of Jihadists in the name of Islam can be attributed to several factors chief of which were sectarian divisions in Syria and Iraq, multiple divisions among groups opposing Assad in Syria, and above all the woefully weak post Saddam government in Iraq led by an overtly sectarian Prime Minister.

The sectarian divisions in Iraq and Syria have been always there; primarily Shia Sunni divisions. These divisions, however, were less pronounced under Saddam in Iraq and Assad in Syria, both of whom ironically belonged to minority sects. The iron grip of both on the governments of their countries, and their despotic rules helped suppression of the sectarian strife. The war in Iraq and civil war in Syria later opened the Pandora's Box, and sectarian strife began gnawing both countries.

The second enabling factor was the fractured opposition to President Assad and splintering of various groups based on ideologies. It is ironic that despite the despotic image that President Assad held, he like his father depicted a secular image of his government. Among groups that opposed Assad there were secular elements who were mainly disaffected officials, but they soon were outnumbered by other pro-religious groups. In the chaos that followed, the group that emerged to be better organized, disciplined, and also well-armed was the Al-

Qaeda inspired band of warriors. They were not only well-equipped, but also motivated by an aspiration to establish a religious state harking back to their concept of an Islamic state fourteen hundred years ago.

The failure of the government in establishing order in a war torn country coupled with rising economic crises added to the sectarian bias of the government to the Shiite alone. The religious militants who drew heavily from the Sunni sect were able to exploit the feeling of alienation among the minority Sunnis across the border and offer them protection against the perceived injustice against them by the predominantly Shiite government.

Next is the perception of this new or latest US campaign in the Arab and Muslim world. The adoption of the name of Islamic State by the terror group is a clever design to draw attraction and sympathy of the followers of the religion around the globe. The so called ideological bias of the group is also responsible for attracting disenchanted Muslim youth from various parts of the world to its war. To them it is a war for a cause; it is a mission to establish a government based on their ideology. The militant group will portray this war as another western attempt to thwart Muslims to govern themselves according to their way of life and religion. A war against Islamic State is a war against their religion.

Success of this latest war against terrorism, rather against ISIL, will depend on not only destruction of the group itself, but demolition of the lie and myth that the group has created about Islam and the system of government that it claims as the true heritage of Islam. The government that it wants to establish was conceived fourteen hundred years ago for a society that came out of hundreds of years of ignorance, intolerance, and savagery. True heritage of Islam is not the Caliphate that this militant group wants to resurrect; the true heritage of Islam is establishing human rights, tolerance, and promotion of peace and equality.

This success will not come only with air strikes and ground support from allies on the ground, this success will come when the countries in real danger from this threat combine to stop the threat. These countries are not only the immediate neighbors of Syria and Iraq but also the countries where the majority of the population that profess the religion of Islam lives. They need to realize that their religion has been hijacked by a rogue group that believes neither in the core principles of the religion nor practices it. It only wants to grab a territory to practice and preach their violent ideas. The success of this latest war will come about when all of these countries throw in their lot and combine to eradicate this evil.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

Yesterday's answer

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | M | I | S | B | O | S | H |
| T | O | N | I | S | C | I | N |
| L | O | T | T | A | U | N | F |
| A | R | E | V | E | N | D | I |
| S | E | N | D | I | N | G | E |
| S | T | E | A | L | W | E | S |
| P | R | I | C | E | O | P | R |
| S | A | P | V | O | L | G | A |
| S | E | W | M | E | N | D | I |
| P | E | N | D | I | N | G | E |
| A | R | I | A | S | A | R | O |
| C | E | N | T | S | S | A | L |
| E | D | G | E | D | E | L | O |

4 Say inadvertently

5 Western resort

6 Pandora's box held them

7 Sea, to Simone

8 Deposit

9 Mole, e.g.

11 Kitchen fixture

15 John Major, for one

17 Pennsylvania port

18 Haughtiness

19 Horn sound

20 - Mater

21 Take wing

22 Frost work

25 Spring shape

26 Airport announcement

28 Stood up to

30 Frog sound

31 Patriot Patrick

33 Plane part

34 Harrow rival

35 Field workers

36 German cry

37 Pigeon call

38 Binary base

CRYPTOQUOTE

QBFRAQK WJQ IF JUAOQJBO J HFBOS DSFZ

BRO VFUABAWJU IEIBOZ JI MJWYAQK J

NAQQAQK WJQXAJXBO.

- ZJSY M. WFROQ

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

WHY DO GRANDPARENTS AND GRANDCHILDREN GET ALONG SO WELL? THEY HAVE THE SAME ENEMY - THE MOTHER

- CLAUDETTE COLBERT

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One 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.

QUOTEABLE Quote

Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance.

George Bernard Shaw

<h2