

## Dhaka is choking Free up the canals

THE reckless manner with which canals have been grabbed and filled up in the capital city can be likened to choking the blood in arteries of a human being. If there ever was a wakeup call, it was September 1 when the city literally went under water after a few hours of heavy downpour. Nothing could drive home the point more than a city being robbed of free water bodies and canals. This paper has been crying hoarse for decades on the issue of the wilful neglect of authorities in addressing the issue. If we want to see Bangladesh transformed into a middle income nation, we had better do something about the country's capital which, at present, is in a state of dysfunction.

The indiscriminate grabbing and poor maintenance of some two dozen canals stretching some 65 km is playing havoc with the city's storm drainage system. Decades of negligence have left the field clear for unscrupulous interests to willfully occupy and fill up floodplains. The indiscriminate dumping of solid waste into canals is an ongoing practice, which apparently do not catch the attention of officials of the two city corporations.

September 1 drove home the point that we have reached the point of no return. Immediate steps are needed to recover and revitalise the canals. Now that we have two mayors in office, they must live upto their electoral promises for cleaning up a city that is becoming unliveable. We do not want to see our beloved city be ranked as the second least liveable city in the world as per the Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) Global Liveability Index next year.

## Merciless beating of three female students

*Stern action needed against such criminal offences*

WE are appalled at the news of a headmaster of Golapganj High School in Dinajpur brutally beating three of its female students. The students sustained serious injuries and had to be hospitalised. The manner in which they were beaten amounts to abuse and violates the basic rights of children to be treated with dignity and to be protected from any kind of violence.

Bangladesh's High Court in 2011 declared all types of corporal punishment in schools 'illegal and unconstitutional' in response to the litigation filed by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) to stop cruel punishment of children. Later, the Ministry of Education banned corporal (inhuman) punishment following that instruction. Unfortunately many schools have not taken the Court's directive seriously. Recurrent incidents of teachers or administrative high-ups resorting to cruel corporal punishment show that the government order is yet to be implemented at the ground level and teachers and school administrators are either unaware of it or simply have chosen to ignore it.

In this case, the local villagers vehemently protested the beating and demanded suspension of the guilty headmaster. It is encouraging that the teacher was immediately suspended. But suspension is hardly enough. The headmaster has committed a criminal offence and so should be brought to book and given exemplary punishment. Teachers, parents and school authorities should also be made aware of the ill consequences of corporal punishment on children and the government must make sure that educational institutions honour the court's order. Corporal punishment is a primitive, unacceptable practice and must be rooted out of our schools for good.

## COMMENTS

**"Germany has a heart, after all"**  
(September 8, 2015)

Neela Haq

My idea and thoughts about Germany have totally changed. Congrats Germany!

**"SIM re-registration a must"**  
(September 7, 2015)

Sajid Tahsin Khan

It's the third time people have to "re-register" their SIM cards!

**"Dhaka: A sustainable city?"**  
(September 7, 2015)

Rizwan Chaudhry

We have built infrastructures by blocking the canals and we are the ones who will have to endure this.

**"Homemade 'seaplane' takes maiden flight"**  
(September 7, 2015)

Saber Khan

Bravo! You have done a wonderful job. Keep up your creativity and go ahead regardless of what obstacles come your way.

## REFUGEE CRISIS

# Make Aylan's home safe

MD. HARUN OR RASHID

THE image of the three-year-old Syrian boy Aylan's lifeless body stimulated public outcry to deal with the refugee crisis. The body of Aylan Kurdi, who drowned along with his mother and his five-year-old brother, washed up on a beach near the Turkish resort town last week. The photograph had captured him lying face down in the surf, wearing a red t-shirt and shorts. This photograph coincidentally attracted the attention of international leaders, undoubtedly due to the immense media coverage. French President Francois Hollande immediately corresponded with Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other European leaders, stating that the picture must be a reminder of the world's responsibility. British Prime Minister David Cameron, who was silent earlier regarding the crisis, said he was deeply moved by the image of Aylan. Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny described the refugee crisis as a "human catastrophe" and found the picture "absolutely shocking".

If we look back at the Syrian crisis, it is observed that most such refugees are driven by an urgent need to escape the country, which has already become a living hell.

The Syrian conflict started during the so-called Arab Spring, and clashes between Syrian President Bashar al Assad and his several oppositions including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Barrel bombs have been dropped continuously on the opposition-led areas by Syrian army helicopters. This conflict has killed thousands of people over the past four years. To further elaborate, ISIL militants have also been responsible for the mass exodus. The militant group occupied a key town along the Turkish border that triggered a rush of frantic refugees driving into Turkey.

According to an estimate by the UN, around 250,000 people have been killed and more than one million wounded since March 2011 in Syria due to the conflict. About half of the country's population has been displaced. A recent UN report said that since 2011 more than 2,000 Syrians refugees have drowned while desperately trying to reach Europe.

What is the role of world leaders in the crisis? Instead of taking any effective initiative to stop the war, they are providing support to both the Syrian government and the opposition groups, militarily, logistically and diplomatically. Iran and Russia provides military support to the Syrian government, whereas the main opposition body, the Syrian coalition, receives logistic and political support from major Sunni states in the Middle East, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, France, Britain and the US also provided political, military and logistic support to the opposition.

One can easily raise a question as to what the role of UNHCR is in this regard. The UNHCR's 1950 statute clearly states its core mandate within two principal areas on refugee protection. Its first mandate is to work with states to ensure refugees' access to protection. In other words, those outside of their country of origin, with a well-founded fear of persecution, would be assured of certain clearly defined rights. Secondly, to ensure that refugees are able to have access to durable solutions and are either reintegrated within their country of origin or permanently integrated within a new country.

Aylan's father took several initiatives for resettlement, to migrate formally to countries including Canada, but his application was rejected. Aylan was born in the Syrian city of Kobane. After moving between various towns, his family settled in

Turkey. The family then returned to Kobane at the beginning of 2015 and again returned to Turkey in June 2015 when ISIL reoccupied Kobane. After several failed initiatives to take the family to a safe place, Aylan's father made the last attempt that ended in tragedy. He failed to migrate because he could not manage an exit visa from Turkey. They did not have Syrian passports, valid Turkish visas or even UNHCR's refugee documents, and therefore did not qualify for exit visas. Hence, getting out of Turkey was his only option to avoid arrest and detention by Turkish authorities. According to their mandates, UNHCR's effective mechanism to provide assistance to the family could probably have stopped them from taking the risky voyage.

British Prime Minister rightly realised that it is high time to solve the problem at source. Yes, only an end of the conflict in Syria would stop the flow of refugees. The UN must play its role to stop the devastating conflict. According to a report by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, the UN Security Council has not only failed to fulfill its basic function – the maintenance of international peace and security – it has also failed to uphold its Responsibility to Protect (R2P) the Syrian people. Hundreds of such images of drowning boat people in the Mediterranean Sea and in the Bay of Bengal in the last few months have sparked public outcry and calls for world leaders not only to change their attitude toward refugees but to deal with the root causes of the crisis. World leaders and the UN must take initiatives to stop the ongoing conflicts in Syria and other refugee source countries and come up with sustainable solutions.

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# A case against (only) watching CAT VIDEOS



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

ONE of my students in my class said one day, "We watch cat videos because the world is difficult to watch." Heads around the room nodded in agreement

and I realised how helpless and even dejected my students feel, a group that I had always thought to be idealistic and full of excitement to change the world. It made me wonder how I should go about giving them hope, only to tell myself that the sooner they realise what the real world is like, the sooner they can be a part of the solution. But as social workers, my students knew how they could have individual-level impact on the populations that they work with, but found themselves struggling to find a way to work within a system that creates divisions, 'us and them'.

So, the single broad question that emerged throughout the semester was: What can be done to stymie the production of "marginalised groups"? "Revolution!" someone said, only to be reminded by another student that (and I paraphrase): in the individualistic world order we are all in it for ourselves, our lives consist of individual decisions made to further our individual goals, we are kept worried with student loans, made to dream about home ownership and children, all of which, when actualised, create further debt and bindings that keep us from organising, because a day of protests, for example, would mean a subtraction from our paychecks that would in turn make it difficult to pay off our debt.

And all the social problems that they see and want to fix? That's where cat videos come in. As it turns out, on most days they feel like they really can't make a difference on a macro level, which means, as someone said, "We're doomed – we will just self-destruct our way through the world."

The dejection that I see is perhaps warranted, given the insidious nature of the social problems around us – particularly because on the surface many problems have purportedly been solved. For example, many of my students talk about how they were taught in school about the end of racism when slavery ended, only to realise that racism is thriving. Some talk about migrants taking unwarranted risks to further their individual careers, when most migrants are products of war and poverty – the most recent example being the displaced people of Syria seeking refuge. What is clear is that to shake off what you learn

of these problems, steps that researchers have taken to understand these problems better. And solutions come from these steps. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement sheds light on the issues of police violence/brutality and mass incarceration of people of colour; the Occupy movement made people aware of the stark inequality between the haves and the have nots; the Arab Spring made it clear that despotic governments can't rule forever; closer to home in Bangladesh, the Shahab movement made it possible for people to start talking about justice for war

find themselves in positions of power – they do what is good – just – for people. In a recent study that Navine Murshid and I conducted, we found that children who witness violence are more likely to mimic that act in situations they deem appropriate as violence becomes normalised. The same principle applies to other issues: corruption, murder, lying, ill-treatment of people. Let us not be those parents that teach children that it is acceptable to be corrupt, lying, violent, through words and action. Individually, this may seem like a drop in the proverbial ocean, but if all parents could do this for their children, we

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as children and re-view the world with a critical lens as adults is not an easy task. Indeed, a large part of the work that we do as teachers is help others open their eyes and understand what they see, see what they don't see, and learn to delineate the problems and unravel the enigma that is hidden in plain sight. And once those eyes are opened, it is understandable that people would feel dejected.

But from dejection comes creativity, I imagine, because while we witness a world of war, plight, hunger, displacement, we also witness the steps that people have taken to address some

crimes, breaking a silence of decades. These are steps towards change. We all need to be a part of these moments of change, we all need to be a part of creating such moments of change, and hopefully galvanise these moments into movements that actually bring about change, and then start all over again. These are small steps, but one day they will become strides towards a world that demands equality, fairness, and justice; a world where divisions and isolation are not inevitable.

And while we are at it, we have to model the right behaviours to our children, so that when they grow up and

would have more and more people resorting to constructive, instead of destructive, behaviours as a mechanism of conflict resolution. And if the system could be changed where race, class, social status (and so forth) did not matter anymore, perhaps the impetus for corruption, murder, and violence would cease to exist as well. Utopia? Sure, but there has to be a destination ahead of us, and what better than the best even if we never reach there. The least we can do is keep walking in that general direction.

The writer is Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work, University at Buffalo.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Price hike of electricity and gas

The government has decided to increase the price of gas and electricity. No doubt, it will make day-to-day life more difficult for the middle and lower income people. They are already under severe pressure to cope with the burgeoning prices of essential food items. Many vegetables are now sold

for Tk 80-100 per kilogram. It seems fish and meat is out of their reach already. Now that the prices of gas and electricity have been increased, it will put pressure on the majority of the people.

We hope the government will reconsider its decision to hike prices of gas and electricity for the sake of the countrymen.

Zabed Wali  
Chittagong

### Help floating migrants

People from developing countries are adopting illegal, risky and dangerous ways to migrate to advanced countries in hopes of better living conditions. Many of these unfortunate people have already met with tragic fate at sea and other places which is

really heart-breaking. It is true that some countries are helping the suffering migrants by supplying them with food and rehabilitating these unfortunate people. But it is also upon other rich nations to help these people.

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