

## An open space is an open space

*Is relocating hawkers there a good idea?*

It should surprise anyone who is looking for a breathing space literally in various parts of the capital amidst a concrete jungle that the city has really become, to know that the Matri Rahman Park, which the Mayor terms as "open space" would be used to resettle hawkers. The hawkers, who are going to be evicted from various parts of Gulistan-Banga Bhaban-Baitul Mukarram area, have been occupying these spots illegally and all attempts to remove them have proved futile.

That the Mayor of Dhaka South has considered relocating the hawkers is a very good idea indeed. These pavement markets have been there for a long time. They not only provide livelihood for many low income groups, they also offer many goods at cheaper prices affordable to the middle and low income groups. There is thus a demand for such a facility. And doing away with them without providing an alternative would adversely affect both the sellers and the buyers. But is the alternative of the so called "open space" as described by the Mayor the best?

Open spaces in Dhaka city are being continually occupied by the rich and the powerful and there is very little left of it. And just because it is described in official documents as an open space does not condemn it to the fate that it will face once the Mayor's plan is carried out. And for those who are conversant with the area would know that this "open space" was actually a part of Banga Bhaban that was ceded for public use as a park.

The Mayor's intention is noble, but that should be implemented in a manner that would save the "open space" and rehabilitate the hawkers as well.

## Fishermen shortchanged

*Compensate them*

FISHERMEN in fourteen districts are being shortchanged by the authorities who have imposed a ban on the catching, selling, transportation, storage and exchange of Hilsa to sustain the population of the delicious fish; most of them have not yet received the rice that was promised to them by the government as compensation. Pushed to the wall, some of those who went fishing defying the ban were arrested, fined, jailed and had their fishing nets burnt down by the authorities.

We wish the authorities were as efficient in keeping their promise as they were enforcing the prohibition. Twenty days have gone by since the ban was declared without the rice—20 kilograms per family—reaching many families while relevant ministries blame each other for the failure. It is interesting, however, that the rice reportedly found way to the homes of affluent and politically connected people all across the country. No ministry or department has offered any explanation as to why and how that happened.

The ban on catching premature Hilsa is a good initiative for facilitating its breeding and growth. There is a high demand of the fish in the country and abroad and the move is likely to contribute significantly to the economy. But at whose expense? What message does the failure to compensate the fishermen send to them? That it is alright to stop plying their trade for their livelihood so that the fish could grow? The concerned ministries and departments should immediately step in to ensure the distribution of the promised rice to these people. That's not going to solve all their problems—rice is not the only thing one gets by—but it's a start.

# Acknowledging the ugly truth



MACRO MIRROR  
FAHMIDA KHATUN

THIS happens every month, every week, everyday. Again and again and again. Brutality in the form of torture, sexual abuse, rape and murder has become epidemic in our society. Some cases get coverage in the media and spark reaction among citizens for a while, but most remain unreported and unknown. The ones which hit the headline in the media indicate the scale and depth of the dark side of our society.

While the memories of Tonu, Risha and Khadija are still fresh and alive, here comes another incidence of a heinous crime committed by a 42 year old human-beast from Dinajpur who beat, raped and tortured a girl of only five. Almost at the same time, we received the news of Bangladesh being recognised as a frontrunner among South Asian countries in regards to gender empowerment. Among the 144 countries on the list, Bangladesh secured the 72nd position for gender equality, leaving behind its South Asian peers. Great achievement indeed! Ironically, these two contrasting facets of our country only show how different the micro scenario could be from the positive macro indicators of progress and how gender equality is still a far-away goal.

Gender empowerment is not only about increasing school enrolment of girls, higher participation in the labour market, lower mortality rate, access to micro-credit, getting jobs in the readymade garment industry, or holding political positions. Therefore, such indexes and scores do not reflect the real plight of majority of



SOURCE: PATCH.COM

*The stereotypical mindset of even the highly educated section of the society hold the view that girls should maintain so-called 'decency' in their outfits and movements. If that is so, then what type of indecency can a five-year-old girl display in her clothes and demeanour? Are girls who wear hijabs spared by these monstrous men?*

the girls and women in our society. Beneath such spectacular progress of women in so many fields, there are also stories of humiliation and shame, discrimination and cruelty. The girl who goes to school or college or university does not know what awaits her on the way. From stalking to harassing to physical abuse to murder – she may encounter any of these that can put

her dreams on pause in seconds. The RMG worker, who returns home in the evening after a long work day, cannot be assured whether she will reach home safely. Even a minor girl is not safe to play outside or inside her home. They all fall prey to the ugly desires of the men in their own surroundings – relatives, teachers, co-workers, neighbours, classmates and local boys and men. They can be from any age group – starting from teenagers to mature adults. They can be from any profession and any economic cluster. The common factor of masculine perversion brings them together. But is masculinity about committing violence? How does this crime develop in some and not in other men?

Social scientists argue that violence against women is the result of the structure of gender relations in the family, society and state. In this structure, men are considered superior to women and more powerful and capable than them. Women are to be their subordinates. Hence, in this day and age whenever there are incidences of sexual abuse and rape of girls and women, the patriarchal mindset of even high profile people would try to justify the behaviour of the perpetrator as natural and even blame women for having a 'loose' character. The so-called *shalish* in the villages of Bangladesh, where a group of local powerful men decide and determine the punishment of such crimes, are often only a derision that harasses women. In many cases, the victim herself is humiliated instead of the criminal being punished and handed over to the law enforcement agency. Sadly, the law enforcement agencies sometimes cannot do much due to apparent political connection of the perpetrators.

Social and cultural factors are thus intrinsically linked to the development of violent behaviour and abusive actions of people. Within the family, men are the controlling point and take on the role of domination,

whereas women are dependent on them for decision making. Their role is determined by the division of labour and allocation of resources. Outside the family, the society does not like women who are not submissive or have 'minds of their own'. The stereotypical mindset of even the highly educated section of the society hold the view that girls should maintain so-called 'decency' in their outfits and movements. If that is so, then what type of indecency can a five-year-old girl display in her clothes and demeanour? Are girls who wear hijabs spared by these monstrous men?

We do not look at the root cause of the problem. Violence against girls and women should not be explained in isolation. This is about the power relationship between men and women, between rich and poor, between influential and vulnerable. Economics plays a crucial role here. It determines the position of people in the family and society. The exploitative environment that is created through money and power takes advantage of the weaker sections of the society. Girls and women are surely the vulnerable segment. But exploitation also takes place against men who are poor and helpless. Also, the same woman who herself may be dominated by male members in her family can often feel that she has the power to torture impoverished girls and other weaker female members in the family. Mistreating, beating and killing of female house-helpers and daughters-in-law by women are not uncommon in our society. Thus, the problem cannot be solved in a piecemeal basis. It needs increased social awareness, stricter laws and their proper implementation, and stronger institutions that can function smoothly to take measures against the perpetrators.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

## Duterte's American fixation



JOHN NERY

CABINET secretaries and campaign volunteers alike have told me that Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is open to new ideas and serene about ceding full control to his appointees within their scope of work. In my own, limited interaction with him during the presidential campaign, he struck me as someone entirely at ease in his own skin. All of which makes one ask: Why is his foreign policy driven by long-standing resentment, and why does his signature governance initiative depend on an old, unsound idea?

Since his election, and especially since his so-called war on drugs provoked US President Barack Obama to raise human rights concerns, he has attacked the United States for its great-power hypocrisy and Obama for, well, being an American. He denounced the presence of American forces in the Philippines, ordered an end to decades of annual military exercises between the Philippine military and the American armed services, refused Philippine participation in joint naval patrols in disputed parts of the South China Sea, and, while on a state visit to China, dramatically declared a "separation" from the United States.

I think it is fair to say that the vigorous criticism of American presence and policy preceded any articulation on his part of the Philippine Constitution's directive for the country to develop an "independent foreign policy." The gut reaction to what Duterte's leftist supporters call continued American "domination" of the Philippines came first; in a remarkable disclosure, President Duterte even told a forum in China that he felt slighted many years ago when his application for a US visa was rejected. His own humiliation thus magnifies the worst excesses of American colonial rule in the Philippines; it helps explain why, in his first appearance on the world stage, in Laos, he was driven to lecture the summit of leaders on atrocities Americans

committed against "my ancestor." (He did not however include American complicity in the crimes of the Marcos dictatorship, because Marcos' descendants support him.)

The war on drugs he launched in the Philippines less than four months ago — his signature initiative — has already claimed thousands of lives, including the obviously innocent. (Children caught in the crossfire, overseas Filipinos back home for a quick visit.) And yet the

who, in 1971, designated drug abuse as "public enemy No. 1," and officially declared a "war on drugs." War is the right word, because what Nixon started eventually mobilised government agencies, military assets and police resources in many countries in a massive attempt to stop the illegal drugs trade. It has failed, it is failing, because the undertaking, understood precisely as a war, sees users as enemies, rather than victims who both need help

several — some unintended — negative consequences, including a big strain on America's criminal justice system and the proliferation of drug-related violence around the world."

Why is President Duterte fixated on this American idea? For the same reason, I believe, that he thinks China is "good" to the Philippines, Marcos was the Philippines' best president, and Beijing and Moscow continue to be politically aligned and would

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Farming industry needs young leaders

Bangladesh is full of natural resources. Despite such a large share of our economy taken up by agricultural activity (almost 80 percent of the population's occupation is farming), younger generations show little to no interest in the sector. Farming doesn't just refer to rural people working hard in fields all day long. It is also a scientific process requiring the young generation's participation in order to develop. If we can motivate students to contribute to the farming sector, we can fix the unemployment problems of Bangladesh. It would give them an alternative to competing for office jobs in a herd and also help develop an important sector of the economy.

Asif Shahriar Niloy  
East West University

### A request to Roads Transport and Bridges Minister

We heartily congratulate Minister Obaidul Quader for being elected as General Secretary of Awami League. In light of the Prime Minister's initiative to diagnose the problems of the commoners in the recent council, I would like to draw their attention to a matter of concern. Tolls on various roads and streets are being forcefully taken from rickshaw van and auto-rickshaw drivers. We request our Roads, Transport and Bridges Minister to stop these unfair practices ruining the drivers' livelihoods.

Md. Golam Azam  
Gurudaspur, Natore



Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte delivers a speech at the Philippines' Economic Forum in Tokyo on October 26, 2016.

PHOTO: AFP/KAZUHIRO NOGI

*Duterte's war on drugs is an American invention. It is an American travesty of justice, which Duterte seems intent on imposing on his own country. Not least, it is an American failure, with which Duterte is unaccountably fixated.*

experience of other countries, including Thailand, has already discredited this take-no-prisoners approach. It simply does not work.

But here's the supreme irony. President Duterte's war on drugs is an American invention. It is an American travesty of justice, which Duterte seems intent on imposing on his own country. Not least, it is an American failure, with which Duterte is unaccountably fixated.

It was US President Richard Nixon

and are a potent source of the help needed.

The excellent Vox special report on the war on drugs notes: "Over the past four decades, the US has committed more than USD 1 trillion to the war on drugs. But the crackdown has in some ways failed to produce the desired results: Drug use remains a very serious problem in the US, even though the drug war has made these substances less accessible. The drug war also led to

welcome newly non-aligned countries like his: His formative ideas were formed in the 1960s and 1970s, and now, at long last, he is in a position to make them real.

The writer is Editor-in-Chief of Inquirer.net and represents the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in the Asia News Network. Twitter: @jnery\_newsstand

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