

Post-flood rehabilitation

Essential drug distribution urgent

We have been warning about the onset of post-flood diseases for some time now. The local administration has been responding but it appears not so fast in many areas where the receding waters have brought water-borne diseases like diarrhoea and skin-related infections. What we are seeing in some districts is that water purification tablets distributed by health officials are ineffective primarily because the medicines were date expired. Why is this happening? And why wasn't the Health Ministry not aware of this situation? Although, most affected communities have been able to find shelter and physical safety, the lack of safe drinking water could become a major health hazard in the coming weeks unless something is done fast.

Hundreds of thousands of people will require immediate access to essential drugs such as water purification tablets and survival food kits. No one wants to see the local health complexes to be overburdened with people coming in sick with stomach ailments like dysentery, diarrhoea. As we have already experienced a bad case of expired medicines in some areas of Manikganj, it falls upon the local administration and health ministry officials to act fast to rectify the situation. Once the immediate health hazards are contained, and there is no reason why we cannot handle them as emergency response is an area where Bangladesh has significant experience and expertise; it is imperative that both State and Non-State actors work with affected communities to get their life back on track.

Occupying street to hold election!

Why the abject disrespect for public woes?

It is unfathomable how on Friday, the Bangladesh Chemists and Druggists Samity blocked the entire street connecting Bailey Road with Ramna Park to hold a daylong election. The association also took the liberty of decorating the road in front of the Officers' Club with banners and festoons making the place look more like the venue of a fair than of one of the busiest roads in the Capital. A photo published in this newspaper yesterday depicts all this and leaves much more to our imagination. What exactly is the policeman seen in the picture doing? Did the organisation take permission from the DMP? If it did, why did the latter allow it to occupy one of the arterial roads of the city? Is lawlessness the new law in this country?

The consequences of Dhaka's gridlock on the economy and public health are enormous, costing the economy Tk. 1.5 billion a day and a rise in conditions such as hypertension. To reduce it, the government has undertaken some ambitious projects such as the BRT, MRT and elevated express highways. Will not the gains made by these laudable initiatives be eclipsed by such utter disregard for law?

The reasons behind Dhaka's traffic congestion are many and complex. While there is no single, grand solution to the problem, it can be managed by implementing simple measures like making the roads usable for vehicles and pedestrians. Is that too much to expect?

COMMENTS

"CAFÉ ATTACK THROWS HIM INTO STREET"
(AUGUST 4, 2016)



PHOTO: STAR

Roya Zabeen

Can the government provide some financial assistance to such people?

Shishir Sakib

This is just one simple example! Several hotels and restaurants of Dhaka got notice that they would have to shut down their businesses. What will happen to the employees?

Reena Siddiqui

Closing down these places will affect the well-being of these families including their children's education. I hope the authorities concerned will take these factors into consideration before taking such steps.

Don't blame private education for radicalisation

M NIAZ ASADULLAH

MANY experts and development organisations advocate greater provision of fee-charging for-profit schools in developing countries. According to *The Economist*, "Where governments are failing to provide youngsters with a decent education, the private sector is stepping in." [Learning Unleashed, August 1, 2015] While this view remains challenged and the United Nations has recently urged governments to monitor and regulate private education providers, for-profit schools and universities are in the spotlight in Bangladesh for a very different reason.

Following the worst terrorist attack in the country's history on July 1, 2016, government bodies and many others have been accusing English-medium private schools – schools that teach in English, offer GCSE/International Baccalaureate education, and mostly cater to well-to-do urban families – and universities of not doing enough to tackle youth radicalisation.

The government has repeatedly claimed that there is no presence of the IS in Bangladesh and the recent terrorist attacks have been carried out by local militants. After the brutal attack at Holey Artisan on July 1, 2016, the government has also stressed on the fact that many of the terrorists involved were educated in the elite schools and universities of the country. While it is true that three of the attackers had indeed studied at schools that provide Western education and guarantee English proficiency – a key marker of affluence and status in Bangladesh – young victims of this heinous crime, Abinta Kabir, Tarishi Jain and Faraaz Hossain were also graduates of an elite secondary school. This highlights a deep split in Bangladeshi society.

Soon after the attack, our Prime Minister vowed to unravel the root causes of terrorism. While government agencies are still investigating the attack, some ruling party ministers seem convinced that non-state educational institutions are responsible for the recent surge in

terrorism. A junior minister was reported as claiming that some private university students are "getting involved with militancy in the private universities in the absence of progressive political activities." Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the ruling party, has also announced that it will form committees across all the private universities to "fight militancy".

The focus on private universities does not seem disproportionate if one considers the background of other local youths involved in terrorist activities. One of the perpetrators of the Sholakia attack on July 7, 2016, had also graduated from North South University (NSU), a leading

universities. Despite decades of government support, none of these universities feature in the list of the top 100 Asian universities.

A key reason for this is pro-government student politics, which condones violence, undermines scholarship, accepts corruption in teacher appointments and provides immunity against law-breaking. Many ruling party student leaders at public universities have often been in the news for acts of extortion, arson, assaults on teachers and destruction of property. This has pushed many to opt for high-fee private universities.

There are serious concerns over the quality of education in Bangladesh.

If the government is serious about tackling terrorism, politicisation and increased surveillance in educational institutions will not be enough. Despite many limitations, private schools and universities have for decades served as a complement to the state's educational initiatives. They should not be singled out as a security threat.

private university of Bangladesh. Six students from the same university were arrested for the murder of blogger Ahmed Rajib Haider in February 2013. The man accused of plotting to bomb the New York Federal Reserve Bank in 2012 was also a former NSU student.

However, the government's thinking is flawed. Exerting greater political control over the private education sector is not going to solve the problem of terrorism. The long-term neglect of education by the state in Bangladesh has created a void that private education providers have filled. Private universities have also grown in response to the poor performance of heavily subsidised state-run

Examination papers are frequently leaked. Students engage in rote learning and rely on private tuition instead of classroom lessons. Private coaching reached such endemic proportions that the government had to pass a law to ban the practice. The end outcome is a weak relationship between schooling and learning.

A recent study ("The dissonance between schooling and learning", Asadullah, M. N., and Chaudhury, N., 2015, *Comparative Education Review*), spoke of small gains (in terms of basic cognitive skills) from grade completion among rural children aged 10-18 years. This implies a flat schooling-learning

profile and a deep crisis in the education sector of Bangladesh. In collaboration with researchers from BRAC, I found similar evidence of a low level of learning across state and non-state schools.

Fact of the matter is, a large proportion of the adolescents in rural Bangladesh is in school, but they are not learning. This is worrying because the absence of effective literacy and critical thinking ability can make youth vulnerable to radical and extremist ideologies. Not only has the government not built enough schools or truly enhanced the quality of public universities since 1971, budgetary spending on education has rarely exceeded 2 percent of GDP.

If the government is serious about tackling terrorism, politicisation and increased surveillance in educational institutions will not be enough. Despite many limitations, private schools and universities have for decades served as a complement to the state's educational initiatives. They should not be singled out as a security threat.

Stereotyping non-state educational institutions will only create more divisions among Bangladeshi citizens, making it harder to build a political consensus to fight radicalisation. If anything, these institutions can be an effective force against insurgency by improving national literacy rates.

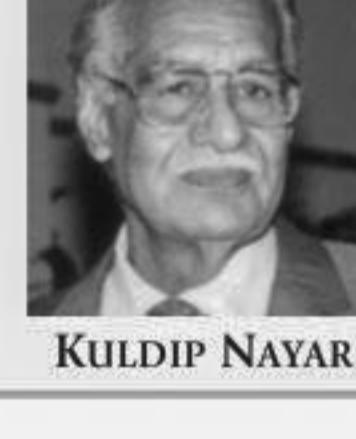
Instead of blaming students of English-medium schools, the government should focus on enhancing the quality of government schools, which are increasingly becoming weak substitutes for non-state schools.

Extremist outfits are more likely to prosper in an environment without accountability. Lack of good governance, a broken public education system and democratic deficit, and not private schools or the absence of party politics in private university campuses, create a hotbed for terrorism.

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Segregation in democracy

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

YET another Dalit family was hacked to death because the members were suspected to have eaten beef. The laboratory tests of the "beef" showed that it

was the meat of some other cattle. Some time ago, the Kerala House in Delhi was attacked by gau rakshaks because beef was served there. But the most shameful aspect is that there was no repentance among the upper caste, and even the leaders of the RSS, who are supposed to work for social upliftment did not utter a word of either condemnation or sorrow.

All religions indulge in social, economic or political discrimination but it is not the part of the religion itself as it is among the Hindus. And for centuries, it is going on without much challenge. There are still certain parts of India where the Dalit cannot use roads or wells that are frequented by the upper caste. The worst part is that the funeral ground which the upper caste use is exclusive for them.

Islam which teaches equality has also been affected. In fact, an ordinary Muslim suffers from both sides – one because he is poor and, two, because he is considered not at par with the well-placed Muslims. Here the economic factor has come into play. And then it has become mixed with preferences and prejudices, making the poor Muslims' plight still more pitiful. True, the Indian Constitution does not allow discrimination on the basis of religion. But it is practiced all over and even the police force has come to be contaminated as it connives at the violations of the upper caste without a demur.

The practice has become more glaring

and persistent since the advent of the current government. That the upper caste people have been appointed to key positions in universities and other institutions at the behest of the government make some of the best brains rot. The RSS makes sure that the people appointed are from the "right" background to ensure that the Hindutva philosophy is taken as the guideline.

Not long ago, the Pune Film Institute went on strike for months when its head was replaced by a television artiste who

the results of the government continuing with reservations, despite the 10-year time-limit set by the Constituent Assembly way back in 1950.

I recall the time during the debates of the Constituent Assembly when Dr B.R. Ambedkar, a revered Dalit leader, declared that they did not want any reservation. He was persuaded by the assurance that the period will not be more than 10 years. Now the situation is such that as soon as the period is over, Parliament unanimously extends it to

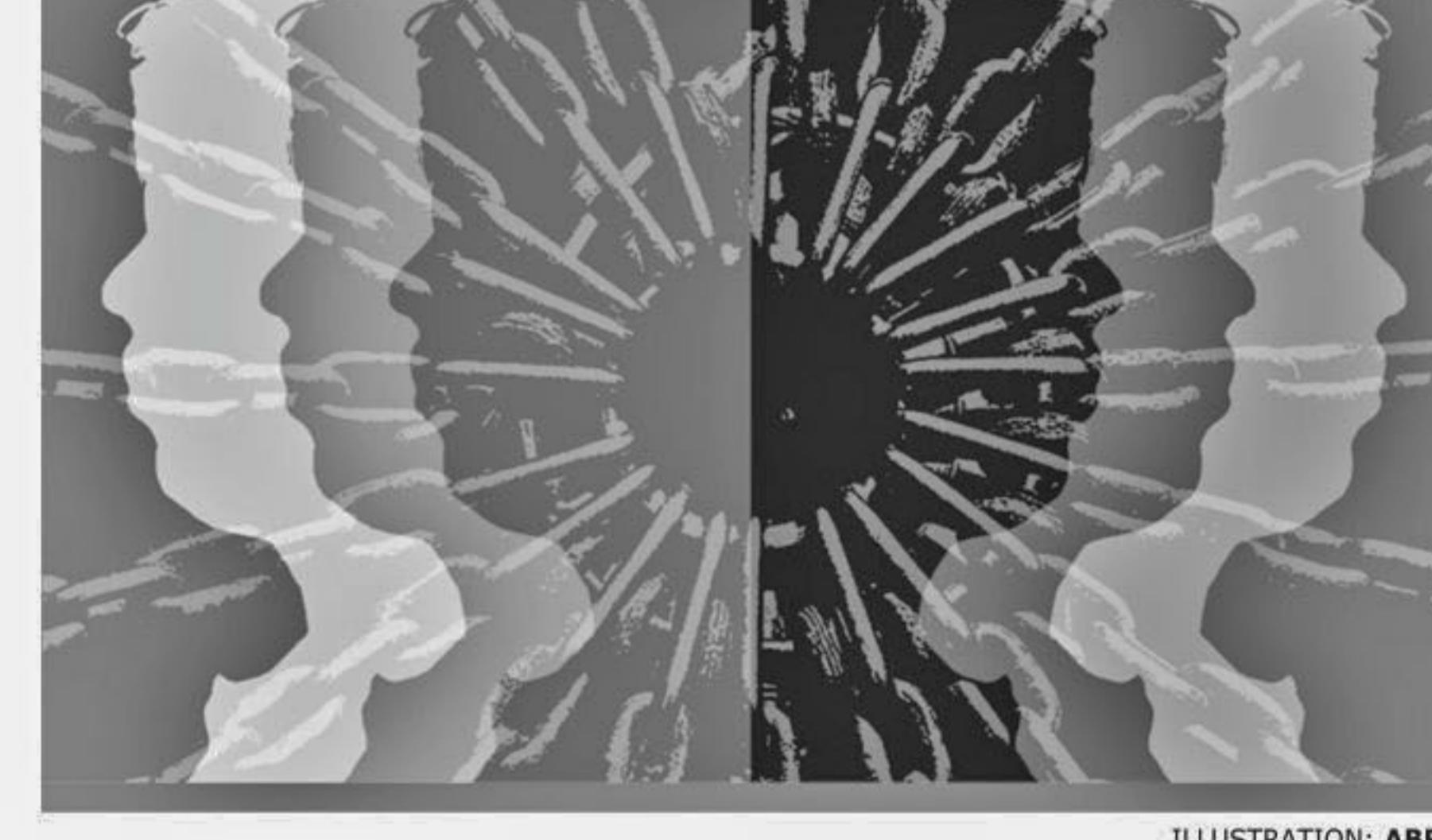


ILLUSTRATION: ABRO

had the blessings of the RSS. The government did not change its decision even in the midst of widespread discontent. Ultimately, the students had to give in because their career was at risk.

Time has come for introspection. The upper caste has not accepted the presence of Dalit or even members of other backward classes in their midst. The numerous agitations in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh or, for that matter, in other parts of the country have not jolted the conscious of the upper caste. These are

another 10 years. No political party, including the communists, has stood up to resist and say enough was enough.

Now that elections in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in the country, are scheduled to take place in 2017, Dalit leader Mayawati is being wooed by all political parties. She has said that her party would go at it alone and there is every possibility that she might return with a majority. Her advantage is that the Dalit voter obediently follows her instruction. She is the only one who can get the Dalit votes transferred to some

other community. Even though the Congress has traditionally fought for social justice, Mahatma Gandhi was the only leader who believed in giving equal status to the Dalits. True, they did not like the title "Harijan" (son of God) given by him because they thought it was too patronising.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad, after finishing his task as the president of the Constituent Assembly, was appointed as the food minister. He went to Gandhiji to seek his advice on his accommodation. The Mahatma, who was living then in a bhangi (sweeper) colony told him to live in the cottage next to the one he was residing. Dr. Rajendra Prasad was so horrified over the idea that he went to the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and complained about Gandhiji's suggestion.

No legislation is going to help, as has been India's experience. Ultimately, it depends on the upper caste to change its attitude. They believe in democracy but not in equality which is the integral part of the system. People in the world find it difficult to believe that the country which has sent a rocket to Mars – something which even advanced countries envy – practice discrimination against fellow human beings. It shocks outsiders when they learn that a democratic country where people queue outside the ballot box to elect their leader, cannot get over the prejudice which they have inherited from an era even before the British, who divided the society caste-wise and religion-wise to make their rule easy.

Any action taken by the Parliament to eliminate this malady will not help until the upper castes realise that what they are doing is against the democratic polity of India. The sooner the realisation, the better it would be for the country and its polity.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Awful condition of the National Memorial

During a recent visit to the National Martyrs Memorial at Savar, I was shocked to see the premises in untidy condition. Also, I did not see any metal detectors, archways or CCTV cameras. I think the authorities should keep it clean all throughout the year, not only in the

month of December. In addition, adequate security measures should be taken to ensure the security of the memorial as the country has been facing serious security threats from extremist elements.

Md. Selim Reza, Jahangirnagar University

Help the flood affected people

The flood situation is getting worse in the northern part of the country. Countless people are in need of relief and assistance. But this year, the flood affected people have received very little help in terms of relief as the country is reeling from militancy and everyone is giving priority to that issue. The government should come forward to help these people immediately.

Tarek Aziz Bappi, DU



PHOTO: STAR