

## Legalising Bangladeshi workers

Much welcome move by Malaysia

WE are very happy to learn that the government of Malaysia has decided to legalise some 400,000 Bangladeshi workers working there without proper work permits. That the decision has come against the backdrop of a government-to-government (G2G Plus) initiative to take some 1.5 million more of our workers over the next three years is extremely good news for Bangladesh. The process should be concluded within the next year and our workers there who have had no problems with the law should take advantage of regularising their papers with the authorities. It would provide them with safety, better pay from employers and rights – none of which is presently available to illegal workers.

Kuala Lumpur deserves praise for the initiative especially in the backdrop of growing demands by many Malaysians to deport illegal workers in that country. With papers regularised, the hundreds of thousands of illegal workers who remit a mere US\$112 million a year should be able to earn much better wages and the remittance basket from Malaysia should grow significantly. It should also send a strong signal to human traffickers who have taken advantage of poor Bangladeshis desperate to get to a foreign land to earn a living – a dream that more often than not turns into a nightmare. An undocumented worker has no place to go and is hostage to unscrupulous employers.

With this move, we hope that relations between the two countries will smooth out over the near future and we can look forward to a mutually beneficial agreement that profits both economies.

## Low quality fuel at high price!

Sheer disregard for customers' interest

THOUGH the global oil prices have fallen sharply over the past seven months, Bangladesh government continues to charge stubbornly high price for fuels. Most oddly, the quality of fuel is below the BSTI standards that results in further loss of production capacity and environmental pollution.

According to a report published in *Prothom Alo*, octane and petrol available in our local market contains lesser percentage of octane molecules than the BSTI standard. For example, there should be 95 percent octane molecules in octane but our local octane contains less than 90 percent. Usage of substandard fuel badly affects the overall production efficiency. According to Bus and Truck Owners Association, they cannot introduce high performance engines due to low quality diesel. Substandard fuel also creates high pollution. The diesel we use contains 20 times more sulfur, a major air pollutant, than the diesel used in India.

Rampant adulteration of the fuels occurs at various stages of the supply chain that impinges on the quality of fuel products. A section of unscrupulous refineries mix condensate, byproducts obtained in gas extraction process, with the fuel. In the local market 1 litre of condensate costs Tk 42 while 1 litre petrol costs Tk 96. According to experts, corrupt fuel suppliers exploit this price gap. They have suggested reconsidering the pricing system of fuels to stop this malpractice. The government should seriously consider this proposal. It should also expedite the plan to establish a direct pipeline connecting Chittagong and Dhaka to control corruption in fuel supply system.

## COMMENTS

### Clean Dhaka concert postponed (February 12, 2013)

Syed Najmul Hussain

It was indeed a stupid idea. Canceling it is a prudent decision.

Saleh Chowdury

City authority should distribute leaflets and use billboards at important junctions of the city to make people aware about the clean practices. They should also increase manpower in the Municipality. The government also needs to allocate adequate fund for this purpose.

### NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

THE dejection in 15-year-old Ranjina Khatun Rojoni's face says it all. Physical pain, humiliation, disillusionment and despair are all written in that child's countenance – expressions that tell us how we have failed our children. For are we not part of this barbarism that allows a teacher to cane a child for not wearing her uniform, something her day labourer father could not afford? Rojoni was called out during assembly by, ironically, the fine arts teacher, who just started mercilessly beating her with a cane until she lost consciousness. She had to be treated at the hospital for three days. Barely able to contain her tears, Rojoni, a Class VI student of Ramnagar Government Primary School in Chatmohar upazila of Pabna, told a reporter that she did not want to go to school anymore because she was afraid that the teacher would beat her again.

So why didn't anyone stop him? The answer most likely lies in the fact that beating up students by teachers is an age-old practice, accepted by many teachers and parents alike, as part of disciplining children. Thus a High Court ruling that banned corporal punishment in Bangladesh schools and madrassas five years ago has had little effect on the mindsets of teachers and school authorities.

In fact, had our Pabna correspondent, Ahmed Humayan Kabir Topu, not filed this story or sent her picture that was published, it is quite likely that nothing would have happened to this sadistic teacher, giving him license to continue such despicable behaviour. But even such publicity may not guarantee appropriate punishment for such a crime.

An inquiry committee, formed by the primary education officer of the upazila, found the teacher guilty. Guess what his punishment was for physically harming a child and most probably psychologically scarring her for life? He was dismissed

from the school and transferred to another school in another remote area. So until departmental action is taken against him, this man will be allowed to teach in another school.

Meanwhile hundreds of other children in schools and madrassas will continue to be victims of sadistic teachers who get high on the power trip of violence. Needless to say, children from poor

of teachers taking pleasure in cruel punishment of children. The reports of students being whipped, punched, their hair shaved off, chained and so on, are many but they are still only a fraction of what really goes on in the name of discipline. In poor, remote areas where there is little or no monitoring, primitive traditions like caning a child linger and flourish,

make them more responsive to learning, quite the opposite in fact. Psychological trauma ranging from depression to sociopathic tendencies can all be attributed to childhood experiences of corporal punishment. The High Court directive, endorsed by the government, that has defined corporal punishment as 'cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and



Class VI student Ranjina Khatun had to undergo treatment at a hospital after being mercilessly canded by a teacher for not wearing school dress.

PHOTO: STAR

families will be targeted more because poor parents seldom protest injustice in fear of more injustice. Rojoni's father, a poor day labourer, has not filed a case hence criminal proceedings against the teacher who has definitely committed a crime, will not be taken.

While there are still many examples of teachers who have dedicated their lives to nurturing young minds, with patience, kindness, knowledge and integrity, there are also many instances

But even when physical punishment is not used teachers often resort to verbal abuse – using humiliating language to demean a child, destroying her self-worth, sense of security and sometimes even her ability to learn. There are many adults who still believe that a little slap now and then is the best way to discipline a child and it is this notion that condones the practice of corporal punishment. We do not need studies to tell us that hitting children does not

a clear violation of a child's fundamental right to life, liberty and freedom' and therefore prohibited, must be followed through in each and every school, no matter how remote. If education is the basic foundation of nation building we must ensure that no child sees school as a place of dread but rather as a place of safety, fun and learning.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial & Opinion, *The Daily Star*.

## Who will protect children in cyberspace?

LAILA KHONDKAR

CHILDREN are one of the most significant users of the Internet.

They use it for education, communication, and entertainment. There are utopian celebrations that the Internet will empower children and democratise the society. It is also being held responsible for the destruction of childhood as we know it. Too much exposure to it is commonly thought to lead to violence and delinquency, sexual promiscuity, educational underachievement, obesity, apathy, cynicism, and other anti-social behaviours. While there are many benefits, various new child protection concerns have also emerged due to children's access to cyberspace. These need to be addressed urgently.

According to a recent study conducted by Telenor, 49 percent of Bangladeshi children have encountered cyber bullying. Violence and harms against children in cyberspace could be in many different forms. One of those is the production, distribution and use of materials depicting child sexual abuse. Online solicitation or 'grooming' is another serious concern where an abuser secures a child's trust in order to draw them into a situation where they may be harmed. Adult pornography exists in abundance on the Internet, which many children can access. Moreover, information on tools for violence, cults, drugs etc. are freely available through the web, which could be very damaging for children. Social networking sites are a particular growth area that is being exploited for online abuse of children. Cyberspace hosts a vast number of venues (chat rooms, message boards, and games) where children congregate. This provides greater opportunities for abusers to seek out and approach

children relatively easily, and eventually they can harm them psychologically and/or physically. It must be remembered that abuse of a child is still more likely to occur within the family than anywhere else, but cyberspace opens up the possibility for family members to use the technology abusively. Moreover, it provides other family members and strangers with the opportunity to contact children with

*There is a need to achieve a balance between utilisation of positive aspects of the cyber world -- ensuring the rights of children to privacy, information and expression, association -- and protecting them from abuse.*

whom they would not otherwise have had any kind of relationship.

It must be said that no country in the world has solved the challenges related to online child protection completely. But important lessons can be learnt from the West. Now it is known that online activities have their roots in offline behaviour, and it is important to understand the contexts in which the Internet is used instead of just focusing on the technology itself. Some prefer blocking software, which will prevent

children from gaining access to online materials that are inappropriate for them. However, evidence of effectiveness of blocking software is limited. Rather than simply take restrictive measures, we need to strengthen the capacity of children so that accessing the Internet becomes an empowering experience for them. We need a multi-sectoral response to protect children in cyberspace with active engagement of the information and communication technology sector.

Children's vulnerabilities are connected to their status in the real world. Some children are especially at risk due to a range of vulnerability-enhancing factors. If children live in socially and economically difficult conditions, have already experienced harm such as sexual abuse and exploitation, suffer from loneliness and low-esteem, and are alienated from parents and others, they are more likely to be negatively affected. Thus, it is imperative that adults actively listen to children, understand their vulnerabilities and take sensitive measures to protect them from harm.

According to article 18 of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), parents have the primary responsibility to raise the child, and the State shall support them in this. However, many parents do not have the capacity to guide their children, as they are not very familiar with the new technology. In Bangladesh, parents in general seem very worried about their children's internet usage and feel a sense of helplessness. This usually leads to a gap between the parents and children. A survey of adult and child internet users in 12 countries revealed a big difference between the amount of time that parents believe their children are spending online, and the amount that children actually do. There is a need for better parent-child communication.

The principles of protecting children online and real settings are quite similar. Parents should spend quality time with their children to understand their lived realities, friendships, and interests in order to provide them with the guidance to protect them in all settings. Parents cannot offer appropriate advice if they do not know their children well.

Governments should consider computer literacy programmes targeting parents and other caregivers so they are better informed about children's use of the Internet. This may not be possible in all cases. For example, parents may not be able to learn about child protection in the cyberspace due to limited or no education, language barrier etc. Even in that case, nothing should stop them from communicating with children effectively; that is critical for protecting children. Teachers could also play a role in guiding children when parents are not able to do so.

Children have the right to explore new territories as well as the right to be protected from harm. There is a need to achieve a balance between utilisation of positive aspects of the cyber world -- ensuring the rights of children to privacy, information and expression, association -- and protecting them from abuse. In Bangladesh, more and more people are using the Internet, but there are limited interventions to protect the best interests of children in online settings. The government should provide leadership in developing policies and facilitating initiatives that enable children to exercise their right to information without being abused. Parents, caregivers and teachers should address the root causes that make children vulnerable in the real as well as the virtual world.

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## WORLD RADIO DAY 2016

# Radio in times of emergency and disaster

TAMANNA RAHMAN and SYED KAMRUL HASAN

ADVANCES in technology have given people more and more ways to access an increasing amount of information. However, in a country like Bangladesh -- where access to technology is expensive, flow of information is limited or literacy rates are not up to the mark -- radio continues to play an important role in information sharing.

Community Radio (CR), as a new broadcaster media offering a fourth tier of radio broadcasting in addition to commercial and public broadcasting, serves geographic communities and communities of interest. First, it is

communicated orally by using local language and at a relatively low cost -- meaning that it is accessible to people who cannot access other media. Secondly, CR is frequently paired with other communication tools, such as mobile phones for call-in shows, which enhances the likelihood of the audience taking in the information being shared, and creates a platform for two-way exchanges and learning among a wide range of actors. Finally, this platform can be used to transmit messages from one community to another and to link with national broadcasters and global networks. To promote a positive social and cultural change, community radio is considered not only as a channel to transmit

information and stories to the people, but also from them.

Currently Bangladesh has 16 CR Stations, and 16 new CR stations are in different stages of establishment. There are many inspiring stories about the profound impact that CRs have already had on local communities, not to mention on issues of self-determination, cultural sovereignty and social justice.

More than a third of the country's population lives in the coastal areas. Many are in rural areas where radio is the main medium of information. Community radio has proven to be an effective tool for disaster management, as it can readily deliver information that are suited to the needs of

the community, packaged in their own language. It has helped prepare the communities to tackle any impending disaster.

During an emergency, it is critical to start broadcasting as early as possible. In addition to warning the communities in advance, CRs can broadcast updates on the damage, providing gender disaggregated data when they can. Broadcast appeal for donations, addressing women and children's special needs, can help the relief efforts. Cultural practices often prevent a woman from seeking medical help from a male doctor. In such instances, proper information can fill the gap.

Following a disaster, CRs can air

counselling programmes aimed towards trauma victims. Call-in programmes, for instance, for victims to express themselves and learn from each others' experiences can have a healing effect, particularly for women, youth, and the elderly.

Special attention must also be paid to the safety of people behind the microphone, i.e. the people who are tasked with the responsibility to make it all happen. Likewise, establishing support centres for information sharing and logistic distribution with a special section for women and children can lead to efficient relief delivery.

The writers are members of Bangladesh NGO's Network for Radio & Communication (BNNRC)