

Callous and insensitive towards victim

Media must be more judicious

THE horrific incident of torture and rape of a five-year-old girl in Dinajpur left us dumbstruck with rage. Now, it seems we have failed her yet again. A picture of the Dinajpur Deputy Commissioner handing over financial help to the survivor's grandfather was posted by a freelance journalist on the social media site Facebook, and then carried by multiple newspapers along with the names of the victim and her family members.

As great a gesture as the help might be on the part of the DC, posting pictures of rape victims and their family, especially in a society such as ours, is both callous and insensitive. It mars the commendable gesture, and puts the victim open to further social stigma and marginalisation.

We appreciate that newspapers are giving due importance to this horrific crime; more so since one of the alleged rapist is still on the run. We also understand the imperative for media organisations to keep alive the focus on the issue so that our outcry is lasting. What is not acceptable is to put the victim through further trauma from society.

While some of the newspapers which carried the photo expressed regret for doing so, the journalist who originally posted the photo said that he was instructed to take the photograph on instructions from the DC office. If that is indeed the case, it was utterly insensitive of the DC to use his philanthropic gesture in an issue such as this for publicity. On the other hand, media organisations need to treat issues like this with more attention, so that their work does not end up doing more harm than good.

Gender equality remains elusive

Patriarchal mindset in society must change

FOR a second consecutive year, Bangladesh has ranked ahead of all other South Asian countries in gender equality. While that might be something to celebrate, what is concerning is that it has also slipped by eight notches down to 72nd from 64th among 144 countries. But that should not be too big a surprise, as despite the ranking, the regular stories we hear of violence against women, and the daily experiences of us all should have already made it clear that while we constantly speak of equality, female security, which is integral to gender equality, is still gravely missing in our country.

Given also that the other South Asian countries are not doing well themselves, there is no point in comparing our performance with others as that would fail to paint the real picture of women's status and their condition in our country. The only purpose that it could serve is to show that all the countries of this region have performed poorly when it comes to gender equality and have much more to do in that regard.

In the case of Bangladesh although there are strict laws in place to punish the perpetrators of such grievous crimes, justice still remains elusive in the majority of cases of violence against women, especially when the crime is committed by those affiliated with influential quarters.

If we truly want to give women an equal footing, allowing the culprits of such crimes to escape justice must be brought to an end. The patriarchal mindset that exists in society must also be changed if we are to achieve true gender equality.

Building research universities

SYED SAAD ANDALEEB

IN an editorial I wrote in the Journal of Bangladesh Studies in 2003, I had noted a perplexing and worrisome situation in Bangladesh's academic institutions, both public and private – lack of a research culture. I had written how averse the intellectual community was towards building a scholarly ambience – both for themselves, as well as for their institutions. Most of the “academic” journals published in Bangladesh did not have any international standing (which still persists), the libraries lacked the products (books, research monographs, etc.) of local scholars, the universities had meager (or no) budgets to support research, and there was a plethora of related constraints that made scholarly engagement stand far afield from the true work of academics.

Little seems to have changed in the past thirteen years regarding the research profile of the academic institutions, perhaps with very few exceptions. One indicator to support my contention is the absence of the country's “elite” higher education institutions in any global rankings that emphasise research as a mark of scholarly distinction. Not a single one of them has found a prominent place even in the South Asian rankings! India, on the other hand, claimed 17 of the top 20 spots in this category. Its IITs are globally recognised, a legacy of Nehru's deep and futuristic thinking.

But there is an encouraging development that ought to be noted. The National Education Policy 2010 (Bangladesh) espoused the need to expand the horizons of knowledge through creative, multidimensional, original and practical research.

This emphasis on research is a new and welcome shift in the policy pronouncements. Funding available for research also seems to have grown phenomenally, with hundreds of crores reportedly allocated to uncounted projects and “research establishments.” It is important to sustain and ensure long-term availability of such levels of funding for academia to engage with and contribute to the global knowledge architecture.

But who is to do all this “new” research? Academia, in its present avatar, has not shown much promise to play such a vital role; its capacity is still to be gauged, indirectly for now through global metrics. Meanwhile, various government and private/consulting bodies appear to lionise the budgetary allocations. Interestingly, they turn to one place for the actual work to be done: academia! Who gets how much, what type and quality of research is done, who does the actual work, and what real impact does it all have remain an enigma.

It is unlikely to be contested that most of our academic institutions are not

capable or equipped to do good quality research. Expecting a wide spectrum of institutions to do research is thus not likely to be fruitful. It is, therefore, time to envisage building specialised universities with emphasis on research, supported by strong graduate programs (and driven by the nation's priorities), if the Government's desire for research is to be meaningfully driven. Selectivity is very important. As flagship institutions, the “Research Universities” can play a leading role in nation building.

In this regard, Asian universities are being widely talked about as “the next higher education superpowers.” Japan, S. Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong have already begun the competition for research supremacy by promoting “world-class universities.” India's Finance Minister also recently announced that an “enabling regulatory architecture will be provided to

partnering with industry, they can be transformative: The role of Stanford University and UC Berkeley, energizing Silicon Valley, is a case in point. Hunter Rawlings, president of the American Association of Universities, observes the contributions of research, leading to the creation of the iPhone:

It depends on [several] fundamental scientific and technological breakthroughs such as GPS, multi-touch screens, LCD displays, lithium batteries, and cellular networks. How many of those discoveries were made by Apple? None. They all came from research supported by the federal government and conducted in universities and government laboratories.

The role and importance of research universities is reflected in MIT's (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) total revenues of USD 3,290 million in 2015. Roughly 10% or USD 331.8 million

after positions in many top-notch research institutions across the world.

For this shift to materialise, two elements (among others) are vital: recruitment and academic freedom. Recruitment of research faculty, free from any interventions, will be the key to building flagship research universities. Effort must be expended to recruit members who have the training, goals, commitment, and socialisation skills needed to build these institutions. Contrary to some thinking, I believe the world should be open to staffing these institutions as most globally reputed ones do. China, for example, has leapfrogged research capacity building, an arduous process, by opening its doors to global (mostly Chinese) scholars with an attractive combination of incentives.

The second vital component is “freedom” – academic freedom – to choose an institution's research agenda and how it is propagated. The ability to speak up – responsibly – based on solid evidence (say on Rampal or economic policy) must be encouraged; on controversial matters the institutions must be open to challenge but immune from harm and castigation.

Other controls must also be relaxed or lifted that hinder academic freedom – for example, on choice of curriculum, infrastructural considerations, access to resources, and even staffing decisions. Professor T.N. Srinivasan, formerly of Yale University, remarked about India's UGC and ICSSR that these license-permit-raj (LPR) bodies stifled competition, creativity and innovation, hence the “need for reform with a re-thinking of the role of central and state governments and the private sector in higher education.”

I might venture to add a third element that will go a long way in building world-class research universities (for that matter, any institution) – pride of belongingness, a spirit of enthusiasm, and the tenacity and dedication to build an enduring entity of repute and stature. Academic heritage is important, but not enough. It takes hard work, time and endurance to build world-class institutions.

Research is the exclusive domain of scholars whose pursuit of knowledge has brought remarkable changes and affected the lives of millions across the globe. Bangladesh has seen significant impact in the agriculture sector, attaining much needed food self-sufficiency. But we need change-maker researchers, in sufficient numbers, with the right qualifications, and in many other fields, to shape the country's future with their wisdom and insights drawn from evidence-based research. When research is nurtured, recognised, rewarded and heralded for its enlightening contributions, its effects can be far-reaching and decisively positive.

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10 public and 10 private institutions to emerge as world-class teaching and research institutions.” China's C9 League is another alliance of nine elite universities similar to the Ivy League in the United States that has emerged as a powerhouse in research.

Similarly, according to a recent study, the Malaysian government upgraded four institutions – University Malaya (UM), University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) – into research universities, and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) into an Apex University. “These universities are being encouraged to participate in QS World University Ranking to be recognised as world-class universities.”

Research universities often help bring dramatic change in scientific, economic, social, and even political spheres. When

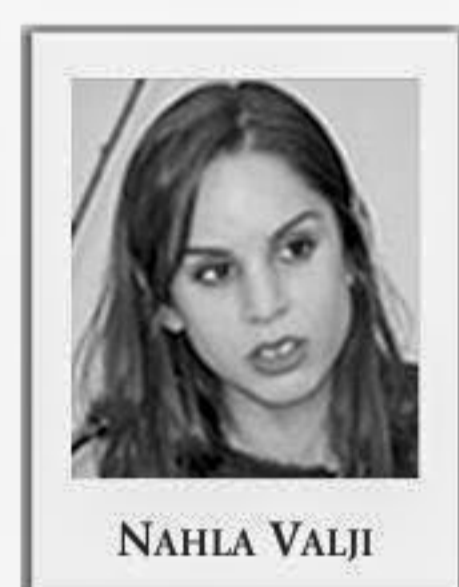
came from tuition fees while the bulk of it came from sponsored and unsponsored research support. MIT's creative and dedicated researchers garner great confidence in their ability to do research to be able to command and bask in such abundance of research funds.

It is the research centres where the real work of making the world a better place continues: cancer research, carbon capture mechanisms, superdense data storage, graphene water purification, kaons, 3-D printing, VLSI, imperfect knowledge economics (IKE), energy psychology, contract theory, and much more.

Can Bangladesh go down this path? Only time – perhaps another 25 years, optimistically – will tell if there is real commitment to building research universities. My belief is that we can: that confidence stems from the fact that Bangladeshis today occupy highly sought

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

Meaningful participation still the missing ingredient in peacebuilding



NAHLA VALJI

AS the United Nations Security Council holds the annual Open Debate on

Women, Peace and Security to discuss protection of women and girls in conflict and women's leadership in preventing, resolving, and recovering from conflicts, the war in Syria enters its sixth year, contributing to a global refugee crisis. Iraqi forces

enter Mosul amidst a dire humanitarian situation, and peace remains uncertain in countries such as South Sudan and Colombia. The global political landscape is volatile, challenging and increasingly complex. The number of people in need of international assistance has tripled over the past decade and 80 per cent of them are affected by armed conflict. In 2015 alone, the global cost of violence and conflict was estimated at more than USD 13.6 trillion. Violent extremism and terrorism is on the rise, and the fragile gains on women's rights are under attack.

It is within this context, that the United Nations undertook three separate reviews on peace and security last year—on peace operations, the UN's peacebuilding architecture and on fifteen years of women, peace and security. I had the privilege of heading the review on women, peace and security, which concluded with the “Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)”, authored by Radhika Coomaraswamy. The study drew upon global consultations and new research and emerged with one key finding—women's meaningful participation is the most important and overlooked ingredient for sustainable peace.

The study showed, backed by data, how women's participation would increase the reach of humanitarian assistance, accelerate economic recovery and reconstruction, improve the effectiveness and credibility of our peace operations, and help prevent and counter violent extremism. For example, we now know that the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least 15 years is 35 percent higher when women are included. However, our actions and policies are yet to respond to this evidence.

What can be done to change this? The study listed more than one hundred recommendations and ideas, including quotas, earmarks, targets and other temporary special measures that are still under-utilised or used as aspirational benchmarks. If countries were

to act upon these recommendations, we could realistically remedy the gender imbalances currently undermining our peace and security response.

One of the recommendations of the global study, calling for the creation of a new mechanism in the UN Security Council—the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security (IEG)—has been fulfilled. The IEG began its work in February, shortly after the launch of the study, co-chaired by the United Kingdom and Spain and with UN Women as its Secretariat. In just eight months, through this forum, the Security Council has heard directly from the UN's senior leadership on the ground and received quality gender and conflict analysis that would be otherwise absent

anti-women's rights language in order to lay the foundations for radicalisation. It heard that in Iraq, there was not a single woman in the four command cells administering the return of population to liberated areas; and in Central African Republic, since the end of the transition, women's representation in national institutions has dropped again, down to single digits in the parliament.

This information is already being used to strengthen UN programming on the ground and by civil society representatives advocating for peace. The IEG, like many other policy processes, will not lead to overnight changes in the lives of women in conflict-affected countries, but we fully expect it to improve the



PHOTO: UN WOMEN/CHRISTOPHER HERWIG

from its regular reports and deliberations.

Apart from examples of extreme violence against women—an issue that has finally gained more visibility in the last two decades—the Council is now hearing examples of extreme political marginalisation and exclusion of women in key peace and security processes and the gender dynamics that fuel or mitigate conflict. For example, Council experts heard detailed new research from Mali showing that the strongest factor pulling former combatants away from the battlefield and back into their communities were female family members; and that social media was being used to target urban youth in the north with

response of the UN and other international actors. At the very least, the Security Council cannot hear only once a year that women's leadership and participation is a missing ingredient in crisis response and stabilization efforts. It must hear it all year-round, directly from the people it deploys on the ground, and act upon it.

The writer is Deputy Chief of UN Women's Peace and Security Section.

This story was replicated from the UN Women website. The Daily Star is an official partner of UN Women's Step It Up! Media Compact, an alliance of media organisations committed to playing an active role in advancing gender issues within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Save the trees

I fully appreciate our honourable mayor's contribution towards fixing many of Dhaka's sewerage lines. However, the contractors are in the process, harming our trees whilst fixing the sewerage system along Gulshan 2, in the backyard of Road 50 near the lake.

We have beautiful trees bordering the lake outside our boundary wall. These trees are matured and have grown with us over the last 20 years. All over the world, good neighbourhoods bear the sign of maturity from preserving older and matured foliage. I request the major to look into the matter and save our precious trees.

Hina Yunus Haider
On email

Government's help needed for female migrants

I agree with the article “Abuse female expatriate workers face” published on 27 October, 2016. I would like to add that 45% of female migrant workers are exploited both physically and sexually in their work places. In 2015, 15000 female migrant workers went mostly to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman and Dubai. Among them, more than 150 female migrants were tortured and exploited last year. Majority of female workers are entrapped and deceived by brokers.

The government must enforce appropriate measures against such injustices. Otherwise, exploitation of female migrants will keep on increasing.

Mizanur Rahman Rezi
On email