

Benefits from safety net programmes

Nutritional awareness key

A two-year joint research carried out by the World Food Programme and the International Food Policy Research Institute has come up with some interesting findings on how to improve the benefits of safety net programmes (SSNPs) being run in the country. Currently, programmes target ultra-poor women with small children and incorporate various components to improve their lot. These include cash only, food only, cash and food combined, and conducting training programmes. What the study has found is that the greatest impact comes when target households are given education on nutrition. The informed families change consumption patterns where nutritional value of food is given precedence. This has shown the greatest promise as many of the SSNPs are targeted at the 36 per cent of children in the country who suffer from stunted growth.

The learning from the research will help policymakers to bring requisite changes to various SSNPs, which is important as the country has allocated an estimated \$3.9 billion in the current fiscal. Malnutrition is still a major problem in the country with about a quarter of the population living below the poverty line. Hence better information dissemination on what constitutes good food could go a long way in making children belonging to the poorer sections of society healthier. Research also shows that Bangladesh loses an estimated \$1 billion in productivity linked to adults who suffered from nutrition deficiency as children. It is hoped that the results will be taken into consideration in making necessary changes in operationalising SSNPs to make future generations healthier.

BCL factional clash and attack on journalists

Ruling party should put a brake on it

It is disquieting to note that during a clash between two factions of Jahangirnagar University (JU) unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) three activists got injured and three journalists were assaulted. It is alleged that the conflict erupted over sharing of money obtained out of bidding for a public work inside the university.

Why are students involved in the tender business? It has become a culture in public universities that ruling party student activists get engaged in bidding, seeking ransom and other illegal activities to make a quick buck. It seems that money and privilege motivate these students to participate in student politics, not any ideology or pursuit of well-being for general students. As a result, we often see clashes between student activists over petty interests which sometimes turn into lethal conflicts and vitiate the campus environment. In a similar factional clash at JU a student named Zubair was killed in 2012.

We strongly condemn the attack on journalists while they were covering the incident. Such untoward occurrences only show the party hierarchy's insensitivity to professional discharge of duty by media people.

We urge the university authority to take stern action against these raucous elements. Elections to students unions have been long overdue although this could have been a viable anecdote to the un-student like behaviour. The BCL for its part should try to live up to its past glory.

COMMENTS

"Ansarullah outfit banned" (May 26, 2015)

Safil Uddin Bhuiyan

If they are engaged in militancy then it is right decision; but without proper investigation, it's not wise to ban any organisation.

Abrar Amin

Why was the government so late to do so? They should have been banned the moment they murdered Avijit Roy. They are a violent terrorist organisation.

"Rohingyas branded as Bangladeshis"(May 25, 2015)

Reaz Ud

Bangladesh must do something with the help of the international community and UN to stop this inhumanity and nonsense. The military government of Myanmar wants unrest in this region once again.

Shah Alam

Myanmar government must take the responsibility of their migrants. The international community should come forward to resolve the issue.

"Clean Dhaka top priority" (May 24, 2015)

Munthab Chowdhury

What about a safer environment for women?

Sohel Rana

Please act on it rather than just say it.

Ashifur Rahman

If possible then reduce the traffic jam. People will appreciate that greatly.

Rubel Barua

It's really hard to clean Dhaka city without people's awareness.

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
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ndc, psc (Retd)

WHILE most in Bangladesh overlooked or chose to disregard the Indian External Affairs Minister's comment in the Indian Lok Sabha amidst the euphoria of the passage of the Indian 119 Constitutional Amendment ratifying the 41-year-old Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between Bangladesh and India, it did raise mild curiosity here because of the message that it carried. The Indian minister had said, "It is often alleged that India is a 'big brother' in South Asia. But let me assure you India will never behave like a big brother but like an elder brother who cares about its neighbours."

These are very encouraging words. And it conforms to the marked slant and reorientation of the foreign policy of the Modi government, which conjoins India's 'neighbour first' policy with its policy of international engagement. Evidently, India wants to shed its 'big brother' image which is more than a perception among the other regional countries, and it would not be wrong to suggest that its weight has been thrown about from time to time, often in more subtle than direct manner. And that

perhaps is the view that the other regional countries hold too. This slant also demonstrates a bigger aspiration which is to attain a status of world power. It is to the credit of the Modi government that it has realised that without gaining acceptability as a regional power its aspiration to be member of the international Ivy League would not be fulfilled. Thus realpolitik is what motivates the Indian government's new look at the region. Undoubtedly, India has all the endowments to take the position of a world power, certainly of a power that can influence the region much beyond its immediate neighbours.

No country can or should grudge India's aspiration, and we in Bangladesh must now start to learn to live not with a big neighbour as vast as India, one of the only two we have, but also a neighbour that does not only act big but also acts great; we have said before, bigness does not necessarily accord greatness to any country.

Sushma Swaraj's comments assume more significance in view of the impending visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Bangladesh. Quite naturally, Modi could not have come earlier simply because it would have been meaningless to come to Dhaka without giving anything to Bangladesh. Given that Bangladesh had met all of India's security and strategic requirement, what Bangladesh has received so far are assurances only. Now that the last impediment to the implementation of the

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1974 LBA has been removed with the enabling legislation, the time is most propitious for the Indian PM to visit this country.

We would like to take hope from the Indian Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh's declaration, coming a fortnight ahead of PM Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh on June 6, that Teesta water-sharing accord with Bangladesh will be finalised soon. Reportedly, Mamata Banerjee is not likely to accompany Prime Minister Modi because, according to an Indian newspaper report, the Paschim Banga Chief Minister had told her close aides that she "has done her job" by agreeing to the LBA and there was "no need for her to accompany the Prime Minister." We would not like to read anything negative in that. But while Bangladesh newspapers in the last

several days have carried reports of the many deals that are likely to be signed during the Indian PM's visit, the Teesta is not on the list.

There is the likelihood that the deal may become linked with state politics because to quote another comment, "Though the chief minister has responded positively so far on the Teesta pact, it would not be politically wise for her to associate with the agreement, as West Bengal goes to the polls in 2016 and water-sharing could be a major issue in North Bengal, where her Trinamool Congress doesn't have a strong base." Thus what we in Bangladesh would like to know is how 'soon' will be soon. The 1974 LBA had run into 2015, and for some, a minute may consist of more than the usual sixty seconds.

Two years ago, we wrote in these very columns after the botched visit of Manmohan Singh that India had lost the chance to prove its greatness by standing Bangladesh up on the Teesta. Bangladesh would like to see India as neither a big nor an elder brother but a gracious neighbour that delivers on its commitment.

As for Bangladesh, while our foreign office has been engaged primarily in devising policies to coexist with India, we have failed to use our strategic importance to our advantage. More on that next week.

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A Recipe for Disaster

CLEAR AS MUD



AHMED HUSSAIN

A few days ago, a Garo woman was abducted from a busy street in Kuril in the capital while she was waiting for transport and was gang raped in a moving microbus. The ghastly incident that has shocked the nation comes only a month after a string of assaults on women that took place during the Bangla New Year festival, where organised goons sexually harassed a number of women at the heart of Dhaka University campus and that too under the very nose of some close circuit television cameras.

There are reports on Facebook and Twitter of women being abducted from Pahela Baishakh celebrations across the capital, news that cannot be independently verified. As the photographs of the perpetrators of the sexual harassment went viral in the social media, a couple of alleged offenders have been identified by the general public and their photos and identity were published. No arrest has yet been made for the crime which has tainted the most secular celebration of the Bangalis.

To make matters even more grievous, the police officers who were patrolling the area on the fateful day of Pahela Baishakh did not intervene even after the victims cried for help. A procession protesting police's failure to nab the culprits was brutally suppressed later with women protesters kicked and manhandled by truncheon-wielding male members of the police force.

Let it be-it is as though this is what the government is telling us to do about the Pahela Baishakh assault. Be it the gang-rape of the Garo women or the mass molestation of women in the Dhaka University campus, the epitome of our secular progressive movement, the police's way of handling of cases of sexual harassment leaves a lot to be desired. This is no less than shocking, for the person at the helm of the country is a woman, and there is no questioning her unwavering and unreserved stance

when it comes to establishing women's rights in the country.

There is no denying that the government alone can do little to fight this social malaise. But it can make stringent laws against portrayal of women as sexual objects in the media. Media's role in the spread of sexual harassment and rape is undeniable as it is what moulds our collective psyche. This is especially true for television advertisements where a woman's body is displayed as a commodity that is being used to sell a certain product. A certain

be of fair complexion. The advert of a famous ballpoint pen can be a case in point. A girl child is singing in the background where she says that her father uses the pen (a man is seen working in some office), and the girl says her mother also uses the pen (a woman is seen making a list of groceries). The message is loud and clear. The advert clearly defines the roles of the two genders. And we grow up watching on TV how a woman can show some skin to compensate for whatever lacking she may have in other aspects of life.

lovers in a compromising position, which were later published online. Some famous cases have been reported, and a few arrests have also been made. And yet the government did little to warn the young women in the country about such traps. Of late all young adults in Bangladesh have been given some sex education at the secondary level, but it misses to teach something very basic: how to respect the fairer gender or to see women as an equal partner in life.

Instead we have a generation of men who have been taught the use of



ILLUSTRATION:DOAA EL ADL

angle of the camera or a particular lighting effect is created to expose certain physical attributes that are completely irrelevant to the product for which the commercial advertisement was supposed to be made in the first place.

Domination and subjugation of women are relentlessly aired on TV. It is as though a man can get a job (in some cases a much-sought after cricket match ticket) through hard work and intelligence, but in the case of the woman, she needs to be pretty and must

Then there is the evil of pornography. Some of the widely accessed websites from Bangladesh cater solely to the viewing of explicit adult content. While the state can do very little to stop its citizens from viewing porn online, it can always be on guard to stop its distribution. It can also make some online filters and raise campaigns among young students to make sure that children do not fall prey to this monster. There are instances where unsuspecting women were videoed by their male

contraceptives but do not have any outlet to make use of their sexual awakening. On top of it all, these young men have access to television and the internet which falsely show a fantasy world where women are apparently 'dying' to be noticed and loved by men. Add to that a culture of impunity and an erosion of moral values and what you get is indeed a recipe for disaster.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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John Nash's sudden demise creates a vacuum

We are shocked to know the news from media reports that Nobel laureate mathematician John Nash has been killed in a car crash along with his wife in New Jersey, USA on May 24, 2015. His sudden demise leaves a vacuum in the field of Mathematics. Nash was awarded the Nobel Prize for economics in 1994. The Oscar-winning film "A Beautiful Mind" was based on his life. We pray for the departed soul of this genius.

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Teaching swimming in schools

In mid-March, many dailies reported that the government had decided to make swimming mandatory for all school children. As reported, letters from the authorities were supposed to be issued to all schools within the next few days. It will take time and detailed effort to organise all the logistics that will vary from school to school. But the sooner this job gets done the better.

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