

Murder of foreign nationals

Exercise due diligence for successful probe

ACCORDING to news reports some positive developments have been made into the murder investigation of the two foreign nationals. Investigators have claimed to have detected the person who had tweeted on behalf of the so-called Islamic State, claiming responsibility for the killing of Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella in downtown Dhaka. Although the detectives are yet to disclose the identity of the sender of the tweet, it is expected that the new evidence will lead to an important breakthrough.

It is, however, upsetting to witness the reckless, unsubstantiated comments made by political party members regarding the killings, blaming the opponents for masterminding the gruesome incidents. Apart from deflecting focus from the main issue of identifying the criminals, such blame game hampers the course of the investigation. When the issue is used to excoriate the opponents, it only makes light of a very important matter.

The investigation into the twin murder and its subsequent findings will have positive implications for the country. At stake are Bangladesh's image abroad and also its future as a hub of foreign investment. It is imperative that the probe is conducted with due diligence to clear any misgivings and fear engendered by the murders. We urge all parties involved to refrain from making comments that trivialise such a grave issue or potentially harm the investigation and influence its outcome.

Trials of militants

Why are police witnesses not turning up?

AT a time when our government has reiterated its commitment to curb militancy in the country we are dumbfounded by a news report by a leading Bangla daily that the trial process of 156 cases involving militants are on hold. The reason for this is even more mystifying: over 300 police personnel including plaintiffs, investigating officers and police witnesses of the cases, have just not turned up in the court even after arrest warrants had been issued against them.

Such defiance of the law by those who have been appointed to protect it is unfathomable. The report cites the example of four arrested Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) members being produced in the court 67 times but the plaintiffs, a sub inspector of the police station and an investigating officer never came for giving their depositions in court thus retarding the trial process.

The reluctance of the home ministry to give the required approval of charge sheets of 138 militancy cases is also baffling as this, too, has set back the trial processes.

It is encouraging that our law enforcing agencies have been able to arrest militants before they could carry out any terror attacks. But just arresting them without a quick trial process nullifies such efforts. If the government is as serious about combating terrorism as it says it is, it should make sure that the home ministry approves the charge sheets of the militancy cases and that the members of the law enforcing agencies, who are the plaintiffs and witnesses in such cases, appear in court.

COMMENTS

"Bangladeshi villager shot dead by BSF"
(October 10, 2015)

Robi Rahman

Bangladeshis often get killed by the BSF but no measures are taken to stop these killings.

Saleh Chowdury

Are some of our ministers going to blame it on BNP and Jamaat?

Saif Shahriar

For how much longer are we going to allow this atrocity to continue? When is our government going to stand up to them?

Syed Zia-ul Hussain

It may seem that BSF is using Bangladeshis for target practice.

"Gaibandha MP to face trial: Home minister"
(October 8, 2015)

M.S. Islam

Bodi was not spared either!

Muslim Ahmed

Their audacity has crossed all the limits. They are tarnishing the image of the government.

Mukul Hossain

Hope you really meant it.

A BETTER TOMORROW

for children without childhood



MACRO MIRROR
FAHMIDA KHATUN

THE issue of exploitation of child domestic labour does not catch our attention unless there is sensational news of torture in the media. At an age when they are supposed to be in school or at the playground, these children find themselves in the houses of well-off families, doing all kinds of arduous household chores from early morning to late night, cleaning and serving customers in shops and restaurants, as helping hands on farmlands, or in factories working in hazardous conditions. Many are on the streets begging along with adults, from an age when they can barely speak.

In Bangladesh, poverty has decreased significantly over the years. Yet, the absolute number of poor people is large as the population is high. Children remain the worst-hit by poverty. For poor families, they are the breadwinners and additional sources of income. Many of them are thus separated from their families and enslaved in the harshest of working conditions. However, poverty and child labour are linked in both ways. Economic vulnerabilities lead to child labour. But as these children are deprived of education and skills - many of whom also suffer irreversible physical and psychological damage - their opportunity for better livelihood options in the future remain limited. Ultimately, they fall into poverty later in their lives. And their children are born into a poor family. Thus, an inter-generational poverty cycle is created that gives rise to an unequal society. The success of Bangladesh in meeting Millennium Development Goals on universal primary education is praiseworthy. Despite higher access to schools and increased enrolment, the drop-out rate is still quite high. And these are the children of poor families who work as child labourers.

Several laws are in place that call for protecting child rights and prohibiting child labour. Starting from the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 to the National Child Policy 2011 - all emphasise the need to abolish child labour. The Child Labour Unit set up in 2009 at the Ministry of Labour and Employment has the responsibility to coordinate child labour related policies and measures, and work towards elimination of child labour. But this unit needs to be strengthened with financial and human resources and be more proactive. The Ministry of Labour and Employment adopted a National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010. This aims to eliminate all forms of child labour by 2015. However, we still have miles to go before we reach a situation without child labour. Laws typically lack strong enforcement mechanism for the child labour provisions. Also, since more than 90 percent children are engaged in the informal sector, the enforcement of legal measures is also difficult. This is

reflective of the very nature of our economy where the share of the informal sector is much higher than that of the formal sector.

Another important way to uproot child labour is allocation of adequate resources by the government. A study of the Centre for Policy Dialogue and United Nations Children's Fund, in which this columnist was a contributor, reveals that though allocation for children's education, health and protection has improved compared to before, in terms of share in the national budget, the amount dedicated exclusively for children is still very low. The report estimated that the total budget directly allocated for children, including allocations for children's social safety net programmes, amounted to 4.1 percent of

'Bolsa Familia' cash transfer programme for children to go to school in Brazil or cash transfers under Education Sector Support Project scholarship programme in Cambodia are examples of initiatives which helped reduce child labour. Health insurance of family members or old age allowance has been useful in many African countries in lowering child labour as they provide a source of income and sense of social security. Bangladesh is pursuing several social safety net programmes for a long time, mainly in the form of direct cash transfer, food transfers and micro-credit aimed at supporting the vulnerable groups of the society. While these have improved the welfare of families and in turn of children, more such programmes are needed that target children



the national budget of FY 2010-2011. This was equivalent to 0.7 percent of gross domestic product of the country. Disappointingly, though the size of the national budget has been increasing every year, the share of children's budget has stayed almost the same in the past years. This reiterates the need for a child-friendly budget whereby resources will be allocated in a way that directly benefits children. About 45 percent of our population consists of children under 18 years. Therefore, the development of the country is intrinsically related to the welfare of this segment of the population.

Experiences of many countries including Bangladesh show that social protection measures are useful in reducing child labour.

specifically.

According to the International Labour Organisation, child labour is harmful to the physical and mental development of children as it deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity. To explore the true potential of our deprived children and ensure their right to live with dignity, the rest of society will also have to uphold a sense of dignity within itself which will not allow its members to employ and exploit child labour, but to work towards combating such evils. This, of course, needs a total change in our societal and cultural outlook.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, currently a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for Study of Science, Technology & Policy, India.

Where there's a will, there's a way

Reflecting on the achievements of Bangladesh, Edouard Beigbeder, UNICEF's country representative discusses how much work is ahead of us in the areas of education and health.

How has Bangladesh fared in ensuring basic rights of children?

Bangladesh has really moved forward in the last forty years—in terms of enrollment in school, immunisation, meeting minimum water requirement and so on. The country is now a model in the world in family planning and decreasing child mortality (from 94 in 1999 to 46 in 2014). Maternal mortality went down from 340 in 2000 to 170 in 2013. About 98 percent children enroll in primary schools. Deaths due to diarrhea are now only 2 percent as opposed to 20 percent 20 years ago (as per BDHS 1993 to 1994). But pneumonia and birth infections remain major causes of death. In a neighbouring country, 55 percent people engage in open defecation. Here, the number is less than 3 percent. The government has achieved these remarkable feats working closely with the civil society. We hope we can replicate these successes in eradicating child marriage.

UNICEF has been working in the country since 1952. UNICEF provided emergency relief to thousands of war refugees in 1971 and children caught up in several of the world's worst cyclones. For over 40 years, UNICEF has worked with the Government of Bangladesh, partners, donors, civil societies and local people in an effort to improve the survival, development, protection and participation of women and children in Bangladesh.

Now that we have made significant strides towards quantity, what needs to be done to ensure quality?

We are upgrading the services in community clinics. We need to ensure safe deliveries in safe clinics. In schools, we



Edouard Beigbeder

have to ensure that the children are learning, not just attending. About 27 percent children drop out between enrollment and grade 5 - an issue that is directly related to the issues of child labour and child marriage. Schools will have to be safe. New school buildings will have to be built keeping in mind that Bangladesh is prone to earthquakes.

In most schools we have about 80 children in a classroom for 3 hours a day. This is not conducive to learning or teaching. If you have 40 children in a classroom for 6 hours, as per international standards, you will not have so many dropouts.

The government and the Unicef will be working together to close these gaps. It is a great move by the government to introduce one year of pre-primary

schooling. Pre-secondary schooling and vocational training will be the next steps. We need carpenters or electricians as much as we need doctors and engineers.

How can we address the mushrooming of 'coaching centres' that has become rampant even in rural areas?

The demand in the education sector is high. Public-private partnership can be a way forward. Schools will have to be better managed. Teachers and local inspectors need more training and empowerment. ICT can be used to put in place better monitoring systems.

I have visited some schools in rural areas where computers are kept in a locked room. Is a change in the attitude of school administrations necessary?

You cannot expect people to use technology if they are not trained. We have pilot projects in several "schools of excellence" to see the impact of computers on learning. But nothing would replace the motivation of a Headmaster or a teacher. And how do we improve their motivation? A number of things could be done like training and creating a better environment in classrooms. Motivation is not only a question of money. If you see a student do well in life, you get satisfaction.

How can quality be ensured when we get reports that recruitment of teachers is not transparent?

When higher enrollment was the primary target, entry requirements were lowered. Now it is time to raise the eligibility. When bad practices happen, the government should punish those involved under law. The ideas, the strategies and the willingness are there. The question is how you roll them out.

Can quality in education be attained when a lot of children are malnourished? Is school feeding an option?

Bangladesh has had progress in terms of breastfeeding. There has been a sharp decline in terms of stunting but it is still high. Children who have good food stay in school longer and learn better. Water is part of nutrition. A recent study shows that if you do not have proper sanitation you are likely to be malnourished, regardless of your economic conditions. The World Food Programme feeds children in many schools and provides them with right vitamins. The government is also working in this area.

A lot of children living in a city like Dhaka do not have access to playgrounds. Given the space constraints, what could be done?

It's not a question of space. A lot of schools do have playgrounds or a small park nearby. You need to use them. A classroom could be turned into a playground where children can do gymnastics or free hand exercise. You do not need a big stadium for that. Where there's a will, there's a way.

We talked about the quality of education. Sports are part of quality. School feeding and nutrition are part of it. Things are not in isolation. With the MDGs Bangladesh has shown a lot of promise. If we can hold the momentum, Bangladesh will become a tiger. But you are not going to get there by keeping girls at home. They have to be sent to schools, vocational training centres, colleges and universities. That's a proven formula for reducing and stopping child marriages.

The Interview was taken by Amitava Kar.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Lawmaker or lawbreaker?

According to news reports, Manzurul Islam Liton, the MP from Gaibandha-1 who shot a 10-year-old boy has been terrorising the local people with the help of his goons. This unlawful behaviour by someone whose job it is to make laws is unacceptable. The government must arrest this criminal without delay and award him the highest punishment under law.
Nawfal Talukdar
USA



Alarming breach of security in Dhaka airport

Recently a woman dodged the check-in counter and all other security checks at the airport and got the only vacant seat in the flight of US-Bangla Dash-8. When asked to show her boarding pass, she said that she had lost it. Afterwards, her

mother said that she was a mentally ill patient and the police released her.

I think that she should have been examined by a psychiatrist to check the validity of her mother's claim. She should also have been made to explain as to how she managed to pass through so many check points. This is necessary to prevent such incidents from happening in the future.

Shahjahan Hafiz
Gulshan, Dhaka