

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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DHAKA THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 3, 2015

## The woeful plight of Dhaka

Address the drainage system seriously

FIRST day of the month of September will be remembered by Dhaka residents for a long time. Incessant rainfall paralysed all major and minor roads in the city for hours on end. Knee-high to chest-high waters on some of the busiest roads, not to mention the lanes and by-lanes, added to the troubles of commuters who simply didn't have the option to stay at home. Vehicles were seen stranded for hours on end in all localities as roads had become unnavigable. People not fortunate enough to own vehicles or even two-wheelers were the worst affected. Rickshaws plied blindly through murky waters, often overturning with passengers when landing in the potholed roads which had become submerged. The water had turned stinky as the sludge from the open drainage system had come to the surface.

This was the state of the city on September 1 and all this due to one hour of heavy rain. City planners have a lot to answer for. Expert suggestions on not filling of dedicated water retention areas and flood flow zones to help real estate companies do their business were ignored when finalising the most recent Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of Dhaka city. According to Dhaka WASA authorities, at best there is 22 percent storm sewer coverage of the 360-sq km area that WASA serves. And Dhaka covers an area of 1,528 sq km. The situation will only deteriorate with time unless authorities take immediate measures to protect natural canals and flood plains from unscrupulous developers and land grabbers.

## A dangerous proposal

Passengers' safety comes first

WE are alarmed at the proposal of private launch owners to stop the ongoing process of resurveying fitness of launches across the country. Though the suggestion has come apparently as a solution to meet the huge rush of passengers ahead of Eid-ul-Azha, such a proposal, if approved, will put the lives of countless passengers at risk.

After the Pinak-6 capsized in August last year, the issue of unfit water vessels came to the fore as a major reason behind recurrent launch accidents. Later, the shipping ministry decided to resurvey the fitness of around 300 launches across the country. It is crucial to conduct the survey to check whether the launches are fit and in need of repair or modification. The concerned ministry has already resurveyed 87 launches and found technical and engineering faults in some of them. Against this background, the proposal of stopping this long-overdue survey is totally unacceptable. According to experts, if the proposal is implemented, plying of unfit vehicles would certainly cause accidents and loss of lives.

Launch owners have also asked permission for vessels to ply on Shimulia-Kawrakandi route on Padma at night. As per existing rule of BIWTA, no launch is allowed to ply on that route after sunset. The government should scrutinise this proposal before allowing such an exception while keeping the safety of passengers as top priority.

# The lure of extremism

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

MUSLIM Bangladeshis living in the UK recently became a focus of interest to all Bangladeshis living home and abroad when the news of some young Muslims of Bangladeshi origin joining the so-called Islamic State in Syria/Iraq struck the front page. Among them were three young women and an entire family that also included elderly members. Young people leaving a relatively prosperous country for a war torn, failed state that had succumbed to a militant group was astounding news not only to their families but also the country that they decided to leave.

The militants in Syria and Iraq calling themselves the Islamic State (or ISIS) have grown in strength over the past two years drawing youths from different parts of the world including Western Europe, the United Kingdom, even the US. It is reported that there are over 4000 foreign fighters who have joined the ranks of ISIS, which primarily consists of rebels from Syria and is believed to be militarily trained and supervised by ex-members of Saddam Hussain's formidable army. The military prowess and tactics that ISIS has shown in overpowering the Iraqis as well as the largely depleted forces of Syria's Assad are evidence of a well-trained force that goes beyond the normal fighting strength and longevity of a typical rebel force.

ISIS' sustained war in Syria, along with its success in holding on to a sizeable territory of Iraq for nearly two years established its credibility among radical Islamist rebels, many of whom have been active in the Middle East as well as Afghanistan and Nigeria. ISIS emerged as the strongest among the militant organisations, not only because of its organisation, but also because of the ambivalence of the Middle Eastern nations towards intervening in the current war and half-hearted attempts by Western powers to stop the war. The ambivalence of some Middle Eastern countries partly comes from their fear of Shia domination in that area with Iraq now falling mostly to Shia leadership, a potential Iraq-Iran entente rising in the horizon.

ISIS grew as much for what it did for itself as for what the other countries inad-

vertently did for its growth. It developed into a mighty fighting machine enough to declare itself a Caliphate and asked all Muslim countries to join its cause, even asking them to recognise its supremacy. People have not joined them in droves, but it did appeal to a good number of young people spread over distant lands to join its ranks. And many have joined, not just attracted by the romanticism of the adventure, but also deluded by the religious appeal of joining a grossly misinterpreted holy war.

a wider range of people from different ethnicities. Added to that is a perceived sense of persecution worldwide of people of different faiths, which has been constantly hammered into them by clerics with a political agenda of their own both at home and abroad.

Absent from the above analysis is how much religious teaching itself is an important driver of young people wanting to relinquish their adopted home and fight side by side with forces that are not exactly their friends. Immigrants to the UK, US,

it difficult to assimilate at a later stage, at a workplace or higher places of learning when they come out of these shells or might feel like misfits.

Joining a jihad brigade provides a kind of escape for these young people from the hard reality they face. But they find it equally difficult to return when the "romantic" adventure does not pan out the way they want it to.

The right place to prevent disgruntled and alienated young people from being fascinated by this false attraction is their



Attractions of Muslim youth, particularly in the West, to this cleverly constructed holy mission has been variously attributed to disenchantment and disengagement of the youth from mainstream culture of the adopted country stemming from their failure to assimilate in the society, and a perceived sense of discrimination by the mainstream society. It has also been attributed to a growing urge among them to seek a different identity from the mainstream, an identity based on religion alone since this identity provides them a bigger platform and strength in number. It covers

and other European countries come from all parts of the world with all kinds of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Unfortunately, many young Muslims of diverse origins have been brought up in an environment which is devoid of the most fundamental teaching of their religion, tolerance and acceptance of all other religions as equal to their own. They don't receive this education at home or places where they go for worship. A good number of these young people grow in ethnic and religious settings that harden them into individuals with a rigid mindset, they find

own home. They need the basic education of having respect for every human being, irrespective of religious faith. They need to be told that alienation from the country they live in on the grounds of religion or rejection of other religions cannot lead them to happiness or success. The Islamic State or ISIS is a political game that will not deliver to them the life their parents expected of them, or the one that their adopted country offers them.

The writer is a US based political analyst and commentator.

## INTERNATIONAL CEDAW DAY 2015

# Withdrawal of reservation

Citizens' Initiatives on CEDAW, Bangladesh (CIC-BD)

THE Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in December 1979 as a bill of rights for women. Till date, it has been ratified by 188 countries of the world. It is the principal treaty on women's human rights setting out a framework for achieving equality as well as putting obligations on states to eliminate discrimination against women and girls. The Convention is based on three important principles: (1) Substantive equality which covers not only the formal equality of treatment but also a strategy that evaluates results of gender responsive laws, policies and programmes. (2) Non-discrimination—the convention defines discrimination and intends to eliminate both intended (direct) and unintended (indirect) discrimination. To this end, the Convention covers actions of all - from the government to private sectors, from individuals to families and communities - but the prime responsibility lies with the government. This is linked with the third principle. (3) State obligation - under the Convention, the State is to ensure both *de jure* (legal) and *de facto* equality as a result.

Bangladesh ratified CEDAW in 1984 with initial reservations on four articles of which two were withdrawn later. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has been reasonably regular in submitting its periodic reports to the CEDAW committee. The combined sixth and seventh report submitted in 2009 was considered by the UN CEDAW Committee in 2011. GOB has submitted its eighth periodic report on April 14, 2015.

The vibrant civil society of the country

has also been actively engaged in meeting its obligations, either in the form of preparing and submitting the shadow/alternative reports or in monitoring the status of implementations of concluding observations. Community Service Organisations (CSOs), in the name of Citizens' Initiatives on CEDAW Bangladesh (CIC-BD), are supporting the implementation as partners and also in constant advocacy with the GOB in implementing the provisions of CEDAW. Currently, the CSO platform (CIC-BD) is preparing the shadow report complementing the State Party Report.

Bangladesh is one of the early countries which ratified the Convention and is an active member of the CEDAW committee. The committee has had representation from Bangladesh with three distinguished women personalities for a number of years since its ratification, which highlights the government's commitment to the provisions of the Convention.

The state also has adopted many women-friendly laws and policies over the last few decades which include, among others: the Women's Development Policy followed by an action plan, the High Court's directives on sexual harassment and fatwa, Women and Child Repression Suppression Act, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act. It is also heartening to note that major policies and planning documents of the government refer to and are based on provisions of CEDAW (e.g., five-year plans, national perspective plan on post-2015, etc).

On the other hand, the GOB has still retained its reservations on two articles: 1) Article 2 and 2) Article 16(1c). Article 2 mandates that state parties ratifying the Convention declare intent to enshrine gender equality into their domestic legislation, repeal all discriminatory

provisions in their laws, and enact new provisions to guard against discrimination against women. Article 16 (1c) dictates that state parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and, in particular, shall ensure a basis of equality of men and women.

The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights for women and men. However, having a reservation on Article 2 contradicts with Articles 10, 19, 27, 28 and 29 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. The government, however, made commitments to withdraw the reservations when it submitted a periodic report in 2004 after it was reviewed by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. A recent report by the Law Commission also indicates the potential for withdrawal of reservations. Bangladesh is not governed by Sharia law per se; it is only the personal and family issues that are governed by the laws based on religious provisions in the absence of a Uniform Family Code. Besides, about 10 percent of the population of Bangladesh belongs to religious groups other than Islam, whose life is not governed by the Sharia law.

On the other hand, looking at the examples of other Islamic countries, it is noteworthy that 29 out of 57 member countries of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have ratified the Convention fully without any reservations. Other countries have withdrawn initial reservations after justified review. Therefore, there are instances where concrete steps were taken in countries with a Muslim majority.

The CEDAW committee has repeatedly expressed its concern on the continuing reservation by the government in its concluding

observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic report. The committee called it impermissible as the committee considers Articles 2 and 16 to be "core provisions of the Convention," and "central to the objects and purpose of the Convention". These have implications for other articles as well. Later, the committee also requested the government to put a specific time frame for withdrawing the reservations.

The government submitted its eighth periodic report in 2015. The year 2015 will mark a few landmarks in global development agenda, because the world has already redefined the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) this year. The global process of the post-2015 development agenda is already heading toward culmination. The SDG is built upon global initiatives like Rio+20, CEDAW, the Beijing+20 review process and the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In all these processes, the governments are committed to giving women their rightful voice and choices for shaping the world that empowers them through the development agenda.

2015 will be a year that makes history and during this year, we want to see the government fulfilling its commitment towards the women of the country. In order to ensure substantive equality for women and to eliminate discrimination, it is imperative that the state accepts this obligation and withdraws the remaining reservations from CEDAW, which the government has committed to since 2004. This will make all actors, including the government, more responsible and accountable to women in realising their rights.

CIC-BD is a platform of 54 non-government human rights organisations working for full ratification and implementation of UNCEDAW Convention in Bangladesh.

## COMMENTS

**"Fuel prices go up in our country while they fall in the international market. It's unacceptable. It is unjust. The government should reconsider [the move to hike fuel and power tariff] for the sake of the people of low income groups ..."**

-Suranjit Sengupta

Sajib Hasan

When the price of fuel is decreasing in the international market, the government is increasing the tariff of electricity. It is an unwise decision that will cause prices of other daily commodities to go up.

Robert Mrong

It's completely unacceptable and we, the poor people, will be the victims.

**"Fool's oil"**  
(August 30, 2015)

Bushra Mollick

I hope more people will read this news and realise that this 'miracle oil' is nothing but fake.

**"Unjust, illogical"**  
(August 30, 2015)

Refat Hossain Bappy

Everyone should protest this hike.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Teachers should have their own web pages

The writer of the letter "Textbooks—a thing of the past?" published on August 29, 2015 deserves appreciation for addressing a fact that prevails among university students nowadays. Nowadays, we, the university students, mostly depend on lecture synopsis and photocopies rather than textbooks. Very few teachers have their own web pages but they don't update them. It would be helpful for us if teachers maintained and updated web pages regarding lectures on different topics.

Zubair Al Islam  
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### Robotic weeder

- Weeds lower crop yield to a great extent.
- Globally, a huge amount of herbicides are used to control weeds. But many of the herbicides are getting resistant to weeds. Moreover, the chemicals used as herbicides are very poisonous and harmful to human health, soil and environment. So, to control weeds more effectively and safely, scientists are working to develop some sustainable devices.

Chemical-free, power-efficient robotic weeders have been developed for controlling weeds on crop fields, particularly of high value crops.

I think this technology should be introduced in Bangladesh and a modified version of the tool be released after proper designing and testing at agricultural research institutes.

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