

Justice elusive to abused children

Make crisis centres more effective

THE one-stop crisis centres (OCC), formed in 2001 to facilitate medical treatment, police assistance, social services, legal assistance and counselling for women and children who were victims of repression, have reportedly been reduced to providing medical services only. While we laud the government's initiative to cater for the medical needs of child victims of rape at the eight OCCs, a lot more needs to be done to provide them with effective legal services that will lead to the convictions of perpetrators of despicable crimes.

According to a leading Bangla daily, one third of the total number of people who sought the OCCs' services during the last 15 years were children, 80 percent of whom fell victim to rape. An alarmingly high percentage of their families, however, did not pursue legal actions, sometimes opting to strike a 'compensation' deal with the abuser. The reasons behind this chilling fact are multilayered—social stigma, pressure from powerful quarters, lengthy legal procedures and lack of security, to name a few. In many instances, the OCC failed to follow up on the cases to see justice delivered.

Rape, sexual harassment and violence against children are on the rise. An effective way to combat this menace would be to bring the criminals to justice in an exemplary fashion. And let's not fail to recognise that the starting point is filing and preparing a case that will withstand the court's scrutiny.

Special tribunals may be established to facilitate speedy trials of such cases. But most importantly, the government must provide security to the families of the victims during and after trials.

Rayerbazar memorial

Maintain its sanctity

THE Rayerbazar memorial is the site we go to pay our respects every year to intellectuals massacred on the eve of victory on December 14, 1971. A tomb stands there commemorating the renowned academics, teachers, litterateurs, doctors, engineers and other eminent personalities who were killed to cripple the new-born nation intellectually and in terms of professional wealth. As with all national monuments, the Rayerbazar complex is supposed to be a protected site. Indeed a placard stands there with the declaration that the precincts are not to be used for any other purpose than to pay respect to the martyred heroes of the Liberation War.

Yet today, we see that the sacred premise has become a playground for children who use the water pool in front of the memorial. People wilfully ignore the official sign and use it for sports, bathing and washing. Although the city corporation is supposed to be guarding the site against such prohibited activity, we are shocked to find that beyond the putting up a sign, there is nothing by way of safeguarding the sanctity of the place. Defiling of such a sacred site speaks volumes about some people's ignorance of history and lack of respect towards martyrs. Needless to say, we abhor this sort of behaviour and sincerely hope authorities would take adequate measures to fend off such undesirable intrusions. The sanctity of the memorial must be protected and honoured.

COMMENTS

"HSC pass rate 8-year low"
(August 10, 2015)

Prince Rintu Mollik

Political violence is responsible for this low pass rate.

Sk Al-Amin Hassan

Yes, political crisis is responsible for this result but I think the questions were also very hard.

Nurul Haque Tushar

It's because question papers were not leaked this year!

Arina

But how that could be? Like previous years, Facebook was flooded with leaked out questions of this year's HSC exam!

"22 highways off-limits to autorickshaws"
(August 8, 2015)

Babul Ahmed

Right decision, but this alone won't solve the problem. We need well-trained drivers, implementation of law, public awareness etc.

"Resist 'Thought Prisons'"
(August 9, 2015)

Saleh Chowdhury

If someone's blog hurts the religious sentiment of others, the latter cannot silence the former by killing him. They can only silence him by using their pen intelligently.

The postmodern posters

and billboards of our times



KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

THEY seem unreal and far removed from the tradition of advertising or effective propaganda. Dhaka is invisible this minute. The trees can't be seen; the major structures have disappeared; the concrete of the walls have evaporated into thin air. All one can see are the ugly billboards and even uglier posters. One cannot drive past any road without visually experiencing the larger than life billboards with pictures of lesser-known people being pasted all over them. The sizes are shocking; the content badly and disappointingly designed and presented.

'Disappointment' is perhaps not the right word. Aggrieved is perhaps better. I assume most people like me feel violated by the billboards and posters that eat our lovely city up. Given the fact that the city is probably at its worst with noise, air, water pollution today, each one of us living in this city still feel that some more green, some more cleanliness and some more parks would do us all some good. Given the fact that most of the parks are grabbed by many people who profess being apparently powerful, many still believe that there ought to be even more powerful voices to correct these offenders. This is what, many people, I assume, desire.

But how can it ever happen in a city, which has more than 2500 ugly, unauthorised billboards strewn all over town? How can it ever happen in a city,

where the culture of billboard is approved and allowed by mindless and compromising authorisations? Your columnist just drove past a huge four-storey billboard in Mohakhali, which has been placed over a four-storey building, itself endangering the structural integrity of the building. Unipoles sliding to the side of the billboards are also super common in the city. Also equally common sights are billboards swallowing the footpath and the roads. Instead of the 50 yards distance being maintained between two billboards,

Given the fact that most of the parks are grabbed by many people who profess being apparently powerful, many still believe that there ought to be even more powerful voices to correct these offenders.

there are many places where they are as close as five to ten feet apart. How do they manage to stand as they do?

The deviations can be listed and the list could stretch up to eternity.

One more thing that haunts Dhaka is the overwhelming number of posters. Special days demand special display. August 15, for this nation, is a date, which transcends and is most rightfully placed

above all controversy. Considering the fact that it is the 40th anniversary of the martyrdom of the Father of the Nation, could we not have designed posters in a more meaningful way and put them up in a more aesthetic manner? All over the world, posters have made a difference to history. Why can we not do the same?

A much-celebrated Russian artist, Dimitri Moor brought in a different dimension to the world of graphics design and impacted the politics of his times, when he designed posters that stood for the heroic allies and portrayed the opposing, oppressive evil forces. His works of art in black and red depicted his views against the capitalists and red was essentially used for flags and the workers' shirts.

Another Russian artist, Braslavskij drew posters for the emancipation of women. These women in her posters appear as ones who supported the communist agenda and wanted to be freed from the duties of being wives and mothers. A woman, pictured in one of the posters, is drawn androgynously, and is seen wearing masculine clothing hiding her female figure, accompanied by a cold hard stare masking her emotions. The background of the poster displays the strength of the women force who strive to do the same hard labour as men, and the main woman in the picture carries the red flag of the communist movement.

One of the Irish Jim Fitzpatrick drew the Che Guevara in 1968. Struck by grief Fitzpatrick drew Che based on his brief meeting with the leader during Che's visit to Killee, Ireland in 1963. Till date, this poster of Che stands as an icon of anti-Vietnam war protests. This image has

continued to automatically become a symbolic tool of any meaningful revolution in any part of the world.

In this column, references have been made to only three out of hundreds of exceptionally gifted artists just to stress on the fact that grief deserves thoughtful space and respect. Putting up posters of Bangabandhu and then adding the names and pictures of our own selves or organisations defeat the single day, which must be remembered with maximum reverence. Unfortunately, most of the posters of the Father of the Nation have smaller images of him coupled with the advertiser's happy mug shots. It seems that many were in a hurry to just print thousands of posters, marking the anniversary of martyrdom of this great leader without even having time to design a decent one.

Posters can add to positive perception and posters can recreate the grandeur of history. For the sake of the next generation, going forward, the authorities should invest in design competitions through which artists will have to submit poster designs for specific occasions and ultimately create brilliant visuals enriching our history and benefitting the tomorrows of our land.

This way, the tale of greatness will be told far better than how it is being done this minute with callous red drops of blood on the posters on the Father of the Nation, accompanied by even bigger, self-glorified images of the attention seeking insignificant aspiring leaders, belonging, yet, most unfortunately, to entities which most rightfully have a valid political legacy.

The writer is Managing Director of Mohammadi Group.

The Naga Peace Accord and the challenges ahead

SMRUTI S PATTANAİK

THE "historic Peace Accord", signed between the National Socialist Council of Nagaland - led by Isaac Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah - popularly known as the NSCN(IM) and the Government of India in New Delhi on August 3, after 80 rounds of peace negotiations, expanding over 16 years, is expected to herald a new era of peace in the North Eastern region.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said, "Today, we mark not merely the end of a problem, but the beginning of a new future" and assured that India would be a "partner as you restore your pride and prestige." Terms like 'pride', 'prestige', 'honour' and 'dignity' were used when Muivah spoke at the ceremony, indicating the deep-seated feeling of the Nagas and their larger stake in the political system that recognises their unique culture and history and protecting them from the integrating tendency of the nation-state. Nineteen other top leaders from various organisations in Nagaland were present when the peace Accord was signed, reflecting a broad consensus.

What has generated controversy around the Peace Accord is that the terms and condition have not yet been made public. Even though the government terms this as a Peace Accord, Muivah described the accord as a "framework agreement" for political settlement of the Naga issue and recognition of the "unique history and situation of the Nagas." This, thus, creates doubts regarding the nature of the Peace Accord. The secrecy surrounding the Accord is also creating unnecessary apprehensions among various other major stakeholders. The agreement has ruled out the redrawing of boundaries of the present states in North East, which is a major assurance to other stakeholders. The NSCN (IM) has given up their demand of unifying all the Naga areas under a single state to create a greater Nagalim - a demand opposed tooth and nail by Indian states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh that have a significant Naga population. The NSCN has declared a ceasefire since 1997. The Government of India had also extended



PHOTO: AFP

the ceasefire with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khole-Kitovi).

The Accord has brought in sharp criticism from the state governments. In a joint press conference held in New Delhi, the chief ministers of the Congress-ruled North Eastern states severely criticised the manner in which the Peace Accord was signed, without taking the chief ministers of the states into confidence, despite the prime minister's emphasis on "cooperative federalism". The government, though, spoke to the Governor of Nagaland and intimated the opposition parties regarding the impending Peace Accord. The negotiation was piloted by the Prime Minister's Office and the main interlocutor was the former Chairman of Joint Intelligence Committee, R.N. Ravi. Earlier, Ravi had alleged that the ceasefire agreement with Khaplang was negated by the Home Ministry in March without consulting him. The challenge is to bring major opposing factions, notably the NSCN-K led by S.S. Khaplang, on board and have them accept the Accord, which would be a pre-requisite for peace.

In March this year, the NSCN (Khaplang) called off the ceasefire, ostensibly protesting his group's exclusion from the talks. It expelled the pro-talk lobby within the NSCN-K, Wangtin Naga and P. Tikhak, who supported the

ceasefire in the meeting of the Cease Fire Supervisory Board (CFSB) against Khaplang's decision to call it off. After their expulsion, the two formed the NSCN (Reformation). In 2011, Khaplang had also expelled the group's General Secretary N. Kitovi Zhimomi and Commander in Chief Khole Konyak, two senior leaders, alleging that their dedication to the Naga cause was "doubtful" and blamed them for "celebrating unification anniversary" when cadres were being killed by security forces. This division led to infightings between the cadres of Khaplang and Kitovi-Khole supporters. After calling off the ceasefire in March, Khaplang moved to Myanmar and reportedly masterminded the attack against the Indian military convoy, killing 18 soldiers and resulting in a cross-border raid.

However, Khaplang has expanded his network and has given shelter to other rebel groups from the North East in Sagaing, Myanmar, where he is based. He has signed a peace deal with the Myanmar military in April 2012 and is permitted to remain there. The Khaplang group is part of nine insurgent groups, which includes the Pareth Barua faction of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO). Together they formed an umbrella organisation, the

United Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (ULFWSEA). However, there are reports that Khaplang called off the ceasefire after coming under the influence of Pareth Baruah who is suspected to be in China.

By concluding an Accord with the NSCN-IM, the Indian government has taken advantage of the existing fault lines between the Myanmar Nagas, led by Khaplang, and the Indian Nagas, led by Issak-Muivah. However, for greater peace of the region, Khaplang must be taken on board. Presidents of Naga Hoho, which is considered as an apex body of Naga tribes, and the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) are planning to travel to Myanmar after August 15 to persuade Khaplang to re-impose ceasefire for greater peace. New Delhi has cleared their travel. It is yet to be seen whether Khaplang will rethink his strategy and join hands with its one time comrade and now arch-rival NSCN (IM) in heralding a new era of peace in the region that has kept economic activities hostage, resulting in the widening of criminal networks which is benefiting from the insurgency at the cost of people.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Punish the arsonists

Recently, the prime minister distributed 222 cheques for over Tk 8.37 crore among the relatives of 37 burn victims and owners of 185 damaged transports during the 92-day blockade and shutdown programme enforced by the BNP-Jamaat alliance. The prime minister also reiterated her government's steadfast stand to take legal action against those responsible for colossal damages to the people and killing innocent people alive in the name of politics.

We earnestly appeal to the PM to direct law enforcing agencies to arrest and punish the culprits with the highest punishment so that no one dares



to burn innocent people in future.

Md. Ali Akbar
Monipuri Para
Tejgaon, Dhaka

'Ragging' in educational institutions

One of the most common bad practices that prevail in our educational institutions is 'ragging'. It is usually the senior students who try to bully the newcomers. Ragging is nothing but sadism. The effects of ragging are disastrous. The victims often become mentally and physically traumatised. The victims also practice this when they become seniors. Ragging should be declared an illegal and punishable act.

Surzana Sharmin
Dept. of Business Administration
SUST, Sylhet