

Another minor tortured

Madrasas and schools must be monitored

YET another madrasa student has become victim of a sadistic teacher. The picture of a visibly frightened seven-year-old Md Siam Hossain in Pabna, with chains on his feet, speaks of the trauma this little boy has gone through. The child's 'crime' was that he kept trying to run away. For this he was confined to a room for a few days with his feet tied in chains. Not surprisingly, the accused teacher is absconding.

What is shocking, however, is the number of instances of such inhuman torture in these institutions that have been reported recently. Just this year there have been numerous news reports of young madrasa students – all minors – being subjected to the most painful and humiliating forms of torture. This includes severe beatings with a cane, shaving the head, confinement in a room, being half starved and being hung from a ceiling fan. It is appalling that institutions supposed to be imparting religious education and moral values employ teachers who engage in these beastly acts of torture. This despite a law prohibiting corporal punishment in educational institutes which includes madrasas.

We cannot emphasise enough the need for the government to thoroughly monitor the behaviour of teachers towards their students, whether in madrasas or regular schools. Clear directives must be given to the authorities of these institutes regarding what constitutes the violation of a child's rights and that such violations will be severely punished by law. It is not enough to suspend or fire teachers who physically and mentally harm students who have come to them for learning. The offenders must be arrested and meted out appropriate sentences that will deter other potential torturers from committing the same crime.

Authorities' uncaring attitude

Safety issues remain unaddressed

FOR the fifteen million or so people who call Dhaka their home, life is never short of unpleasant surprises. From rickety buses that should have been taken off the roads decades ago to foot over bridges with gaping holes are just some of the accidents waiting to happen. Two pictures printed in the November 12 edition of this paper caught our attention. The first shows a passenger's leg proudly on display from the back of a bus which had an entire panel simply missing. The other depicts a wondrous gaping hole smack down in the middle of a foot over bridge between Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and BIRD Hospital in Dhaka.

In the former case, we wonder whether it ever catches the eye of BRTA or those on police duty that we have passenger buses running around merrily without giving two hoots about their fitness. And in the latter, the gaping hole in the metal floor of a foot over bridge that services hundreds, if not thousands, of commuters could easily turn into a death trap for the unwary. Even if someone managed not to fall through, the rusty metal could and would cause grievous injury.

This paper has been crying hoarse for years on the apathy displayed by authorities on various problems faced by Dhaka residents. But the utter lack of concern by those entrusted to look after the welfare of residents is dumbfounding. Taxpayers' money would be well spent if regulatory authorities actually did something to improve amenities, and what could best be described as the appalling state of city buses.

COMMENTS

"This kind of shot is daal-bhat to him. You know what is daal-bhat? It's bread and butter!"

--Cricket commentator Shamim Ashraf Chowdhury

Muntaqa Mahi

A witty and powerful comment that aptly describes Mushfiqur Rahim's superb batting style.

Mukul Hossain

'Daal-bhat shot?' Hilarious! Like 'Banglawash' this one is definitely going to have a place in the cricket lexicon.

Tanvir Islam

He is a great commentator who adds to the thrill of cricket matches.

"Strong awareness yet high prevalence"

(November 10, 2015)

Nazrul Islam Neil

Poverty and unemployment are the main reasons behind early marriages.

Saleh Chowdhury

Child marriage is a social menace. The government needs to do more to curb this practice.

"Justice, Refreshingly Quick"

(November 9, 2015)

Molla Masum

While Rajon and Rakib's killers were being sentenced to death, Shahadat's shooter came out on bail with a grand reception.

What a shame!

A nation drowning in its own fear

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

THE Argentine director Benjamin Naishat's debut feature last year was *History of Fear*, which explores how terror of the unknown can become a destructive force. It shows that fear initially just inconveniences people as they are afraid to open their doors for strangers. But then their reactions to things they don't understand eventually affect the society as a whole. Fear does to human mind what heat does to plastic.

That state of mind is now creeping up on us as distortions are about to begin, if haven't already begun. We are afraid of talking to strangers. Many of us don't answer phone calls from unknown numbers. Unidentified emails are readily deleted. I know of people who don't want to get out of the house unless it's absolutely essential. We are fast becoming a paranoid nation where people are continuously looking over their shoulders.

It's because fear confronts us on many fronts. It comes from run-of-the-mill thugs and crooks. It comes from the law keepers. Neighbourhood goons, political musclemen, con men, imposters, militants and terrorists are all having a field day. We are as if walking through a minefield, careful with every step and trying not to get blown up.

This fresh paroxysm of fear adds to the existing layers of fears. The fears of adulterated food, political uncertainty, traffic congestions, accidents, corruption, deception, manipulation, and exploitation have already shrivelled our existence. The new layers are making the burden of fear heavier on us.

It doesn't, however, make us the only nation living in fear. A Gallup poll conducted in 2013 showed that two-thirds of the people surveyed in 134 countries said they felt safe walking alone at night. But less than half the population in 31

countries felt that way.

Some of these countries, where fear rules, have prosperous economies and stable governments. For example, South Africa is one of the world's largest emerging economies but three out of four people there reported feeling unsafe. Botswana is considered to have among the most stable governments in its region, while its citizens are among

us feel unsafe to walk alone at night. It also makes us feel unsafe even while sleeping inside our homes. We are also afraid to speak our minds in the fear of saying the wrong things in the wrong place in front of the wrong people. Muggers, robbers and extortionists are at least corporeal threats compared to the invisible and the unknown ones when the victims have no way to tell who is

this nation had to cope with so much doubt that savagely blurs the line between good and evil.

Besides weakening the immune system, living under constant threat can also impair formation of long-term memories and damage certain parts of the brain. There are many other psychosomatic disorders resulted by fear, which can have debilitating effects on individu-



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the most fearful in the world.

Experts argue that this sense of fear comes with the territory of rapid economic development. They call it the "growing pain" when rising income inequalities create a deep vein of injustice leading to rising crime rates and fears of crime. But none of the above explains the fear that's gripping us.

Neither the stable government nor rapid economic turnaround is the cause. While crimes are always rooted in economic, political and religious reasons, the fear factor that is slowly enveloping us, like a serpent pulling the prey into its coils, is rooted in our confusion about ourselves.

This organic fear doesn't only make

going to strike when for what reason.

The reason why a more affluent nation that we are today is more scared than it was during its poorer days is that the number of unknowns has gone up. Frankly, we don't know anybody or anything these days, familiar things having this terrible capacity to turn abruptly unfamiliar. We not only shudder at the sight of an approaching stranger but also suspect the intentions of friends and family members sitting right next to us.

And it has to be said that never before in our history have we lived in so much fear. Never before have we suffered from so much anxiety to find our enemies hiding in the crowd. Never before has

als. And when individuals are affected it has its knock-on effects, first on the families and then on the nation.

Every government in this country has cultivated fear and taken it to the next level. That escalation has marked a depraved transformation each time as this nation jumped from frying pan into fire. US president Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in his first inaugural address: "Only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Uncannily true for us, the inverse of that saying is stewing us in our own juice because we have got nothing but everything to fear.

The writer is the Editor of weekly *First News* and an opinion writer for *The Daily Star*.
Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

PROJECT SYNDICATE

THE POVERTY LINE'S BATTLE LINES

VISIONARY VOICE SERIES



KAUSHIK BASU

FOR a long time, as a college professor and then as the chief economic adviser to the Indian government, I was a happy user of the World Bank's data on global poverty, tracking trends and analysing cross-country patterns. I seldom paused to think about how those numbers were computed. Then, three years ago, I joined the World Bank as its Chief Economist. It was like a customer, happily ordering dinner in a favourite restaurant, suddenly being asked to go into the kitchen and prepare the meal.

Being in the business of measuring poverty is a challenge for the World Bank. If poverty declines, critics accuse us of trying to showcase our success. If it rises, they say we are ensuring that we stay in business. And if it stays the same, they accuse us of trying to avoid these two charges.

Fortunately, there is something liberating in knowing that you will be criticised for any outcome. Still, as our team set about defining the global poverty line this year (and thus the incidence of poverty), I was acutely aware of the note of caution from Angus Deaton, this year's Nobel laureate in economics: "I am not sure it is wise for the World Bank to commit itself so much to this project."

I could see his point: This year's poverty calculation was particularly momentous. In 2011, new purchasing power parities (or PPPs, which essentially estimate how much \$1 buys in different countries) had been computed, and the data became available in 2014. This was one reason to take stock of how we would adjust the global poverty line, estimate new poverty numbers, and publish them in our Global Monitoring Report, which was released in October.

A second reason is that the UN has included the eradication of chronic poverty in its new Sustainable Development Goals. This means that our decision on where to draw the poverty line probably will influence not just the World Bank's mission but also the development agenda of the UN and all countries around the world. Clearly, as we crunched the numbers, we had a special, and daunting, responsibility to fulfil.

Our first task was to see how the global poverty line had been determined earlier. In 2005, when the previ-

ous round of purchasing power parities was estimated, the method used was to take the national poverty lines of the 15 poorest countries, compute their average, and treat that as the global line. This led to a global poverty line of \$1.25. The idea was that a poor person was anyone whose PPP-adjusted daily consumption fell short of \$1.25.

The validity of this method has been questioned – and I have had my own reservations. But where the line is drawn in the initial year is in some sense not that important. Because there is no unique definition of

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poverty, what matters is to draw a line at some reasonable place and then hold the line constant in real (inflation-adjusted) terms so that we can track the performance of the world and individual countries over time.

Some critics argue that the 2005 poverty line of \$1.25 was too low. But what should alarm them is that in 2011, some 14.5 percent of the world's population – one in every seven people – lived below it. Given that we are already committed to the goal of ending extreme, chronic poverty by 2030, our first decision was to hold the yardstick for measuring poverty constant.

Since there had been inflation between the two rounds of the PPP computation, in 2005 and 2011, we would obviously have to raise the nominal poverty line to keep the real line constant. However, doing this for the world as a whole is far from easy. Which countries' inflation should we use?

We ran two experiments: one was to inflate the poverty lines of the 15 countries used in 2005, using their respective inflation rates and then taking an average; the other was to do the same for 101 countries for which we had the necessary data. These two methods raised the line to \$1.88 and \$1.90, respectively.

However, a third approach was possible: to raise the poverty line with the new PPP indices so that the incidence of global poverty remained unchanged (because PPP arguably tells us about parity across countries and should not change the absolute level of global poverty). This exercise – and it was beginning to look like a strange alignment of the stars – resulted in a poverty line just above \$1.90. In short, by keeping to one decimal place, all three methods led to \$1.9. And that is the line we adopted.

We will not always have the good fortune to be able to use different methods and still arrive at virtually the same line. Furthermore, poverty can and should be measured by many metrics other than money: life expectancy, educational attainment, health, and various other measures of human "functionings and capabilities" (as Amartya Sen calls them) are all important. To tackle these problems in the future and broaden the World Bank's poverty research, we have established the 24-member Commission on Global Poverty – chaired by Sir Tony Atkinson of the London School of Economics and Nuffield College, Oxford – which will submit its report next spring.

Measuring poverty attracts attention from both politicians and academic researchers – and we had an ample amount of both. We were attentive to the politics of poverty, but we resisted political lobbying. We took account of the suggestions of researchers, but we used our judgment. One researcher was adamant that the poverty line should be \$1.9149. I decided that those last three digits were a bit excessive.

The writer is Chief Economist and Senior Vice President of the World Bank and Professor of Economics at Cornell University.
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedadlystar.net

Another fantastic whitewash

Bangladesh cricket team whitewashed another team and this time, it is Zimbabwe. Each of the three ODI matches with Zimbabwe was played very well by our cricketers and they deserve our heartiest congratulations. Hats off, Tigers!

Akib Sumon
BAU, Mymensingh



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Attack on the police

Recently a patrol team of Ashulia industrial police came under attack by unknown assailants in which a police constable was stabbed to death. As a retired police officer, my hunch is that the group of constables was deployed without proper briefing by officers who posted them there. So the group was clueless about any security threat. Currently, the daily morning practice in the police lines consists only of riot drills. The drill to prevent sudden attack is totally absent. Constables are not taught the vital use of 'safety catch' which pre-

vents loaded guns from accidental firing of shots. Instead, constables are trained to not load the chamber without the instruction of an officer of the rank of SI and above. Furthermore, the law enforcement agencies are riddled with corruption so much so that even training programmes are not free from this vice. Both the police and the public will benefit if policymakers dig deep into it and take appropriate measures to prepare law enforcement agencies including the police to cope with sudden attacks on them.

Bazlur Rahman
On e-mail