

## Rising trend in violence against children

### How can we protect them?

**D**ESPITE lofty rhetoric regarding our commitment to the protection of the 'future of our nation' the reality of the state of our children is grim if not macabre. In the last four months 95 children have been killed and 138 minor girls raped in the country according to Shishu Adhikar Forum, a national network of NGOs working on child rights. The grisly reports of child workers being tortured to death for trivial mistakes or for no reason at all, of children being murdered by close relatives, even mothers, of school children being abducted for ransom, trafficking or to be raped and then killed – all these horrible stories point out to a frightening malaise in our society.

We must ask why, in a democratic country that is signatory to international conventions to protect the rights of the child, is there such a dramatic rise in violence against our most precious members of our society? A primary reason is lack of access to justice, especially since most child victims are from less privileged backgrounds. Representatives of the Forum have said that the delay in trial of the perpetrators has contributed to the rising trend.

Between 2014 and 2015, 642 children have been killed according to a report in this daily. We do not know what the death toll will be like this year. In the case of Rajon and Rakib, two adolescents who were victims of sick perverts, the government has laudably initiated speedy trials and convicted the killers. Speedy trials and a separate child rights commission are essential to send a strong message to society – that no one will get away after inflicting violence on a child. All grownups of this society must work together to stop this shameful, horrific trend.

## No women's washrooms!

### Is this not a basic facility?

**W**HILE not a total surprise the statistics are still quite staggering. At least 73 percent of government offices in Dhaka do not have separate washrooms for women; the same goes for 40 percent of hospitals and 33 percent of educational institutions. This was revealed through a survey done by Poribesh Bachao Andolon (Poba) which has also found that 87 percent of government offices and 80 percent of hospitals do not have any soap or hand washing liquid in the washrooms.

There is absolutely no excuse for such an appalling scenario. In the case of government offices, it is unheard of that women do not have separate washrooms. This should be a basic requirement for any office, more so when it is a public establishment. The survey also points out the lack of public toilets that women can use – most of them are in unusable condition for anyone. The glaring absence of women's restrooms and disgusting state of those that are available, have resulted in most women not going to the washroom for hours on end. This results in all kinds of health complications including bladder infections, urinary tract infections and kidney disease.

It is embarrassing that it took a survey of a voluntary organisation to expose the extent of the problem. A city cannot call itself modern if it cannot provide basic utilities like adequate, clean, separate, public toilets for men and women. An initiative has been taken by both the city mayors to build more public toilets that are also properly maintained. We hope their ambitions are realised.

Meanwhile the government must immediately build properly maintained women-only washrooms in all their offices. On a short term basis it can at least designate some of the existing ones exclusively for women employees.

## COMMENTS

### "Primary education now up to class VIII" (May 19, 2016)

**Ratul Islam**

It is a good decision. Kudos to the education minister for this time-befitting action.

**Apu Chandra Shil**

This venture may prove effective if the government can train the teachers well enough so that they could be eligible for teaching up to class VIII.

**Manna Howlader**

Implementing this decision is going to be a huge challenge for the government.

# MP plays judge-jury-prosecutor!

STRANGER THAN FICTION



TAJ HASHMI

**A**N MP – who paradoxically represents the ruling coalition as well as its opposition in the parliament – recently played the proverbial role of the judge, jury and prosecutor. He and his associates publicly tortured and humiliated a headmaster of a local school at Narayanganj, for his "blasphemous" comments against Islam. I don't want to discuss the alleged blasphemy issue; other issues are more important and relevant today. The MP-turned-judge-jury-prosecutor's highhandedness, and the way some vested interest groups, including Islamist fanatics and communal elements are trying to defend the MP, and fish in the troubled water are very ominous indeed.

What the lawmaker-turned-self-appointed judge and his henchmen did to the unfortunate school teacher – brutalised and humiliated him by forcing him to squat holding his ears with his two hands in public – most definitely amount to the violation of human rights, as specified in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (made in 1948). Mahfuz Anam has beautifully elucidated what squatting by holding one's two ears in public is all about ("Story of an MP and a teacher", DS, May 18, 2016): "Culturally, there cannot be a more humiliating act that one can be forced to perform in public... This is what is done when we want to rob a person of all his sense of dignity and self-respect". Most importantly, the lawmaker's breaking the law of the land by promoting vigilantism is a much more grievous crime than any blasphemous comments attributed to the teacher.

I'm not going to repeat the bizarre, and frivolously ridiculous allegations brought against Shyamal Kanti Bhakta, the headmaster of a high school in Narayanganj, by some people in the locality and MP Selim Osman, who had some vested interest in the removal of Mr. Bhakta from his position as the headmaster. The School Committee under the vested interest group had already prepared the Headmaster's resignation letter on May 13, ahead of the actual day of his forced resignation on May 17. As appears on this so-called resignation letter, the teacher concerned "confesses" his lapses, including taking bribes from jobseekers at the school, and making blasphemous comments against Islam. Interestingly, only one student had testified against the teacher, about his making derogatory comments against Islam, which an Education Department probe committee later found out to be totally baseless.

I don't write this because some rogue elements humiliated and tortured a teacher. Had Mr. Bhakta been a cleaner, rickshaw-puller, doorman, or a chaprasi, I would've most definitely defended his rights, honour, and dignity as well. The persecution and humiliation of any human being anywhere, irrespective of the victim's race, religion, age, gender, or profession is a violation of human rights. However, from the mass protests of Bangladeshis – especially in social media – against the public humiliation of a teacher, everyone seems to be aggrieved and angry because a rowdy lawmaker victimised a teacher. A teacher is supposed to be respected most by everybody. Nevertheless, the protest is a positive sign.

The rogue MP's playing the judge-jury-prosecutor role definitely violated the UN Charter on Human Rights. The Charter affirms every human being everywhere must "enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want", and considers this "as the highest aspiration of the common people". While Article 1 of the Charter affirms, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights"; Article 5 is unambiguous about protecting every individual from torture and humiliation in any form; the punch line being "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment".

The UN Charter also stipulates certain remedial and retaliatory measures against anybody (an individual, group, or state) who has violated any individual's freedom, honour, and dignity. As Article 7 affirms: "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law"; so do Articles 8, 12, and 19: "Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law" (Article 8); "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy... nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation" (Article 12); and "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (Article 19).•

It's noteworthy that the Bangladesh Constitution also ensures each and every citizen's and resident's honour and dignity, and freedom from arbitrary arrest and torture in

Bangladeshi men and women have been protesting the persecution and humiliation of the teacher, mostly in social media. As one media posting indicates, a Facebook group has already emerged with the name "kandhorehokprotibad (let us protest holding our ears)". Its members protest the incident uploading photos of them holding their ears. Social media users have started campaigns on Facebook and Twitter with hashtags #sorrysir, #IamSORRY, #weRSORRYsir, #shyamalkantibhakta, in solidarity with the teacher, a victim of public humiliation.

Meanwhile the High Court, various teachers' and students' organisations, human rights activists, a couple of ministers, including the Education Minister have come forward in defence of the victim. The Education Department published its probe report on the fifth day of incident on Wednesday the 18th, which has exonerated the victim from the false allegation of hurting the religious sentiment of Muslims. The Education Department reinstated the headmaster, and dissolved the school's



any form. Article 35 (Clause 5) of the Constitution is very unambiguous about these principles: "No person shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment or treatment".

In view of the unambiguous declarations by the UN Charter and Bangladesh Constitution as to what constitute human rights violations, there is no reason to assume that those in positions of power who violate human rights in Bangladesh are unaware of these declarations. I believe MP Selim Osman and his associates knew what they were doing. Hence the eyewash, blame game, and false flag operation! And sections of the population believed the Headmaster had said nasty things about religion.

The MP and his men also exploited the religious sentiment of the people, and mobilised an Islamist group called Tahaffuz-e-Khatme Nabuwat, which is an offshoot of the Jamaat-e-Islami, a rabid anti-Ahmadiyya proto-fascist outfit in Bangladesh. Many Tahaffuz members and other Islamists organised protest rallies, defended Selim Osman, and demanded death sentence for the "blasphemer" Hindu headmaster.

However, as mentioned above, tens of thousands of

managing body (which was loyal to the MP). However, neither the probe report nor the Education Minister has implicated MP Salim Osman in hitting and humiliating the teacher. However, the report indicates the teacher is a victim of injustice. And the teacher told reporters that the MP had slapped him twice, in public. Interestingly, the probe committee believes "a longstanding dispute between the headmaster and the school committee" is at the root of the problem. "Financial issue is the main reason behind the feud", it affirms.

So far so good! We have reasons to applaud the Education Minister's decision to form a probe committee, which was very quick in publishing its report. Now, it's neither enough to reinstate the teacher to his previous position, nor is it sufficient to accept an unconditional apology from the MP and his henchmen, who collectively committed a grave crime against humanity. The criminals must be punished in accordance with the law of the land. There shouldn't be any "ifs" or "buts" in this regard.

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University. He is the author of several books, including his latest, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (Sage, 2014). Email: tajhashmi@gmail.com

## WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT 2016

# An agenda for shared humanity

ROBERT WATKINS

**W**ITH the advent of the Syrian civil war and the unfolding migrants tragedy in the Mediterranean Sea basin, the world is witnessing a significant rise in the number of humanitarian crises. At least 125 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance; 60 million of these people were forced to leave their homes, representing the largest number of displaced people since World War II. This growing crisis spans across many parts of the world, but is particularly acute in 37 countries.

Humanitarian operations have also become increasingly complex and diverse in nature. At the same time, resources are becoming more and more scarce as donor countries dip ever deeper into their national humanitarian and development budgets to address the crises. Last year, the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, called for worldwide coordinated action to provide effective and efficient humanitarian support to millions of people affected by conflicts and disasters. In response to his appeal, global leaders will gather in Istanbul on

23rd and 24th May for the first ever World Humanitarian Summit to renew joint efforts at coming to grips with these challenges. The Summit is designed to represent the perspectives and proposals of all countries across the world, including Bangladesh.

At the same time, the UN Secretary General will present an "Agenda for Humanity" and urge global leaders to commit to five core responsibilities.

**Core Responsibility 1** is for Global leadership to prevent and end conflict through political solutions, as conflicts drive 80 percent of all humanitarian needs.

**Core Responsibility 2** is focused on upholding the norms that safeguard humanity, as some 90 percent of people who are killed or injured in deliberate or indiscriminate attacks in wars are civilians.

**Core Responsibility 3** calls for "leaving no one behind" – including women, girls, men, boys, migrants, refugees, minorities, the poor, elderly and people with special needs – to ensure an inclusive progress towards sustainable development.

**Core Responsibility 4** pushes to change people's lives – from delivering aid to ending need – by reducing vulnerability

and risk through systematic and transformative approaches.

**Core Responsibility 5** asks the international community to invest in humanity by accepting and acting upon our shared responsibilities for humanity through political, institutional and financial investment, and reducing funding gaps for humanitarian and urgent development activities.

The Summit is of special importance for Bangladesh. This country has been heavily affected by the challenges wrought by climate change, including the rising number of internally displaced people. The pressure of effectively assisting displaced people in Bangladesh is expected to increase in the coming years primarily due to the increasingly adverse impact of climate change. In addition, Bangladesh has been hosting people fleeing from conflict in neighbouring Myanmar since the late 1970s.

We also know too well that Bangladesh is in an earthquake-prone region where two fault-lines cross the country's northeast and southeast. In the past year alone, Bangladesh's neighbours have had to deal with several destructive earthquakes

which were also felt here in Bangladesh. Experts predict that similarly strong earthquakes can strike Bangladesh at any moment.

Bangladesh has had considerable success over the years in decreasing the number of victims from cyclones and floods through the introduction of various reforms and preventative policies. The Government of Bangladesh has sent a high-level delegation to participate in the World Humanitarian Summit and share its experiences and best practices. It is anticipated that Bangladesh will play a central role in the Istanbul Summit by helping to create new global policies, given the experience it has gained over the years from confronting a wide range of humanitarian challenges.

The Agencies, Funds and Programmes of the United Nations System in Bangladesh are working closely with the Government, along with civil society and Development Partners, to support their efforts in responding to on-going humanitarian-related issues in the country and preparing for any new disasters which may occur.

The writer is UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Chicken instead of cash!

Recently, a city in Uzbekistan has paid wages of school teachers in new-born chickens in lieu of cash. Last year, the authority had reportedly paid their salaries with potatoes, carrots and pumpkins! I find it strange for several reasons. Uzbekistan is self-sufficient in food and energy and rich in gold. Cotton is a major agricultural crop

while other crops like rice and barley, and fruits, vegetables, eggs, meat and milk are produced in plenty to meet up the demands of the people. The country has a great potential to export agricultural produces.

It is not clear why a country like Uzbekistan runs short of cash and needs to pay their teachers' salaries in chicken and

vegetables. Why don't they try to export chicken and vegetables and other agricultural products to earn enough foreign exchange to pay their teachers' salaries in cash?

**Professor M Zahidul Haque**  
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### Mobile phone and death by lightning

I have been told by a friend that death of so many people by lightning during the recent thunder storms in Bangladesh could be due to the mobile phones the deceased may have had in their possession. The phones were probably on when lightning struck. There have been

discussions on TV channels about the large number of deaths by lightning but no one mentioned the dangers of having a mobile phone on during a thunder storm. Would anyone tell us whether it is true?  
**Ziauddin Ahmed**  
On e-mail