

Jubo League attack on school students

We condemn it, punish the offenders

We are shocked and appalled that 40 school children were injured during a protest in their school premises by activists believed to be with the Jubo League. According to the school authorities, the activists had tried to extort Tk 15,000 from them on Friday in the name of arranging National Mourning Day programmes in the area, and beat up a teacher of the school when the authorities refused to comply with the demand. It was to protest this extortion attempt and subsequent harassment of their teacher that the students had gathered on Sunday morning, but the youth wing members pounced on them with sticks and sharp weapons. They mercilessly beat the students, resulting in hospitalisation of 22 of the injured -- 14 girls and 8 boys.

To begin with, that school authorities should be threatened and harassed for extortion, and that too, for the sake of observing National Mourning Day, is deplorable and does grave dishonour to the memory of Bangabandhu. On top of that, the ferocious attack on young school students, who were trying to stand up for what's right, speaks volumes about the moral and ideological bankruptcy of the said activists.

The Kachua Jubo League's denial that these men are members of Jubo League imply that the youth wing is unwilling to accept responsibility for the activities of its members -- or at any rate, of people who are using its name to extort money. The ruling party cannot continue to turn a blind eye towards the terrorising pursuits of its activists, the extent of which has been increasing at an alarming rate, defying party exhortations to the contrary. Exemplary measures must be taken, both by the state and the party, to punish the wrongdoers and end the culture of impunity shielding ruling party associates.

VAT from private universities

Students should be spared

SOME eminent citizens over a BBC programme have urged the government to lift VAT from private universities. The private universities, according to the relevant Act, are supposed to be run on a non-profit basis. VAT is usually imposed on profits, so that normally the question of levying VAT on them should not have arisen.

But then 7.5 percent VAT has been imposed on private universities. Our position is that the universities should not pass the burden on to the students because the latter are having to pay high fees already. The Law Minister in the BBC Sanglap has reportedly stated that the government does not want the universities to take VAT from students. But he has made the removal of VAT apparently conditional upon the universities raising their fees and claiming VAT from the students. We wonder if this will solve the problem.

First of all the question of raising fees from institutions required to function non-profitably is contradictory. Then the fees in most cases are already at a high notch, so that raising it further will be burdensome for the students. In any case, the point we would like reiterate is that under no circumstances should the incidence of VAT fall on the students.

Overall, it can hardly be overemphasised that most of the private universities are making a salutary contribution in imparting higher education to a large number of students in a context where the public universities could not have accommodated them.

COMMENTS

"Teenage girl raped in city"
(August 16, 2015)

Raihan Ahmed

Where are we headed? Towards hell?

"Five killed by army"
(August 16, 2015)

Kazi Zehad

Yes, they are terrorists. But why? Because they have lost their land and home.

Rafat Kabir

When someone takes your land, burns your house, rapes your wife and sisters even though you belong to the same nation, you wouldn't feel much patriotism, I guess.

"Mahmudur gets 3yrs for not giving wealth info." (August 14, 2015)

Abu Elias Sarker

I don't like him. I never read Amar Desh. But there are thousands of ruling party men who should have been jailed for the same offence.

Mamun Chowdhury

This is injustice. This is like either you support me or go behind bars.

Saiful Alam Shelly

Nobody is above the law. Why did he refuse to submit the wealth statement? As a retired senior lawyer, I am personally interested to know what his explanation was.

Humane banking for human capital

OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

WHEN I joined the first private bank of Bangladesh some 27 years ago, the definition of a good banker remained as before: a star performer who returns home at night walking with an unsteady gait almost like a drunkard. Unfortunately the definition still applies.

The mission of the private banking products was to modernise banking services, but the top level managers, who mainly came from inefficient public sector banks, failed to deliver the notion of smart banking to the new employees. In the early 1990s, the main branches of private banks were largely computerised, saving an enormous amount of time for accounting and calculations. Although labour productivity increased, which empowered the employees to finish their jobs earlier than usual, the senior managers did not like to let the young officers leave the workplace on time at the end of banking hours at 5 pm. The definition of a good banker asserted: the more a banker stays beyond 5 pm, the better the banker he or she is. This mindset of top level managers ruined the possibility of building human capital.

Banking is an evolving discipline where we need to educate our workforce in a continuous fashion so the industry can take advantage of new products and services. Although the core service of banking is the intermediation between savings and investments, the styles and methods of these products require constant updating in this age of competition and economic openness. Hence, a bank can remain at the cutting edge of the products and services as long as it encourages its workforce to pursue higher studies in economics and business. To make it happen, a modern bank has to provide ample time to its employees so they can pursue business studies or train them to learn skills and technology in the age of digitisation. This way of building human capital indirectly helps the bank to improve its future profitability. But the old mindset of holding the employees beyond usual banking hours is damaging not only for the family life of bankers but also for the future productivity of the banking industry as a whole.

Bangladesh is a poor performer in the knowledge economy index. We cannot afford this anymore when we target to be a model performer in growth and development. We cannot let our growth potential sag in the near future. To reverse the weakness in the knowledge base, the banking industry, as one of the biggest employers of the

nation, must come forward to change its attitude in handling human resources. More humane approaches are warranted. We need to not only let bankers make balance sheets but also strike a work-life balance through which their day-to-day pleasure and productivity will swell up.

When machines are taking more responsibilities to run banks for 24 hours, human beings warrant to be released on or before the closing hour so they can have ample opportunities to perform various functions such as: 1) spending more quality time with their spouses 2) tutoring their kids and taking part in leisure activities 3) pursuing higher studies to improve productivity 4)

officers have to sacrifice more and more hours from their private lives, making late-sitting a norm rather than an exception.

A balance between work and life has collapsed, marking the victory of inhumane banking that threatens the growth of human capital. Workers cannot go to colleges or universities for additional training and study. They miss the sunrise and hardly see the sunset. They have no energy to pursue higher studies to improve skills and knowledge. That is one of the major reasons why Bangladesh performs so poor in the knowledge economy index.

The situation has been even worse since the



taking care of their health, and finally 5) engaging in social services and cultural entertainment. Life remains incomplete without these attributes.

Some enslaved employees argue that both the directors and executives become the direct beneficiaries of holding the workforce beyond office hours. Top level managers earn extra profit by engaging the workforce for extra hours which are not always compensated. Bank owners reward the managers for making it happen. Reciprocity of mutual interest between bank owners and managers goes on and on, making the life of employees dry and dreamless. To respond to cutthroat competition among workers, the young

government changed the banking hours from 9 to 5 to 10 to 6. A few lucky are released at 6 pm. Most officers work one or two extra hours almost every day, losing energy and spirit to think about future development. City-dwellers facing traffic jam return home at 9 pm or even later. Female bankers have to jump into domestic drudgery even after finishing arduous banking hours. Time has come to change our mindset. Humane banking is a must for improving human capital in the future so that people's work lives remain enjoyable and the country's growth sustainable.

The writer is chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Local Innovation for Local Problems

VISIONARY VOICES



MUHAMMAD HAMID ZAMAN

As we learn more about the threat from substandard and counterfeit medicines, it is becoming clear that it is a far greater problem than previously thought. It is

also a scourge that is most acutely felt in developing countries, where fake and low-quality pharmaceuticals kill more than 500,000 people a year and affect millions more by contributing to the emergence of diseases that are resistant to existing treatments.

Compounding the problem is the approach taken by policymakers in the developing world, who are far more likely to look for solutions abroad than at home. This shortsightedness is a grave mistake that impedes innovation and progress. When it comes to tackling high-impact health challenges like the proliferation of fake or inferior drugs, local solutions and local innovations are not only likely to be central to any successful effort; they have the potential to provide benefits that go far beyond the scope of the original problem.

Throughout the developing world, but most evidently in Africa, two groups are interested in finding tools to combat the menace of bad drugs. One group, comprising students, entrepreneurs, and researchers, seeks solutions that are local, original, and tailored to the needs of their societies. Its members are quick to share ideas and eager to collaborate. While this group has produced some

innovative solutions – for example, the Ghanaian entrepreneur Bright Simmons is using mobile technology to address the counterfeit-drug problem – many more passionate local inventors and entrepreneurs must get involved.

The other group is made up of government officials, including regulators. They, too, are deeply concerned about the scourge of low-quality and fake drugs, but they are reluctant to rely on local innovation. In their minds, the solutions already exist, in the form of high-end technology designed and developed in the world's richest countries. The challenge, for this group, lies in finding the financial resources to import these technologies.

For developing-country leaders, the effort needed to create an ecosystem that supports innovation simply appears too great, and the return on investment too little. At countless conferences and symposia, ministry officials and government personnel insist that funds must be found to import solutions, à la carte. Research and innovation, or engagement with local entrepreneurs and inventors, is, unfortunately, never on the agenda. There simply is little interest in tapping into the enormous pool of intellect, passion, and energy at home.

Officials would be wise to reconsider. There is mounting evidence that sustainable solutions must have local support and local partners. Raising funds to import solutions from abroad addresses just one part of the challenge.

Many countries lack the resources to install, operate, and maintain equipment that has not been designed locally. As misuse and neglect causes equipment to malfunction, more funds become required or the program simply dies. Not

only does this approach fail to nurture local ecosystems of innovation, which is deeply frustrating; it also fails – repeatedly – to solve the problem at hand.

While some solutions in the area of drug-quality testing have come from African entrepreneurs like Simmons, such examples are extremely rare, and many are developed in the diaspora with the support of organisations from outside the region. For the most part, such initiatives never engage local students. Local curricula do not focus on local challenges or promote local

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innovation.

And yet local talent is critical for solutions that are both original and sustainable. Indeed, by nurturing an inclusive culture of research, local innovation has the potential to provide benefits that extend far beyond the specific problem that is being addressed.

Nurturing the participation of underrepresented groups and creating opportunities for education and learning not only creates goodwill and promotes transparency and accountability. Building a stable foundation for future

Nations will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals, marking the start of the next phase of global efforts to eradicate poverty and improve health. As the example of developing countries' ongoing fight against counterfeit and low-quality medicines shows, success will depend – far more often than not – on local innovation.

The writer is a Professor of biomedical engineering at Boston University.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Miseries at Rupsha Ghat

Every year from August to October, Rupsha Ghat in Khulna faces a severe water logging problem. People have to wade to and from boats. During high tide, people have to walk through knee-deep water folding their pants and holding their shoes. Sometimes water rises up to the waist. Women suffer much more.

The pontoons of both sides of the ghat are old and in deplorable condition. They may collapse anytime, causing serious accidents. The ghat authority collects toll but does not care about the sufferings of the people. We want them to take immediate actions to alleviate the miseries of the people.

Santosh Das

Khulna



Elephants to detect landmines

Recently I came across a news report of this daily which says that elephants can detect landmines. In a study in South Africa, researchers have proven that these giant creatures can sniff out explosives using their sense of smell.

We know that landmines are often buried (not very deep) in the ground. When landmines are stepped on or driven over, the pressure makes them explode. The result can be death or the loss of one or more limbs. Although used as weapons of war, landmines can stay alive for years long after the war has ended.

We are glad that the US Army Research Office, who funded the study, said that despite their skills, the animals won't be put to work at war. Instead, researchers aim to learn how an elephant smells and then apply this knowledge to electronic sensors.

Mobarak Ali

Gopibagh, Dhaka