

“Anti-terror week”

Pretext for political chastisement?

THE government has gone into a weeklong anti militant drive after announcing the date and time of its commencement. Ironically enough, another member of the minority community was killed on the very first day of the special crackdown on militancy. He is the fourth person, and the third member of a minority community, to be targeted in one week alone, a chilling statistic for a country that prides itself on communal harmony and zero tolerance on extremism.

While we appreciate that the government is making an attempt to crackdown on terrorism, we remain confused as to why there was such a fanfare regarding the week-long drive. Is it not counter-productive, we wonder, to publicise a counter-terror drive, giving the terrorists ample warning to go into hiding or, at any rate, be more cautious? We would think our counter-terrorism experts would know that addressing militancy is a long-term multifaceted approach, not a pre-announced event lasting for a week, like “traffic week.”

It has been reported that, on the first day of the combing operation, cops detained around 1,600 people. We wonder whether all of them are militants. We can only hope that the anti-terror drive does not become a pretext for the administration to crackdown on opponents or harass innocent people, for that would severely hinder any serious anti-terror measure, in addition to violating people's constitutional rights.

Militancy is a serious issue that needs to be tackled in a befitting manner. We urge the government to rethink this method, for a short-sighted strategy would, in the end, only benefit the militants.

Why this heavy-handed attitude?

Ruling party men are not above law

WE have been covering the excesses committed by ruling party men from time to time. This time round a forest official got the short end of the stick for performing his duty. A local Jubo League leader allegedly beat up the man in question for preventing him from cutting down trees in Horidabaria of Amtali upazila in Barguna district on June 10. We are informed by a report in this paper that the president of Jubo League of Gulishakhali union along with accomplices was engaged in illegal activity in the felling of trees that had been planted by the forest department. So the forest official was only performing his duty when he tried to stop these men from cutting down public property.

It seems that ruling party activists feel that it is their right to do what they please. This is setting a very dangerous precedent. Incidences are happening frequently and seldom do we see local administration, police, or the party taking steps to cull this sort of attitude, which merely encourages more of such rogue behaviour. The message being given out is that even public servants are not safe from such excesses. Our crying hoarse for justice and rule of law apparently falls on deaf ears. If this is what is in store for government officials, one may only wonder what is to happen to the ordinary citizens.

BANGLADESH PRIORITIES' SMARTEST SOLUTIONS

Can they change the country's future?

COPENHAGEN CONSENSUS



BJORN LOMBORG

IF you had Tk. 250 billion to use for Bangladesh's future, how would you choose to spend it? That would alter the spending of roughly just ten percent of what the national government and international aid agencies combined spend in the country each year.

It may sound like an infinite amount of money, but the more you spend, say, on education, the less you have to run hospitals, fight pollution, boost agricultural productivity or use on the multitude of other deserving areas. How do we know which issues we should tackle first, or where we should spend more or less?

Since early 2015, the Bangladesh Priorities project has commissioned teams of dozens of specialist economists from Bangladesh, South Asia, and around the world to study 75 concrete solutions to improve the future of the country. The idea is that education economists, to take one specialty, analyse the best education solutions for Bangladesh, estimating the costs and benefits of each, and showing how many takas of good one extra taka spent would achieve. In that way, the project, a partnership between Copenhagen Consensus Center and BRAC, can help everyone figure out the smartest ways to promote development and prosperity for all Bangladeshis.

From May 9, an eminent panel of four of economists have met in Dhaka to discuss the results. The panel includes Finn Kydland, Nobel Laureate economist at the University of California, Santa Barbara, Selima Ahmad, President and founder of the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry, KAS Murshid, Director General of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, and Mushtaque Chowdhury, Vice Chair of BRAC.

Having read all the research, the panel spent the next three days discussing and challenging the findings with all the specialist economists. So, when the education economists had found that one of the best ways to improve education was to put children into different classes according to ability, the eminent panel would quiz the assumptions and probe the outcomes to see if this finding indeed stands up.

At the end, the panel's hard task was to answer where Bangladesh can best spend additional money—essentially, where the government and the development agencies should spend the next 250 billion taka.

The panel handed over the full list of

priorities on May 12, and the top ten are listed in the infographic below.

At top came treatment of tuberculosis, which kills about 80,000 Bangladeshis annually. Spending just Tk. 7,850 per patient on standard drugs and community clinic follow-up can avert TB transmission, leading to benefits 21 times higher than the costs. Missing benefits like avoiding families losing their breadwinner and communities losing their experienced workforce mean the real impact could be even higher. This is why the Eminent Panel ranked TB treatment first.

In second place came e-procurement - better spending of the Tk. 720 billion the government spends each year to pay for

lowers school performance, and leads to worse health outcomes and more disease later in life. The analysis indicated that benefits of nutrition-focused improvements are 19 times higher than the costs, which are low.

The panel ranked digitisation of land records fourth. Three different ministries currently oversee the records, and the laborious and time-intensive system is inefficient and costly. Instituting electronic records would make transfers much simpler and save huge amounts of time and money, but the largest benefit would come from increasing the security of property rights across the country, which are closely linked to higher economic growth. In total, digitisation

prioritisation for us.

The panel pointed out that, for instance, cervical cancer should not come first. This is hard. It kills about 10,000 Bangladeshi women each year, but it is very costly to treat each woman. Compare that to the fact that more than twice as many women die from tuberculosis, which also kills many men and children. For the amount of spending that can save one person from cervical cancer, we can save nearly 50 from tuberculosis. Not saving these 50 people first is morally problematic.

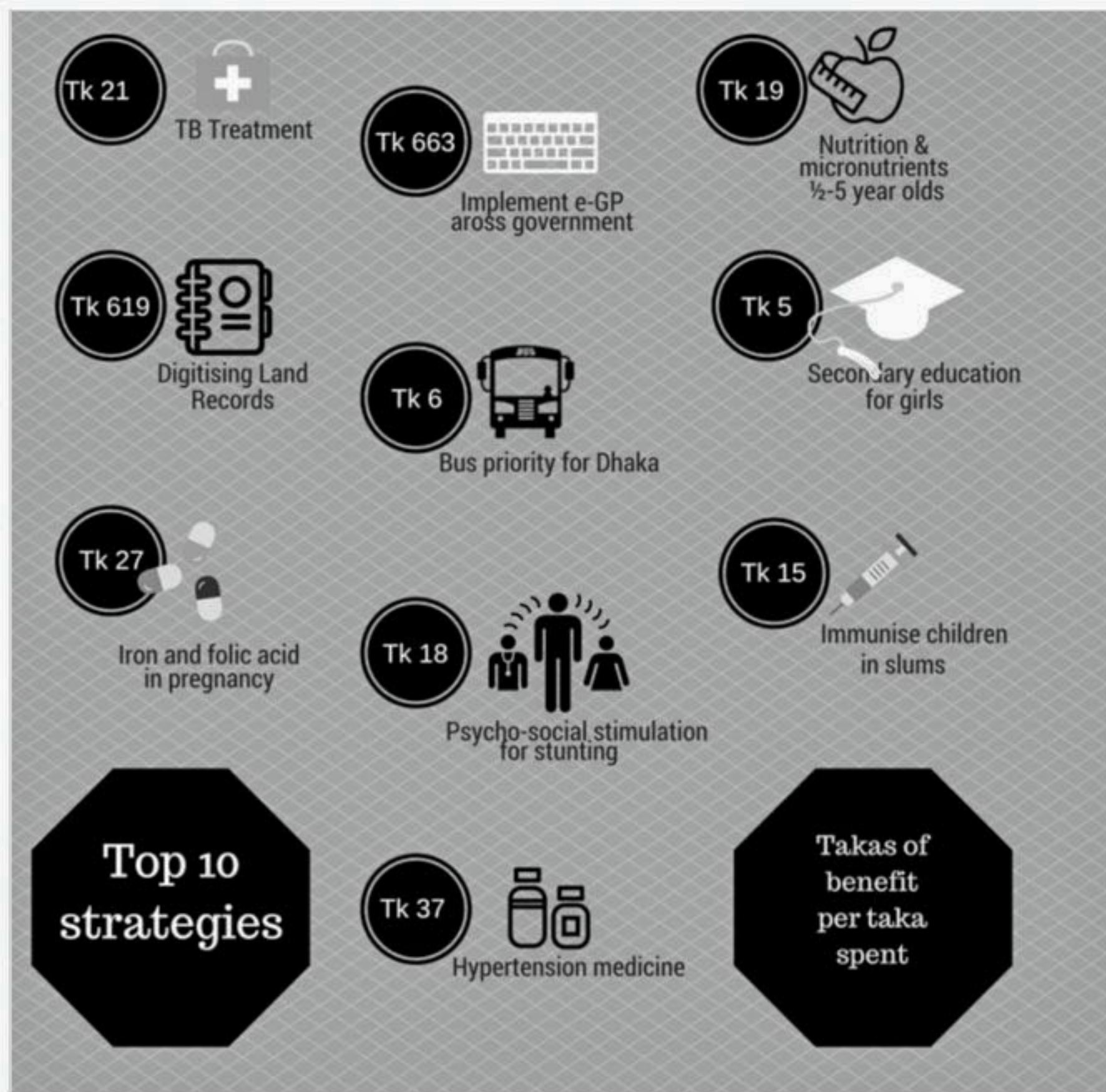
Likewise, the panel also showed what does not work. Out of dozens of policies aimed at improving education, for instance, fewer than half showed any positive effects on child-learning outcomes—these included things like getting students more textbooks or using computers in the classroom. In other words, you are more likely to do nothing than to get it right when it comes to strategies aimed at improving schooling. Other alternatives that also ranked very poor were expensive polders built in places where they would likely not prevent flooding, unconditional cash transfers to fight poverty, and vocational training - each of these proposals returned less than one taka in benefits for each taka spent.

There are 160 million Bangladeshis, and there are probably 160 million different opinions about the best ways to help the country prosper. But without real evidence about what works, deciding between all the options is a little bit like being handed a menu at a restaurant that has mouth-watering descriptions listed beside every meal, but no information about the price you have to pay for each, or the amount of food that would actually come on the plate.

With the results from Bangladesh Priorities, we have put prices on the menu, and we can all see exactly how much we pay for each option, and exactly what we get in return. But this is only the beginning. We hope that we have kick-started the real conversation about Bangladesh's top priorities around dinner tables and within the political and administrative realm.

We will work with youths around the country to establish the priorities with tomorrow's leaders, and BRAC will collect priorities from the rural ultra-poor. Together with readers from *The Daily Star*, I look forward to continuing the conversation on the top priorities for Bangladesh. Now at least, we have the evidence to help make Bangladesh' future even better.

The writer is president of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, ranking the smartest solutions to the world's biggest problems by cost-benefit. He was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time Magazine*.



everything from Padma Bridge to pencils in government offices. Changing the procurement system from its current antiquated and inefficient one to a format similar to an online bidding system can increase competition and decrease corruption. The research estimates that this would reduce government costs by 12 percent. It is also relatively low-cost, implying low risk. Each taka of spending stands to do more than 600 takas of good.

Early nutritional interventions, which are vital in determining long-term outcomes, was ranked third. Nearly one-in-four children in Bangladesh under the age of five are considered “stunted,” which hinders mental development,

would likely bring benefits in terms of economic growth of more than Tk. 160 billion over the next 15 years.

Other promising strategies from the top 10, included bus transportation investments in Dhaka, early-childhood education to overcome stunting, and immunising children in urban slums.

But when we say what should come first, we also need to say what should not come first. This is difficult and may even seem uncaring. But if we do not prioritise, it does not make prioritisation go away - it means we end up spreading resources thinly across great and poor policies alike, or simply allow opaque bureaucratic processes to do the

WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

LOST CHILDHOODS

LAILA KARIM

BACK in 1972, my husband brought home Mugal, a boy of about 10 or 11, to assist me in household chores. Mugal's father handed him over to us saying, “I am giving my only son to you for his future”. Perhaps my husband's office assistant had promised that one day Mogul would be placed somewhere in the government pay roll - a common practice in those days, particularly in government households. Even the office peons, *chaprashis*, *pankha* pullers (dedicated staff sitting outside the room who pulled a special kind of ceiling fan with a long rope) used to perform household jobs.

Major tasks of Mugal included taking our one and a half year old daughter to walk in the lawn, playing with her, and helping me in daily chores. After a few months, I found things going missing: biscuits given to him for my daughter (I now feel ashamed writing this) and keys of my jewellery drawer were found in one of his pockets. I was furious; I beat him and called his shocked father to take him back. It was a relief to be rid of him. In the past forty five years, the world has changed. From a housewife I became a development worker, speaking out and fighting for the rights of children since 1986. Today, Mugal's face and that incident haunt me often.

I feel guilty when I have to compromise with real life situations. I failed to knock at the door of my neighbour when

she was shouting and screaming at the little girl working as a domestic helper. Only later did I learn from her employer that she often wets her bed. She was tiny. She was expected to wake up early in the morning to finish the kitchen work, make *rotis*, clean utensils, prepare the breakfast table; any deviation would cause problems to the family members, particularly the school going children. The girl, an orphan, has no time of her own, and nowhere else to go. This is her fate. As an obligation, the employer married her off later. But she came back again - this time more timid and a flawless domestic aid. No longer an embarrassment for the family.

Do we even know how many these children number to? No, because they live inside our four walls, working 15/16 hours a day; they sleep on the kitchen floor or in the balcony corner, even guest bathrooms.

Before buying a piece of furniture, we decide where to put it. But when we bring a young child for our personal comfort, not many of us consider a place for him/her. Sometimes they become news items, drawing our attentions when things go grossly wrong - when they are tortured, sexually abused, about to die or killed in most bizarre ways.

Tk. 5/6 per thousand pieces As a development worker, I can testify that things haven't changed that much despite the policies, laws in hand, and the international treaties and goals we signed. Our relentless roundtables, talks

and speeches, rallies and campaigns, and work in the field have yet to bring a visible change in the scenario. We are yet to come out from this medieval practice that causes harm not only to the child, but ties the family to an inter-generational poverty trap. We are nurturing this practice as it fits our need and add some extra to the profits.

In past 45 years, the range of their work and places has expanded. Now children work not only for our comfort, but have become a part of our profit making. The number has risen to millions and their little hands are everywhere. In Kurigram, these little hands are rolling *bidi* (handmade cigarettes) for wages of Tk. 5/6 per thousand pieces rolled. Their small fingers are just right to do the job well and fast. We see them in the workshops and glass factories; in the saw mills, in the rivers catching fish fries; market places; or hanging on to the human haulers or tempos. The little hands are making colourful balloons for our birthdays, tiffin boxes for our children. The list is endless. We see them in thousands in the old part of Dhaka city - Lalbagh, Kamrangir Char - and in other cities and towns. The prevalence is higher in the urban areas (9 percent) than in the rural areas (5.1 percent). In Dhaka city, it is higher, at 16.6 percent, than the national level of 6 percent. The highest concentrations are in Ward 61 (over 30 percent) and in ward 71 (43.85 percent) of Lalbagh Thana.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) report 2013-2015 states that over

34 lakh children are engaged in child labour - about half of them directly engaged. Twelve lakh children are doing harmful work and 2.6 lakh of them work in extremely hazardous and harmful situations. They are forced to leave home because of natural calamities and due to familial troubles. Like Mogul, they are also taken away from their village homes and parents with the promise of a future. This scenario has an impact on the number of non-enrolments and drop-outs, children on the streets, child trafficking, and alarmingly, over child marriage (Child Equity Atlas).

We want to see action and implementation of the above laws, policies and protocols to realise our goal of no child having to work before the age of 14 and the removal of children from hazardous labour by 2021, a new deadline of the National Child Labour Elimination Policy 2010-2015, and the formulation of the National Plan of Action (NPA) to meet the deadlines of Vision 2021.

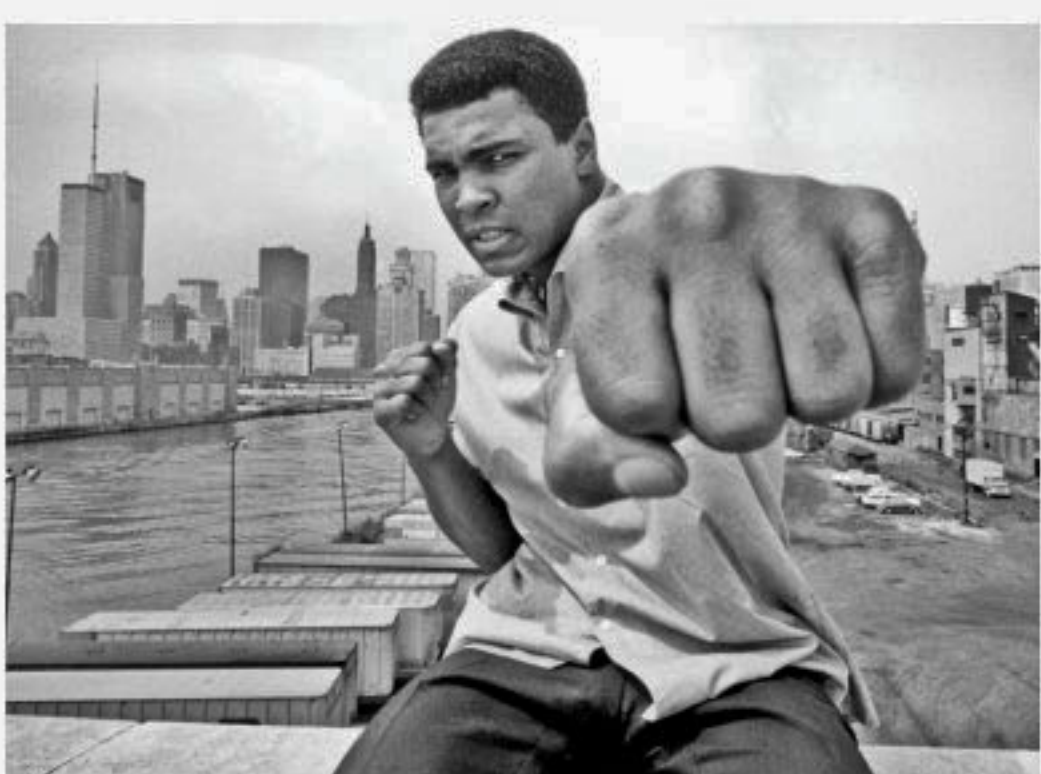
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is our mandate. We made our obligations by signing it in 1989. Let's keep the promise to these children - they occupy about half of our total population. Otherwise we can't reach our ambition to be a middle income country by 2021. Let children have their childhood and grow well with education, be healthy, have leisure, and be protected from harm. Say no to children working for the comfort and profit of adults.

The writer is a development worker.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A tribute to “the greatest”



Mohammad Ali, the world renowned boxing champion was once stripped of his heavyweight championship and banned from boxing for three years during the prime of his career. He appealed against it and the case lingered for quite some time. But finally he won the legal battle and was reinstated and beat the then official boxing champion to regain his boxing title.

We have lost a world class sportsman and an iconic hero. Throughout his entire life, he was an example for others. He used to help people in need all the time. May Allah bless him and may his soul rest in peace.

S. A. Mansoor, Dhaka

COMMENTS

“EX-SHIBIR MAN HELD OVER SP'S WIFE KILLING” (JUNE 9, 2016)

Jannat

Everyday, people are getting killed. We are sick and tired of what is going on in the country.

Shafique Rahman

Please stop playing the broken record of “BNP-Jamaat is behind these killings to destabilise the country” and don't create another ‘Joj Mia’ drama.

PROMISES WE MADE: 'NO' TO CHILD LABOUR

Articles 15, 17 and 19 of the Constitution of Bangladesh ensure basic necessities, free and compulsory education and equality of opportunity to all citizens. On the other hand, Article 34 prohibits all form of forced labour.

The Bangladesh Labour Law, 2006, dedicated a separate chapter (Chapter three) on the issue of employment of adolescents. The law prohibits employment of minors before the age of 14 and has defined conditional employment for adolescents.

The Corporate Social Responsibility Policy, developed jointly by Save the Children and the Ministry of Labour and Employment states, “Business organisations have responsibility above legal and economic consideration”.

Policies and Acts such as the Child Labour Welfare Council, National Children Policy, Education Policy, draft Education Bill, 2016, Child Labour Elimination Policy, 2010, National Plan of Action to End Child Labour, 2012-2016, Policy for the Rights of the Domestic Labour, The Children Act 2013 are all against child labour.

The CRC, of which we are a signatory, ensure no discrimination (Article 2); best interest of the child (Article 3); survival and development (Article 6); appropriate measure by the state to ensure care for child development (Article 18.2); social security (Article 26); right to education (Article 28); state protection of children from work (Article 32). Bangladesh was one of the first countries to sign the Convention of the Rights of Child in 1989.

The ILO Convention 138 and 182, which we signed in 1999, are against child labour.