

Violence against women continues

Implement a zero-tolerance policy

We are horrified at the news that a housewife from Bhaluka Upazila, Mymensingh was severely injured by her husband for not meeting his repeated demands for dowry. The culprit tried to gouge out her right eye; fortunately, neighbours rescued her and took her to a nearby hospital. But her eye already suffered vitreous hemorrhage and serious damage to its retina which might cost her eyesight forever.

Despite a number of laws and ordinances criminalising dowry and related violence, this evil practice is still widespread in the country. Ais o Salish Kendra estimates that in the eight months between January and September of this year, 70 women were physically tortured, 129 women were tortured to death, and nine women committed suicide in dowry related cases. Though many such incidents go unreported, the staggering numbers are enough to show how vulnerable our women are to this social vice.

It often happens that offenders manage to escape the law through various legal loopholes. Sometimes victims also seek solutions outside the court as legal battles cost too much and take too long for them to bear. The criminal justice system should be strengthened to address these gaps and the dowry preventing laws should be applied stringently. In this case, police has arrested the offender and later produced him before Mymensingh Court. We demand exemplary punishment of the perpetrator. The society also has a duty to discourage and prevent the practice of dowry and other patriarchal rituals that impinge on the safety of women in Bangladesh.

Shooting down of Russian plane

De-escalate tension

TURKISH aircraft fire has brought down a Russian Su-24 near the Turkish-Syrian border on November 24. It has generated a war of words between Russia and Turkey, which has been backed up by other NATO members including the US. The latest incident merely highlights why it is crucial for all parties engaged in defeating the Islamic State (IS) to cooperate with one another when conducting air strikes.

Russia's decision to suspend military cooperation should be reconsidered while Turkey should also address the issue in a manner that would help quick de-escalation. Any tiff between Russia and NATO will only aid the IS and transform the Syrian conflict into a proxy war between Russia and the West. We must not lose sight of the bigger picture here. All foreign powers engaged militarily in Syria are there for one single purpose, i.e. the defeat of IS. It would be disastrous if the goal that has united the civilised world against the new menace that IS poses falls apart in a test of egos over an unfortunate incident that occurred in the first place because of lack of communication and cooperation.

We are glad to learn that US President Barack Obama and Turkish President Erdogan have talked with each other on the necessity to de-escalate a potentially explosive situation. It is essential that Russia and Turkey work out their differences in the interest of the Syrian people who have suffered terribly in this long, protracted conflict. The world does not want to see the incident escalate into a confrontation between Russia and NATO.

COMMENTS

"Of commitment, of healing" (November 23, 2015)

Kamrun Nahar

The families of the victims of war crimes will at least get some solace after so long.

Lutfu Begum

We thank the government for bringing these notorious war criminals to justice.

Labib Hasan

Some people are trying to portray the execution of Rajakars as 'inhuman.' They have probably forgotten that these war criminals had committed far more atrocious, barbaric and brutal crimes against our people during the Liberation War.

Ornob

They have got what they deserved.

"Expatriates face MRP trouble" (November 23, 2015)

Khair Feroz

We have been getting reports of various kinds of irregularities ever since the 'machine-readable passport' system was introduced. How long will this MRP drama go on?

Zeba Rifat

This IRIS Corporation is nothing but a big failure. Why doesn't the government cancel its contract with them?

Parul

There are so many complaints against this company. Why isn't the government taking any punitive measures against IRIS? We wonder if some government officials have made a 'deal' with them.

In the grip of madness

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING
BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

THAT is so in the three countries that once constituted the subcontinent and belonged to the same political realm, Pakistan is suffering the consequences of its flawed policy of righting strategic imbalance with its bigger neighbour through a war of proxy – by making cynical use of state terrorism and perpetrating violence on it, using Kashmir and the grievances of its people as an excuse. There is no sign of religious extremism and terrorism in Pakistan abating, unless the Pakistan Army and more importantly, the ISI which dictates the policies of the country, stopped running with the hare and hunting with the hounds – a game it has been playing to its own detriment.

Bangladesh's experience with ribald extremism and terrorism is more recent and, so far, has been less painful in terms of mass attacks or casualties. But there has been a slow, but steady gnawing at the very soul of this country. The very ethos of the land, nurtured by a vibrantly inclusive and syncretic society, is under attack by a band of extremists, calling themselves Muslims, who are unwilling to allow cultures and religions to co-exist in the same vein as has been the case for many centuries. These religious radicals have targeted those whose views they think have denigrated

Islam, arrogating to only them the right to defend Islam. They have targeted even those they feel are supportive of their 'enemies'. The only arbiter they find handy is the machete or the gun; and violence is the intuitive reaction. Counter logic, and counter arguments have no place in their way of life.

And it seems that these extremists have chosen to join the IS bandwagon, for very good reasons too. The name adds magnitude to their madness. The responsibility for the killings of the

that makes the statements of the prime minister, made on more than one occasion, that the country is under international pressure to accept that Islamic State is here, merit serious reflection. However, we wonder what to make of the media report of November 25 that four 'IS Operatives' have been arraigned for plot to topple the government. IS or not, we are under threat and we must rise above political divide, stop making political use of the issue and gel together to combat it. And

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foreigners and of policemen and bloggers/publishers have been accepted by the IS which, to make it more 'convincing,' has been carried in their so-called monthly magazine *Dabiq*. Dabiq is a town in northern Syria, bordering with Turkey. The Islamic State believes Dabiq is where an epic and decisive battle will take place with Christian forces of the West, and have named their magazine after the village. We in Bangladesh have been at pains to deny IS' existence in Bangladesh. And

we must employ both 'kinetic' and 'chemical' energy to fight it, quite unlike what the western countries have chosen to do against the IS.

If that is the rather depressing scenario in Bangladesh, developments next door in India are equally disquieting. Although the radical rightist extremism, fuelled by Hindutva, is not as violent as we have experienced in this country in recent times, the phenomenon of intolerance to dissent is striking at the core of India and,

regrettably, taking the country away from Gandhi's India and nearer to Modi's India which some scholars fear mirror their western neighbour, and ask, "Is India in grave danger of becoming a 'Hindu' Pakistan?" Some of the incidents like killing of intellectuals, lynching of Muslims not only on suspicion of eating beef but also for transporting cows across the country, Muslims being asked to leave India and seek abode in Pakistan, have been unheard of in India.

For those, like Dr. Lokesh Chandra, the newly appointed head of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, who says, "From a practical point of view, (Modi) supersedes the Maha-tma," and that Modi is in fact "a reincarnation of God," moving nearer to Modi's India might be the best thing to happen to India for a long time, but does that augur well for a country that prides itself on tolerance and 'Ahingsa'?

"The Taliban dynamiting the Bamiyan statues, the Pakistani Taliban slitting the throats of captured soldiers and playing football with the severed heads, the ISIS employing naked terror as a weapon of control, a mob lynching a helpless man for suspected beef-eating," as a Pakistani scholar puts it, and one might add, killing the helpless bloggers and their publishers are the same madness that we are all in the grip of.

Unfortunately, mad people feed and sustain on each other's examples. Curing this madness, and more importantly, figuring out how to do it, should be our priority.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

Anatomy of two E-waste disasters

RASHNA RAYA RAHMAN and NAUREEN SHAFINAZ MAHBOOB

DISCARDED end-of-life electronic and electrical devices, or e-waste, are the fastest growing waste stream in the world. But unlike other waste forms, e-waste involves a complex mix of hazardous, highly toxic materials and economically valuable base metals (copper, tin) and noble metals (gold, silver, palladium). The economic opportunities of extracting these metals make it a desirable commodity. In some developing countries, large landfills have emerged where e-waste is dismantled by the informal sector using rudimentary methods that present significant risks to the environment and the health of local populations.

Guiyu, China

In 2010, China became the largest exporter of electronic products in the world. Paradoxically, the country is also one of the largest importers of electronic waste. With the growing perception that e-waste is a valuable commodity, electronic products that are first produced in China and exported to other countries are later imported back to the country as e-waste through illegal channels.

Guixi, a peaceful rice-growing village in northeast Guangdong province, is now known as one of the biggest dumping grounds of electronic waste in the world. In the mid 1990s, trucks of e-waste started arriving into the city for further processing and because the pay was comparatively higher, the people of Guixi started engaging in recycling this e-waste in order to liberate minerals like aluminum, steel, copper and gold. The city of Guixi is home to around 5,500 businesses and more than 100,000 people including women and children are solely dependent on e-waste processing to earn a living.

Several field investigations by authorities including BAN (Basal Action Network) have revealed hazardous practices taking place in Guixi like open burning, dumping of hazardous e-waste into the nearby rivers and lakes and children engaging in several of these activities. The water is no longer fit to drink in the city and has to be brought from nearby towns as the river water in Guixi contains 2,400 times more lead than the WHO (World Health Organization) threshold level is for drinking water. These studies have also revealed that Guixi has the highest level of cancer causing dioxins in the world and the children in the town have excessive rate of lead in their blood.

The aforementioned hazardous techniques and disposing of e-waste in open grounds have resulted in lead and barium leachate, toxic phosphorus releases into the air and surface and groundwater contamination. Alongside severe environmental costs, workers treating e-waste without protective gear suffer from several respiratory and skin problems, with the risk of violent implosion and being exposed to cancer causing polycyclic.

With the aim of tackling these various issues the local authorities of China have taken initiatives to build proper recycling factories and are also banning processes like open burning and acid treatments. An effective program was launched earlier known as "Home Appliance Old for New Rebate Programme" through which 61 million home appliances were collected and treated formally in 2011. A recent collaborative approach by the Chinese search engine

Baidu and the United Nations Development Program plan to create an application through which users may easily sell their old electronics for cash. Since 2011, the central government has been enforcing the national e-waste legislation, which aims to formalise the e-waste recycling processes in the country.

Agbogbloshie, Ghana

Once a thriving wetland on the outskirts of Ghanaian capital, Accra, Agbogbloshie has transformed, over the last 15 years, into a toxic e-waste dumping site. The Blacksmith Institute reported it to be the most toxic place in the world in 2014, more than well-known hazardous sites like Chernobyl.

In 2003, Ghana formulated its policy on Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for accelerated development. The formalisation of this ICT driven development agenda led to a high level of mostly secondhand EEE influx into Ghana from North



American and European countries. In a report published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Ghana in 2011, it is estimated that 30 percent or more of these imports are either non-functional or are near end-of-life. Given the economic opportunities that can be gained from secondary raw material markets, an extensive informal industry has emerged in Accra's Agbogbloshie market that extracts valuable metals from the e-waste.

There is currently an estimated 40,000 Ghanaians who depend on the landfill in Agbogbloshie for their survival. Migrant workers, and even children as young as five, scavenge the waste. They break glass screens and burn plastic casings to retrieve the copper and other desirable metals inside, which they sell to scrap merchants. As there are no clear and specific national regulations on e-waste recycling in Ghana, the dismantlers and recyclers in Agbogbloshie work in

appalling conditions, continuously exposing themselves and communities nearby to serious hazards.

The unsafe practices of open burning have severe environmental consequences. In 2008 Greenpeace Research Laboratories conducted a small sampling campaign on soil from burning sites at Agbogbloshie. Findings from the study showed levels of copper, lead, tin and zinc present at concentrations over 100 times higher than typical background levels for soils. During periods of heavy rainfall, these toxins are transferred from the soil to nearby water bodies.

Ghana's government is tackling the problem with the support of other stakeholders. NGOs such as Pure Earth, Blacksmith Institute and Green Advocacy Ghana have provided wire-stripping machines to recyclers that offer a safer way to extract the metals. The Ministry of Environment in Ghana is drafting an e-waste bill for consideration by Parliament. The bill

proposes a levy to be paid by manufacturers and importers of electronic equipment to pay for the costs of the collection, treatment, recovery and environmentally sound disposal and recycling of electronic waste.

Lessons learnt

As the world becomes more connected and globalised, e-waste streams will continue to rise. The extreme environmental degradation and health hazards documented at Guixi and Agbogbloshie should act as reminder for a country like Bangladesh – a rapidly emerging economy with a focus on ICT policies to drive development – to implement formal recycling techniques and enact regulations on e-waste to circumvent a future potential crisis.

The writers are Director of 5R Associates and Project Manager of EHS Business Solutions, respectively.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Stop electricity wastage

The automatic electronic traffic signal system is not working at any signal points in Dhaka city. The traffic police control the vehicles manually. So why this electricity wastage? The government should stop the supply of electricity to these machines. It will save a huge amount of electricity that can be used for other purposes.

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The tale of refugees

They have to sell their land and their house and borrow heavily to pay the human traffickers. Then, they have to cross the border into Turkey, often illegally, over razor wire fences, and then they have to make their way to the smugglers to be pushed onto the boats. They are told the journey will be safe; there will be only 30 to 35 people on the boat. But in reality, as many as 55 to 60 people are put on each boat. And the smugglers are armed to keep

the refugees 'under control.' These dinghies often break down at sea and drift for hours. Sometimes the boats are attacked by vigilantes. Those who reach the shore end up in overcrowded camps.

In July this year, 24,000 people arrived at the island of Lesbos. And by September, the number was over one hundred thousand. The international community must do more to reduce the suffering of the refugees.

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CA, USA