

When medicine kills

Give the law more teeth

A report published in this newspaper reveals that the Drugs Control Ordinance 1982 under which medicine adulterators are tried is incomprehensive and inadequate. According to legal experts, the ordinance has provision for 10 years' imprisonment or financial penalty or both for manufacturing, importing, distributing and selling adulterated drugs but it says nothing in case of deaths or disabilities caused by adulterated drugs.

We welcome the verdict in the poisonous paracetamol case involving the death of at least 76 children, in which the Dhaka Drug Court pronounced a sentence of 20 years of imprisonment and a fine of Tk 4 lakh to each of the six offenders. Justice has finally been served, 23 years since the fatalities.

Counterfeiting or adulteration of medicines is a lucrative business due to low production costs and lack of regulation and accountability. It particularly grows in an environment where officials are bribable, health systems lax, standards not applied and consumers desperate. At least ten percent of medicines sold in pharmacies in Bangladesh are said to be counterfeit. To make matters worse, consumers and prescribers are often unable to assess the quality, safety and efficacy of pharmaceuticals.

The absence of deterrent legislation and its enforcement encourage counterfeiters. The government needs to promote intersectoral cooperation between manufacturing and wholesale industry associations, patient advocacy groups, health-care professionals, regulatory authorities and law enforcement agencies to oversee the drug market and enforce regulation.

With pharmaceutical sales likely to hit USD 2 billion by 2018, why should the misdeeds of a few be allowed to tarnish the credibility of a flourishing industry?

Woman-unfriendly public transport

Enforce rule on reserved seats

WITH a handful of women-only buses run by Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BTRC) on major routes in Dhaka, thousands of women commuters are forced to resort to other forms of transportation to get around the city. Although a government rule back in 2008 set nine reserved seats for women and people with disabilities on all city buses, this stipulation is not followed by any private bus operator. Both the bus helpers and male commuters do not feel the necessity of abiding by the law. Consequently, women who do brave getting on public transportation must contend with indignities.

There are tens of thousands of women professionals who must get to their workplace at a designated time and as many students who have to attend school, college and universities. Given the present state of affairs, some of these women end up spending as much as Tk 500 a day by using auto-rickshaws for travel to and from work. Needless to say, this puts a huge pressure on their purse.

That male commuters are allowed to occupy women-only seats is deplorable. At many bus stops, women are told by bus helpers there are no seats for women. Matters have been allowed to slide thus far due to a lack of any focused attention to ease the plight of women commuters. Bus owners, operators and law enforcers must get their act together to ensure that the reserved quota for women on the transports is strictly followed on pain of punishment.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Lack of maintenance in Ramna Park

The other day, during my evening walk in Ramna Park, an old and dry heavy leaf of a coconut tree fell on my head, causing serious injury with profuse bleeding. I had to rush to a clinic for emergency treatment.

Those of us who partake in regular morning or evening walks there have already noticed that nowadays there is no maintenance of the park. The old branches and leaves from the trees clutter the walkways, making it difficult to walk. Weeds and shrubs are not cleared or trimmed periodically to keep the park clean and to maintain its beauty. I would like to urge the concerned authority to look into the matter and take necessary steps to keep the park's environment clean and safe.

Sirajul Islam
Retired Resident Manager
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Giving way to ambulances

Giving way to an ambulance when its emergency siren is on is the least we can do when travelling on the roads of Dhaka. And yet none of us do so. In most other countries, the rule is to stop in your tracks when you hear a siren. One can only move to the next lane if one's car is blocking the path of the emergency vehicle. Vehicles move only once the emergency vehicle is out of the way. Non-compliance can mean fines and a jail term. It's simple and yet effective, and should not be difficult to enforce on Dhaka city streets despite the congested traffic.

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KNOT SO TRUE

RUBANA HUQ

ONE would expect the concept of "terrorism" to convey the same meaning for all in this country. It is not quite the case yet.

For most people like your

columnist, anyone committing acts of extreme aggression and cruelty is a "terrorist". For me, the incident of a 10-year-old boy being bludgeoned in the head with a crowbar after being accused of stealing fish is terrorism. For me, a 12-year-old allegedly who suffered the brutality of a compressor hose pumping air into his rectum and ultimately tortured to death by a former boss for joining a competitor is terrorism. For me, a 13-year-old tied to a pole and beaten to death by men who accused him of stealing a van and the circulation of a cellphone video equals terrorism. The fourth incident that happened forty-eight hours back of a 16-year-old being swatted to death in Hajaribag because of apparently having stolen a laptop is terrorism. In a span of a only a month, Rajon from Sylhet, Rakib of Khulna, Rabiul Awal of Barguna and most recently, Raja Mia from Hajaribag have all become victims of terrorists who we fail to spot early on while all of them run loose till it's too late to rectify reality. Frankly the incident of 40 school children of Bhuiyara High School being subjected to attacks in Chandpur and now being admitted to Kachua Upazila Health Complex for having protested the assault on their teacher for not giving in to an extortion attempt by young "leaders" who had demanded Tk 15,000 for observing national mourning day programmes, is also an example of terrorism.

Your columnist also sees no justification in calling terrorists "unidentified assailants" when they hack secular bloggers like Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy, Ananta Bijoy Das, Washiqur Rahman, and Avijit Roy to death in a country where ironically 90 percent of the 160 million people are followers of a religion that teaches utmost tolerance and upholds the concept of peace.

While we watch police spotting and arresting the accused, one also needs to

reconcile with the fact that there are many corporate terrorists that run free in this soil. Hallmark Group, which just had Tk 1700 crore written off by Sonali Bank, and Bismillah Group which also swindled Tk 1174.46 crore using names of fake foreign buyers and forged documents, are no less than terrorists who terrorise and hold the financial sector hostage. According to the Finance minister 2-3 percent of the country's total GDP (almost Tk 450bn) is swallowed up

the last approved amount for demand and current loans and 60 percent for term loans. The loans will be classified as special mention account and banks would maintain provision at required rates with the additional one percent. This prompts your columnist to quote Noam Chomsky at this point. Chomsky wrote: "It's ridiculous to talk about freedom in a society dominated by huge corporations. What kind of freedom is there inside a corporation? They're total-

districts of Bangladesh. A terrorist organisation, Jama'at ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) claimed responsibility for the bombings with the association of another terrorist group, Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami. In Dhaka starting from Bangladesh Secretariat, the Supreme Court Complex, the Prime Minister's Office, the Dhaka University campus, the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel and Zia International Airport, the bombs went off everywhere. At least 115 people were injured. When 7 bombs exploded at about 11:10 am at Biswa Road, rickshaw driver Rabiul Islam was injured and finally succumbed to death while school going Abdus Salam, only 10 years of age died when a bomb exploded outside his house in Savar. Thankfully, the main perpetrators of the bombing, Bangla Bhai and Shaykh Abdur Rahman, were executed by hanging in 2007.

But that is no reason for us to assume that their ghosts have all disappeared. Terrorists walk in our own shadows, within our own frames and network. We may continuously convince ourselves about us being free from the clutches of the terrorists, but the truth is we are subjected to terrorism in multiple forms on a regular basis. Whether it's the terrorists assaulting school kids, beating children to death, hacking bloggers, robbing financial institutions, raping women or planting bombs at public places, they all wear the same ugly hat of evil. By not defining them aptly, by not identifying them from within our own selves, and most of all by denying their existence, most of us are indulging in lies, which are getting bigger by the minute. One of Hitler's closest associates and most devoted followers, Joseph Goebbels, ironically spelt the truth for many of us to pay heed to:

"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it...for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State."

Let this never happen in our soil where each one of us, including the highest authority speaks the same language in the case of handling terror. Let terrorism never assume the proportion of a deceiving reality while we ourselves trick ourselves into believing that we are all safe from terror. We are not. Therefore, while we redefine terror amongst ourselves, the war must go on.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.



by corruption while political unrest adds to another one percent (Tk 150bn). Yet, despite his admission, in July this year, 15 large business groups defaulting on repayment of loans of Tk 12,500 crore, applied for restructuring their debts under a Bangladesh Bank policy issued in January to aid top defaulters on the grounds of prolonged political crisis. Once again, groups, which submitted applications for restructuring loans below Tk 500 crore, will not be considered for getting the restructuring advantage as the policy is issued only for borrowers of loans over Tk 500 crore. After restructuring, these groups will be allowed to borrow up to 50 percent of

itarian institutions - you take orders from above and maybe give them to people below you. There's about as much freedom as under Stalinism." To put it simply, corporate terrorism is one of the worst forms of terrorism a nation can experience.

Day before yesterday, while I remembered 17th of August 2005, bombs exploded close to a shrine in another Asian capital, Bangkok, right at the centre, killing at least 16 people and injuring more than 118. That triggered further memories from 10 years ago, when on the same day, in a span of half an hour, around 500 bomb explosions occurred at 300 locations in 63 out of the 64

WORLD HUMANITARIAN DAY

A Time for Global Citizenship

ROBERT WATKINS

TWELVE years ago on this day, the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad, Iraq, was bombed. It was one of the worst attacks against the UN and humanitarian workers in history, killing 22 people, and wounding over 100 more. As agreed by the General Assembly in 2008, August 19 is annually observed as the World Humanitarian Day to commemorate this tragic event, honour those who have lost their lives in humanitarian service, celebrate the spirit that continues to inspire humanitarian work around the globe, and to draw attention to humanitarian needs worldwide and the importance of international cooperation in meeting these needs.

This year, the United Nations and our partners are aiming to reach 78.9 million of the world's most vulnerable people with lifesaving humanitarian assistance. More than 50 million people are currently displaced by conflict and violence; the highest number of people affected by conflict since the Second World War. But it is not just conflicts that characterise a humanitarian crisis; there are 870 million people not in the headlines who go hungry every day, and with natural disasters occurring with greater frequency and intensity around the world, by 2050 it is estimated that up to one billion people will be displaced by the impact of climate change. Global economic losses from natural disasters are valued around USD\$300 billion, which threaten, and can often reverse, development progress. Those who are already vulnerable are susceptible to being left even further behind.

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster prone countries in the world, and has not only experienced several catastrophes in its young history, but is persistently hit by seasonal disasters. In recognition of the value of joint work and partnership in humanitarian work, in

2012 Bangladesh established a national level coordination mechanism to strengthen the collective capacity of humanitarian actors for effective disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. After the flash floods and landslides in July this year, and again in the wake of Cyclone Komen, the humanitarian coordination mechanism was once again activated. By assessing the immediate needs of the affected districts jointly, the Government of Bangladesh worked in partnership with the UN, national and international humanitarian NGOs to distribute and respond through coordinated efforts, ensuring that the people most in need were able

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to access assistance such as food, shelter, water and sanitation, and cash grants. The joint teams also mobilised an initial USD\$5 million based on a joint response plan, further complementing the Government's own efforts. The role and the support of development partners has been crucial to facilitate the purchase, delivery and coordination of humanitarian work in this case and many others.

Over the years, Bangladesh has developed impressive coping mechanisms and response strategies, but sadly, it often happens that just as communities begin to

recover from a disaster, they suffer yet another natural calamity. Moreover, while disaster victims are supplied immediate emergency needs, their long-term development requirements are often overlooked, and it's not long before they find themselves, once again, victims of subsequent disasters. Early recovery mechanisms, which allow disaster victims to not only get back on their feet, but to improve their initial situation to make them more resilient to new disasters, are absolutely essential if we are to break out of the recurring cycle of disasters.

It is also clear that the interconnected issues of vulnerability, poverty, inequality, conflict, and political and environmental fragility cannot be addressed by one set of actors or approaches. To this end, the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, is organising the first World Humanitarian Summit, to take place in Istanbul in May next year. The Summit aims to be a platform for leaders from the political sphere, civil society, private sector, and crisis-affected communities, to set in motion an agenda for change. It is an opportunity to address current and future humanitarian challenges, to improve the current system, and to introduce new ways to work together.

Having personally worked in different crisis-affected countries in my career, I have witnessed and understand the importance of partnerships, down to the individual level, in humanitarian work. Through strengthening the bonds between government authorities, the UN, national and international NGOs, and development partners, Bangladesh will continue to make strides in responding to the humanitarian needs of its people. It is also up to each of us to acknowledge our shared responsibility and to assume our role as global citizens.

The writer is the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh.

COMMENTS

"VAT won't be removed: Says Muhith" (August 15, 2015)

Mohammad Asif Iqbal

Education is not the right area to impose VAT.

Paromita Das

Why do we have to pay even 1% of VAT if you can't give us seats in public universities?

Suny Bisshojit

If you really need money then impose more VAT on private cars, but not on education.

Abdul Moonim Biswas

Our finance minister doesn't even know about our private universities!

tuition system. All students don't pay TK 30,000 to TK 50,000 monthly; there are variations in the type of private universities.

Khairul Ahsan Saheb

If the MPs and ministers can run their vehicles without VAT/tax, then why VAT on education?

Habib Hasan

Finance minister should impose VAT on private universities' net profit margin but not on students' tuition.

Masnur Rahman

This is digital Bangladesh where we are charged VAT on education!

Captain Bluntschli

Do you think every student of private university comes from a rich family?

Rashed UI Karim

Why don't you impose this VAT on the university authority?

Rafi Al Amin

You have chosen the wrong area to impose VAT.

Mehedi Newaz Khan

Education is the backbone of a nation and we need to pay extra money for making our nation's backbone strong! Bravo!