

Cold-blooded lechery and hushed silence!

Significant progress in RMG safety

Carry out remaining initiatives

THE Transparency International's Bangladesh chapter (TIB) has termed the work done over the last three years by the readymade garments (RMG) sector on improving safety standards as "revolutionary". According to a study conducted by TIB on the issue of governance in the RMG sector found that 6 out of 68 initiatives have been fully implemented and progress on a further 39 was satisfactory. That means the bulk of the initiatives undertaken by national and international stakeholders are on track. Needless to say such initiatives will go a long way in redeeming the reputation of our single largest export earning sector.

That said the TIB has also pointed out that it is imperative that the remaining initiatives are sped up. There are particular concerns regarding workers' right to unionise to realise their demands. TIB has rightly pointed out that a follow up study is required to find out whether the compensation was enough for the Rana Plaza victims to be rehabilitated. It is highly commendable that about 92 per cent of factories operating in Bangladesh today meet the minimum wage requirement. But when we talk about subcontracting factories, many of which remain outside of the membership of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers' Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knit Manufacturers' Association (BKMEA), enforcement becomes a little trickier. The initiatives must be applied to these factories also.

It is worrying to see that international brands are not doing enough to increase the prices they pay to manufacturers, money sorely needed for upgrading factories to meet standards set by Accord and Alliance. Without that happening, there is little incentive for the sector to do more on safety and welfare of workers.

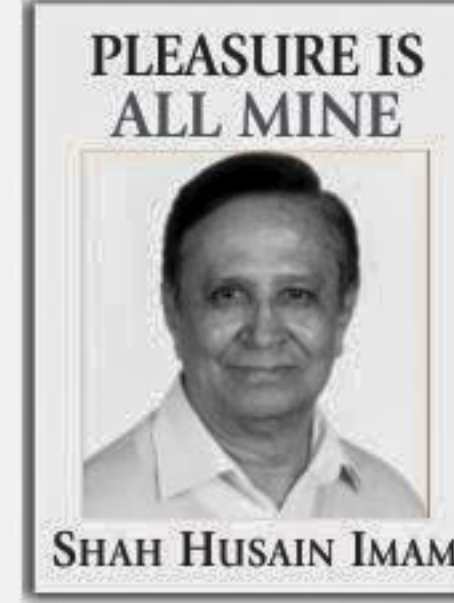
Student in shackles!

Stop torture in the name of discipline

IT seems like a story out of a psychological thriller – too horrific to be true. A 10-year-old madrasa student was rescued by the police last Monday night from Magura Bus Stand area, with his left leg still tied to an iron shackle. We are to understand that the child had fled the institution multiple times as he was beaten and tortured by his tutor, but his father had returned him to the place every time. Consequently, the tutor had put him in shackles. The parents had allegedly consented to this brutal act, which, if true, only adds to our concerns about the trauma undergone by the child and of his future safety.

It is completely unacceptable that such barbaric tools of "discipline" are used in this day and age, in violation of the country's constitutional provisions and laws, by teachers and also parents. We can only imagine the grave psychological harm – in addition to the physical harm – suffered by this minor. Legal action must be taken against the perpetrator of this violence, and, as this instance makes clear, parents too must be sensitised about corporal punishment as many still readily give in to teachers' unjust disciplinary actions thinking that these are an inevitable part of the education system.

And while we are heartened to note that the HC has asked Udayan School authorities to submit a probe report on allegations of torture on an eighth grade by a teacher of the school, we wonder if this case would have been taken seriously had it not been highlighted by the Bangla daily, Prothom Alo. Five years on, isn't it high time we implement the HC ruling that prohibits corporal punishment in a comprehensive manner across towns and villages of Bangladesh?



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THE photograph of a toddler in a Chinese street, published on an online portal, waving a steel pipe at an urban management force working to clear up pavements would itself have made news. But there was so much more to it with the infant actually shouting: 'Don't touch my grandma, go away', to the appreciating, if somewhat amused, glance of onlookers.

It highlighted a child's courage, his concern and love for a near and dear one standing up to a goliath-like adversary to defend his grandmother's dignity against a perceived use of force.

Where a toddler could bravely resist what in his eyes looked like an imposition on his grandmother, you have a mob of grownups at Hatia in Noakhali and Sonagazi in Feni as silent, abetting bystanders to the reported stripping of two women of their clothes in broad daylight and being tortured mercilessly.

The victims are Shahana, 32, of Hatia and Wahida Khatun, 68, of Sonagazi in Feni a beneficiary of Adarshagram Ashrayan project at Chardarbesh union. The first woman failing to pay 'subscription' (toll) to Hatia pourashava was disrobed in public and beaten black and blue, allegedly by local thana dalal (collaborator) and Jubo League cadre Shahjahan. Her husband too, was detained briefly, for not complying with their extortionist demands. At one stage, when Shahana was carrying three and a half lakh taka out of sale proceeds from a plot of land, her purse and necklace

would be snatched away.

When the video was put online it went viral and the police registered the case four days after the incident. And they said Shahjahan was not a thana dalal and that the police was getting a move on to arrest him.

The second victim Wahida Khatun's fault, was to cultivate some vegetables in front of her room allotted under a shelter

reach of the law's long arm stops short or is laid back or compromised by patently unequal power relations in the countryside. Why would that be so when the urban-rural line is fast disappearing through women's empowerment in the garment sector, their local government representation and the women workers overseas sending in money to their relatives at home?

Here is an issue with trafficking behind which is a push factor of young women's sense of insecurity in the country making them look for jobs abroad. And they sometimes land from the frying pan to the fire. Also, they become vulnerable to illegal trafficking such as the recovery of 250 women from the India-Bangladesh border has recently pointed to.

Hated as the women's tormentors are the onlookers of atrocious scenes are equally to blame. The community did not raise a single finger or voice of protest, little realising that a single grunt of protest could have broken into a crescendo of resistance against the rowdies, freezing them on their tracks. Instead, they were watching as though a circus, leery-eyed at the baring of the women's body. Rampant exposure to pornography and the culture of video-recording induced incidents for blackmailing are having all sorts of unsavoury consequences. This is why even governments in the liberal West are working to find remedies to a breakdown of old world family and social values.

Why must a majority be so afraid of a tiny minority of the wickedest? To explain this in terms of the thugs living off scare-mongering, notorious credentials, impunities from offences committed earlier on as though they are beyond and above law, is being pedestrian. For it amounts to

abdication of the government's responsibility and authority on the one hand and that of the community at large on the other.

In one of the human chains seeking justice to Tonu after a full month of simulated mystery surrounding her case, a placard read jarringly but insightfully "When alive we are a 'commodity' and when raped and murdered we become sisters".

This sarcastic line is a razor-sharp pointer to a societal hypocrisy. We are casual with the living, dropping all our guards but chest-beating in delirium about the brutal end of a woman. To compound the burden of our unfinished agenda, a new brutality keeps kicking up the previous one into the long grass.

Let it not be lost on us that the sensitisation campaigns are mistimed in the aftermath, rather in the prelude to a pernicious occurrence when we would be in with a chance of preempting it. An infinitely less costly option that. In spite of the vociferous aftermath do we see any remission in the phallic fever?

There are two ways to be ahead of the problems: One, we have special units or task forces comprising law enforcers particularly women police, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, local body and NGO representatives to attend to the brewing and emerging issues of women's or any vulnerable groups' safety and security. The second option that could be a silver bullet is setting up communication help lines to hear out problems and arranging timely law enforcement intervention. The community policing by young Turks, with a small retainer allowance, could do the rest of the magic.

The writer is an Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

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project. She was stripped, tied with her clothes to a tree by a goon named Sabuj, 38, in broad daylight.

Let's pinpoint the core issues of such rabid-dog-like behaviour assaulting the dignity of women. Far from being macho, it represents the worst abomination of a woman's person. And, are they not our mothers, sisters and daughters? This has happened in the rural outback where the

Where have all the dreamers gone?

HASAN MEER

"What is your dream?"

I asked a group of 19-20 year old students on a lazy afternoon, inside a mundane square shaped room.

The class had just begun and the day's topic was A Midsummer Night's Dream.

There was an uncanny stillness, which might have been welcomed in different circumstances, but I was eager to hear a sound – any sound.

Thud! Someone dropped her book.

I asked again, believing in the virtue of perseverance.

Some looked at the whiteboard; few glanced at the clock, and the rest remained busy scrutinising the rough contours of the desks.

I tried to rephrase my question. "What is your aspiration? What keeps you running or nudges you forward when you find yourself between a rock and a hard place?"

There were 43 students to be exact. These starry-eyed optimists – eager to discover and enhance their abilities, are from different corners of the country, joined together for one unique purpose – to obtain a coveted university degree.

There might be gargantuan dimensions of diverse opinions that present themselves while writing or discussing about education in our tiny country. Then again, if not anything else, a wide window of argumentative opportunities for think-tanks and intellectuals to point out the discrepancies and functional atrocities in all the educational institutions will arise faster than the unfinished high-rises.

Let's not get carried away and blame the system, let's go back to my story. I took refuge to the last resort as a teacher. "You guys will be graded for this!"

The studious ones sat straight, the middle bunch – a little confused, still gathered enough courage to look at my direction and even the notorious lot uncomfortably and hesitantly started searching for an appropriate answer.

I smiled inwardly, though not a satisfactory one! Sadly, the grade tag at times takes the joy out of a lecture. Then again, you cannot always be a chooser.

The first student answered, "I want to be a banker." "A private banker," she reassured.

Second one, "A banker."

Third one hesitated, told me his dream is a little different. I was curious.

"My dream is to be a businessman," he said.

The dream list turned out to be like this: 27 students dreamt of being bankers, 4 wanted to be teachers (to please me, I guess), 5 businesspersons, and 7 corporate officials.

I have to admit, they all looked content and quite sure.

Were these the answers I was looking for? Of course



Your dream should not be only about getting a job, rather getting the best job in the universe! Why limit your imagination? Reach for the stars. Dream big, even if you stumble and are stuck somewhere in the middle, don't stop dreaming.

not!

Was I upset? Not really.

Did I know they were going to answer this way? Perhaps. But I sure have dreamt differently!

I decided to give Mr. Shakespeare a rest and closed the book.

I have asked this question in other classes too, and got similar answers.

How did we get here? Somewhere along the way, we forgot how to dream. When did getting a job become a dream? Where did all the dreamers go? Why is it that no one wants to dream of achieving something completely foolish or crazy?

Why not dream big; why just pick or choose a career?

When I was a kid, our English teachers would assign us essays on journey by bus, train, or boat. After every four months, we were weary of traveling to new and exotic places on our exam papers! Then, there were teachers who wanted to test our imagination and challenge us to write about journey by bus and train, or train and boat together! We had to invent new roads, rivers, and tracks all over again. Amongst all these modus operandi, the schools or teachers never dared to ask us to write about a journey by plane or a spaceship. Somehow they figured that genre of travelling would fall into a fantasy category, or would be extremely expensive! We had learnt a valuable lesson from the schools, which was to put a cap on our imaginations.

After so many years when I asked my students about their dreams, they just followed our legacy and could not

dare to dream big.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be a banker or a corporate official, or a businessperson. But that will be a career choice.

You get admitted to a university of your choice or affordability, then pursue your career path to become what will eventually help you to be successful or financially solvent.

But that's not a dream. Your dream should not be only about getting a job, rather getting the best job in the universe! Why limit your imagination? Reach for the stars. Dream big, even if you stumble and are stuck somewhere in the middle, don't stop dreaming.

And who should be the best person to teach them that – their teachers.

So I urge fellow teachers - it's not the students; we need to dream big for them. We have to open any or every closed channels that might limit us to limit our students. They should not waste the best days of their lives by limiting themselves. Let them dream of becoming the best!

Will all of them become the best? No. But that should not guide us to hinder their dreams. Let them dream, let us help them to dream.

As the class was almost about to end, one of my students, an aspirant banker, asked me, "Sir, what is your dream?"

"My dream?" unhesitant, I replied, "I want to be the best banker in the world!"

The writer is a journalist at The Daily Star.

COMMENTS

"Flat handover starts in Dec"
 (April 20, 2016)

Latifa Begum

Please don't delay the handover process beyond that time frame. Many people are waiting to have a home.

"Target Trans-Asian Railway linkage"
 (April 20, 2016)

Zahanara

Hope this will boost connectivity among countries in the region.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Custody of children

This refers to the report, "Guardianship of children by Mother" (March 29). Either parent can be a guardian of a minor child. The problem arises only in case of separated/divorced couples. It is very unfortunate when the custodial parent uses the child to settle scores with the non-custodial parent in a divorce

battle. It is the child who suffers in the middle of all this. Even when he or she becomes an adult, he/she may be prevented from meeting the non-custodial parent. A law should be there for these hapless children so that they can enjoy the love, affection and guidance of both the parents.

Deendayal M. Lulla
 On e-mail

Is a major earthquake imminent?

Since the devastating earthquake in Nepal last year, we have been experiencing a series of strong tremors occurring quite frequently. The year 2016 started with the pre-dawn earthquake originating from Manipur and recently we were struck by another earthquake originating from Myanmar. Fortunately, there were no serious casualties in our country. But the fact remains that our country faces a great

risk of earthquakes and according to experts, Dhaka is one of the most vulnerable cities. In an event of a major earthquake, 75,000 buildings are like to collapse in Dhaka alone. I think both the government and the people should be deeply concerned about it and prepare for such a scenario.

Kowsar Rahman Sadit
 Uttara, Dhaka

Tackling natural calamities

Our world is today frequently visited by floods, storms, cyclones and earthquakes, which raises the question: how safe are we? Are our buildings really able to withstand natural calamities? Can our MET offices give proper, accurate weather forecasts before any disaster?

We need to find out scientific and technical ways of dealing

with natural disasters, especially in regions those are most vulnerable. Also, we should construct buildings that can withstand natural calamities. Finally, rescue and humanitarian efforts should be ready in time to save the lives of victims of any natural disaster.

P. Senthil Saravana Durai
 Maharashtra, India