

Urban poor in abject health condition

They need affordable medicare

SLUMS are growing seamlessly with one-third of the urban people already living in them. This brings to the fore a pressing public health issue but which comes lower down the conventional order of priorities. Because it is pitted against weightier competing concerns, not necessarily all of which with a human face.

Actually, caring for the urban poor should have been one of the major, most critical areas for government's attention, allocation and investment given that it concerns health and services of a critical mass of people society depends so heavily on, almost existentially.

The government has to exercise its benevolence towards them, taking them under the wings of an inclusive development catering to their special needs. More so because people in the country-side may have access to rural health complexes, howsoever underperforming they may be; but the urban poor have nothing to fall back on. Basically, their utter lack of housing, water and sanitation contribute to their dire health conditions.

Most of them being earning members, daily wage earners keep persisting with ill-health. Sick and yet they cannot afford the costs of treatment. There are facilities for middle or lower middle class people but none for the urban poor. Public hospitals, too not readily accessible to them. Hence, the compelling need for having separate healthcare units or community clinics dispersed around pockets of slum concentrations. The costs must be minimal.

We suggest with all due emphasis that a poor-friendly health insurance scheme must be operated for the urban poor.

Sexual assault in school

School authority's reaction unacceptable

WHAT is as deplorable as the sexual assault and the attempted rape on a minor at a higher secondary school recently is the way the school authorities have handled the matter. It is appalling that they should attempt to shield the perpetrator when they should have been finding out the culprit and punishing him for his abhorrent behaviour.

We wonder why it would need the remonstrance of the parents to start an enquiry. And this when the person responsible for the security and discipline in the school happened to be a woman. Apparently, the rector has not been doing her job with due diligence because, reportedly, this is not the only incident to have occurred in the recent past, and no action was taken in that case either.

There must be something wrong with that school system when the culprit whom many students saw in the act of assaulting the child had not been identified by the authorities even after a week. And we demand strong action against the school authority for reportedly threatening students with dire consequences if they divulged the story to others.

Such despicable acts by male teachers and staff have also happened in the past in other schools too. Regrettably, no action has been taken against those culprits that we know of. We demand that not only the culprit in this case be identified and given the most exemplary punishment, those that have tried to shield him and underplay the issue also be taken to task.

COMMENTS

"Killing of blogger Ananta blow to free speech: HRW"

(May 14, 2015)

Mohammad Javed Chowdhury

Scandal mongering isn't blogging. So sorry to see this happening in Bangladesh. Free speech has a certain limit and we must understand that.

Mustaqem Asad

The Human Rights Watch never bothered when Israel killed thousands of innocent people in Palestine.

Sobuj Momin

Freedom of speech shouldn't mean attacks on Islam. It should have a limitation. Islamophobia is the main reason for growing worldwide terrorism.

Reaz Ud

Writers must understand the difference between 'logical debate' and 'insults'. Murderers must understand killing is not Islamic.

Zaman Khan

The Human Rights Watch has become extremely controversial. In many instances their response is too mild and sometimes they are simply silent.

"Nat'l ID for those aged 15 and above"

(May 13, 2015)

Kalo Jam

The quality of the National ID cards is very bad. First try to improve that. And add some security features, because there are lots of fakes.

If the police were all women



Fahmida Khatun

THE brutal attack of police on protesters in Dhaka city on May 10 has been condemned everywhere. These women and men who were demonstrating against sexual assault by a group of miscreants on April 14, near Dhaka University, had gathered to demand justice of the shameless abuse of women in a public place on Pahela Baishakh. In return what the protesters received from the police does not need to be described in words. Photographs published in the media tell it all – venom expressed through baton charges and indiscriminate beatings.

This happened in a country which has achieved impressive records of economic and social advancements during the last four decades. The incident happened in a country which receives accolades from the international community for making progress in improving school enrolment of girl children, for reducing maternal mortality and improving human development through addressing many gender related issues. It happened in a country where women contribute as much as men do to take forward the wheels of the economy through their hard work and by being engaged in all major sectors of the economy.

And above all, it happened in a country where the supreme power lies in the hand of a woman. Bangladesh is the only country in the world which has women prime ministers for more than two decades successively.

Is it uncommon to see brutality of the law enforcing agents on women while having a woman prime minister? I wish it was. But the role of the law enforcing department is not defined by gender, colour, group or caste of the ruler. That is why we also see situations when there are repetitive incidents of police torture on African American men in the US even after having an African American president. The role of the police is guided by the same principle in the case of both a female and a male head of state. The principle is based on class differences. Protesters, who were chased and grounded ferociously by police, do not belong to the ruling and powerful class, and thus face their wrath. The state wouldn't also do anything to punish the police for beating and stomping on protesters.

It is a regular sight to observe police using their power in mistreating common people, women and also opposition party members. We have seen in the past how police treated some of the political leaders who are ministers of the present government. With the change of power, the police also change their approach towards the opposition party dramatically.

However, for the common citizens, the stance of the law enforcing agency does not change with the change of the regime. The powerless continues to suffer the rage of the cops rightly and wrongly. But the force remains above the law even when they strike peaceful protesters who are not a threat to them. Because they are powered not only with guns and boots, but also protected by the state machinery.

Regrettably, we don't see the use of such power and strength of police when women are assaulted in front of their

eyes. Instead they remain silent and inactive during almost all such incidents. Moreover, there is always an attempt to deny and underplay the situation which encourages the criminals to repeat such dreadful acts.

Would the behaviour of the police toward protesters have been different if they were all women police? Would the police take any action against those who had humiliated women if the police department was headed by a woman and all members were women? Unfortunately, not. As stated above, it doesn't matter if the head of the police

ples outweigh the good ones.

Education, training and sensitisation are important in order to change the mindset of the police toward crimes against women. But these cannot work in isolation without the system of accountability. The culture of impunity gives them the nod to carry on with what they please to do. Also, it should be recognised that the police face new challenges and crises every day which increases their responsibility. In tackling these challenges, the law enforcing department needs to be strengthened. Development partners have undertaken

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force or the state is a woman or a man, what matters is how powerful one is.

But in a civilised society the police should be viewed as protectors, not attackers; supporters of good and opponents of evil. True, over the years the role of our police department has been shaped by political factors to a large extent. But we also have several examples of the heroic roles our police force plays. Many members of the law enforcing agency have risked their lives to save people and to establish law and order in the country. Unfortunately, bad exam-

plify police reform programmes. The government has to allocate more resources for increasing the people-police ratio and the salary of the cops, given the nature of their job. Ultimately, the onus rests on the government since the acts of the cops speak about the governance and state of the rule of law in the country. And we don't want to be known as a country that doesn't know how to establish good governance.

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MODI'S VISIT TO CHINA

The shadow of border disputes

Smruti S Pattanaik

NONE of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign visits drew as much attention as his three days visit to China. The visit assumed significance in the background of global and regional developments like the growing tension in the South China Sea, US 'pivot Asia' policy and China's aggressive quest to pursue 'one belt and one road' initiative and more specifically in the South Asia context, the BCIM corridor, the vigorously pursued Maritime Silk Route (MSR), the proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and its increasing involvement in Afghanistan.

China's increasing foray to the South Asia region has already raised concerns among the strategic community in India but what has deepened their suspicion is its increasing assertiveness in the border and its position on Jammu and Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh which China refers to as South Tibet. While these are important issues that would bedevil the bilateral relations between the two countries, both India and China are also eager to strengthen trade and investment and exhibited a desire to have a common position on climate change especially for the upcoming Paris conference.

Bilaterally, border disputes would continue to overshadow the greater desire for engagement. China's controversial position on issuing stapled visa to the residents of Jammu and Kashmir was a major bone of contention. According to reports, China started issuing stapled visas to the residents of J&K from 2009 while it did not adopt a similar policy towards the residents of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) which indicated its stance with regard to India and Pakistan's position on J&K.

Its policy of issuing stapled visa to residents of Arunachal Pradesh started in 2010 and in the past Beijing has always issued statements objecting to Indian Prime Ministers' visit to Arunachal Pradesh. It successfully blocked an ADB loan to Arunachal Pradesh in 2009. Reacting to India's objection on stapled

visa to residents of Arunachal, China said, "China has resorted to a special arrangement of issuance of stapled visa to address the need for travel of local people. This gesture is out of goodwill and flexibility and if we do not do that we will not be able to address the concern of outbound and overseas travel of these people." India raised this issue during the bilateral meeting. However, Beijing's ambiguity toward improving bilateral relations was reflected when the state owned CCTV beamed a controversial map of India that showed Arunachal as South Tibet and a large part of J&K was missing from the map on the eve of Prime Minister Modi's visit. Such ambiguity was

decided to enhance their cooperation on counter-terrorism and also asked countries to cease cross border movement of terrorists. China is facing the threat of terrorism in its restive Xinjiang province. Their Navies also hold joint Passage Exercise (PASSEX) and Search and Rescue (SAR) exercises. Both the countries have decided to take steps to address the trade and investment barrier and agreed to constitute a Strategic Economic Dialogue to iron out the differences. In spite of objections from the security establishment, Prime Minister Modi has decided to provide e-visas to the Chinese tourists in a bid to enhance people-to-people contact. All

our relationships with other countries do not become a source of concern for each other". While China is expanding its relations with South Asian neighbours, it reacted angrily to India's statement on South China Sea in May 2014, its joint statement with the US mentioning need for peace in South China Sea. Earlier, ONGC's oil exploration with Vietnam in the South China Sea was criticised by Beijing.

India is involved in the BCIM corridor but it has certain reservations on the MSR and perceives this as China's effort to bolster its presence in the Indian Ocean which would have strategic implications.

India-China relations cannot be divorced from global geo-politics and its regional context. China's engagement in South Asia would be watched by India carefully as China watches India's engagement with its East Asia neighbours and specifically India's relations with Mongolia, Vietnam, South Korea and Japan. India is now part of the East Asia summit and China is now an observer in SAARC, aiming to become a member. Both the countries' relations with the United States will have implications for their bilateral relations and regional engagement.

As India and China grow economically, their roles in regional and global forums are likely to increase. Though strategic and geo-political conflicts and the position the respective countries take will have an impact on bilateral relations, both have expansive ground to forge close cooperation on some of the global commons that affect the interests of the developing countries. Issues of energy, climate change, terrorism, protecting sea lanes of communication, dealing with piracy would bring the two countries together. India will closely watch China's engagement with its South Asian neighbours and how its bilateral disputes with Beijing unfold and draw strategic conclusions. There are more grey areas than dual shades of black and white to the bilateralism that the two countries are pursuing.

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Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

demonstrated when major incursions happened in Ladakh when the Chinese President was on a state visit to India.

Yet, India and China realise the 'imperative of forging strategic trust' as a prelude to expanding bilateral ties and enhance their global role. Both the countries recognised the need to settle the boundary dispute and maintain 'peace and tranquillity'. They decided to institute a State/Provincial Leaders' Forum – a first of its kind – to engage the Indian states and Chinese province. Both the countries have been holding joint counter-terrorism exercises and the fifth such exercise is going to be held in China this year. The two countries

these reflect the multiplicity of India-China bilateral relations.

Regionally, China's relations with Pakistan has been a major factor in trust deficit between the two countries. India has raised strong objection to China's engagement in Pakistan occupied Kashmir and its proposed China Pakistan Economic Corridor that would pass through the PoK. Beijing's policy of propping Pakistan to counter-balance India through nuclear and other strategic engagements is well known. However, while emphasising that India and China can increase their engagement in their 'shared neighbourhood', India also made it clear that "we must ensure that

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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'Democracy' of the government

The present government often claims to be democratic. I have a few questions about that.

1. After the 2008 election, the PM appointed over half a dozen advisers and made her cabinet colleagues nobodies in the decision-making process. In which parliamentary democracy in the world do such things happen?

2. She argued that the caretaker form of the government is not representative of the people because its members are not elected. The election held on January 5, 2014 was not participated by the main opposition. Most of the voters also boycotted that

election. How can she and her colleagues in the parliament claim that they are still people's representatives?

3. In parliamentary democracy, a functional opposition is a must. Can we call Ershad's Jatiyo Party a real opposition party when some of their members have also joined the cabinet?

4. How does the government defend the large scale anomalies in the last city corporation polls? Is vote rigging a part of their version of 'democracy'?

MAS Molla
Life Member, BAAS
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Victory for enclave people



The Indian parliament recently passed the historic Land Boundary Agreement (LBA). It is a milestone in the bilateral relationship between the two countries. From now on, the enclave people will no longer be stateless. This is definitely a victory for them.

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