

## Human Rights Day

### Culture of impunity must be stopped

THE country observed Human Rights Day yesterday amidst an environment that only reminded us of its violations. From abuse of power, extrajudicial killings, abductions, forced disappearances, violence against women and ethnic and religious minorities - instances of abuses and the accompanying impunity from punishment have today increased to grave proportions.

How bad is the situation? The answer is evident from Ain O Shalish Kendra's statistics: one person per day was killed in 'shootouts' only last month. At least 89 people have been victims of enforced disappearances this year. Add to that the collusion or indifference by law enforcement agencies in violent attacks such as the likes of those on the Santal community in Gaibandha or on the Hindu community in Brahmanbaria.

At a time when militancy and communal violence are major threats to people's rights, the inactivity and sometimes, collusion by law enforcement agencies is terrifying. A report published in this paper yesterday chalked out only a handful of examples that are frightening for any citizen. Cases of 'shootouts' and enforced disappearances by law enforcement members have been on the rise. And to top it off, there has been no concerted effort to reign in or investigate these abuses. A rights activist put it succinctly, saying an environment of fear and impunity is being created.

Let Human Rights Day be a reminder for us about the gross violations that are becoming the norm. We demand that the authorities check the activity of the enforcement agencies and investigate the role of law enforcement members in these 'disappearances', not only for the sake of justice but also for the credibility and image of these organisations. After all, where do we go if the very people entrusted to uphold our rights end up party to its violation?

## Poorer pay for Bangladeshi expat workers

### Employers need to be taken to task

THE Ninth Global Forum on Migration and Development Summit taking place in Dhaka has revealed some unpalatable truths about the problems Bangladeshi expatriate workers are facing in Malaysia. Around 400,000 are legally employed in construction and plantation sectors. There is however some 200,000 more working there illegally and they are subject to much poorer pay and are under constant threat of deportation. Although we signed a government-to-government deal with Malaysia, the push was on mitigating migration costs and not securing higher pay, resulting in employers paying the bare minimum wage. This situation allows Malaysian employers to pay a documented Bangladeshi worker 1,000MR (Malaysian Ringitt) before tax as opposed to a Filipino worker earning 1,200MR per month.

The situation gets much worse for those workers who are working in that country illegally. Employers are bound by law to pay a lot of costs for taking Bangladeshi workers legally and hence there is a large demand for undocumented workers. The problem with law enforcement there is that the agencies are very active at apprehending and deporting these workers, but there is no action against the employers. This remains a major headache. Unless something can be done to make employers accountable for unscrupulous activity, it will be impossible to check the flow of illegal labour from the country. At our end, we need to negotiate better salaries and benefits for our workers with the Malaysian government. There also remains a dire need to enforce strict guidelines for local licensed recruiters in Bangladesh, which if violated would have their licenses revoked.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### We must protect the Rohingyas

The Rohingya crisis is reminiscent of the chilling memory of Muslims in Bosnia and Tutsis in Rwanda falling victim to two of history's bloodiest murder campaigns, in the name of ethnic cleansing, in 1994. It is shocking to see history repeating itself in an age where democracy is iconised. How can Madam Suu Kyi abdicate her global standing and stay silent on such dehumanising acts that she once fought against with the whole world behind her? We appeal to the world's conscience to stop this genocide in Myanmar.

Yusuf Azad, Rajshahi

### Why are flight accidents on the rise?

The crash of a Pakistan International Airlines flight is unfortunate. Not long ago, around 158 passengers were killed when an Air India Express plane from Dubai had crashed into a wooded valley after overshooting the tabletop runway at the Mangalore airport in India.

These incidents seem to be on the rise. Given that air travel is a lot riskier than travelling by road, the precautionary safety and security measures must be implemented even more to ensure the safety of all those aboard an aircraft. Such tragedies have raised serious questions that need to be answered. Instead of panicking, a thorough probe is needed to come to the core of these accidents the world over.

P. Senthil Saravana Durai, Mumbai

TASNEEM SIDDIQUI

RECENT global events such as the wars in Syria and Iraq, Brexit and the election victory of Donald Trump in the United States among other things have exposed the extreme vulnerability of international migrants in all parts of the world. Globally migrants are increasingly being labelled as security threats, terrorists, infiltrators, polluters, job takers and responsible for all woes that the world currently faces. It is against this stark reality that Bangladesh is currently hosting the Global Forum on Migration and Development, 2016 (GFMD). The government of Bangladesh along with many of the like-minded countries is working hard to highlight the positive contributions of migrant workers in global development. Through this forum these countries are trying their best to protect the rights of migrants in all stages of migration and take steps to enhance the developmental outcomes of migration.

In order to inform the formal GFMD deliberations the civil society organisations, including those working on migrants' rights, peasant associations and labour unions, held the People's Global Action on Migration, Development and Rights (PGA) from 5-7 December 2016 in Dhaka. More than 300 migrant rights activists of 25 countries, from North and Latin America, Africa and the Middle-East, South, East and South-East Asia, participated in this congregation. In line with the agenda of this year's GFMD, the PGA made recommendations on six key themes: labour migration, migration governance, mixed migration, climate change migration, xenophobia and racism, and borders and detention.

**Obstacles at every stage**  
Labour migrants constitute 80 percent of total international migrant population. Short term contract migrants dominate the flow. Migrants face problem at every stage of their migration experience. Those range from access to information to recruitment at the areas of origin and visa trading, contract substitution and absence of decent work conditions in the countries of destination. The PGA demanded the governments at the GFMD agree that fair and ethical recruitment should be the basis of all multilateral, regional and bilateral frameworks. It called for guaranteeing transparency and accountability and effective cooperation

between states of origin and destination in labour recruitment. Bangladesh has been raising the issue of lowering the cost of migration for a long time in the GFMD forum. Concerted effort needs to be made to attain zero cost of migration as stipulated in ILO Convention.

**Establishing labour standards**  
Currently, in the absence of a global regime, migration is governed under dual jurisdiction of origin and destination countries. This inhibits migrant enjoying decent labour standards. Negotiations between origin and destination countries are mostly bilateral. Migration governance requires development of a migration system. The PGA highlighted the need for multilateralism. It



More than one million migrants reached Europe via the Mediterranean last year.

recommended the use of existing human rights and labour standards frameworks for migration governance that include the 1990 UN Convention on Protection of Migrant Workers and their Families, other relevant human rights and ILO Conventions. In order to ensure benefits of the labour standards to the migrants, countries need to frame enabling national laws incorporating those standards.

**Mixed migration**  
In recent years the unfolding of political and economic events in various parts of the world has made it virtually impossible to make distinction between different forms of migration-labour migrants, asylum seekers or climate displaces. Regardless of their status people

involved in large scale movements require protection of their rights at all stages of their journey. When refugees and migrants are at risk the governments should protect and rescue and UNHCR guidelines should be respected on the rights of migrants at the border. The principle of non-refoulement needs to be adhered to by the letter.

**Climate change and migration**  
Climate change related migration should receive more attention in future GFMDs. Climate change is already driving migration as a result of droughts, floods, erosion, natural disasters and these trends will only exacerbate. Climate change reduces the security of rural

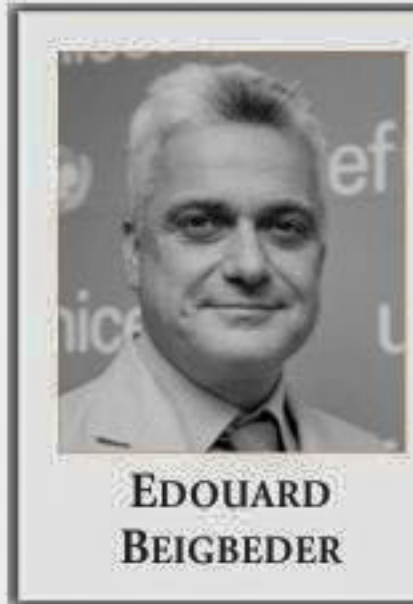
destination countries.

**Xenophobia and racism**  
Currently the world is seeing unleashing of racism and xenophobia. It will be wrong to label them as just interpersonal issues. In fact those are legacies of colonialism and broader relations of inequality. State migration deterrence frameworks result in criminalisation and scapegoating of migrants. It feeds into xenophobia and racism. The time has come to launch a UN campaign on racism. Local and regional realities of fundamental structural patterns of discrimination have to be addressed in such campaign.

**Borders and detention**  
Currently the world is witnessing a surge in refugee and asylum seekers. At a time when people are fleeing persecution, war and generalised violence, the states continue to adhere to their policy of deterrence. Although refugees and migrants fleeing such situations do not have any role in creating those conditions, they are not treated with compassion. This is not only true for industrialised countries of the West but also for many developing countries. It is in this context respecting the international customary law states should open their borders to those fleeing persecution and end immigration detention of all and particularly of pregnant women and children. Alternatives to detention such as open door shelters and community based programmes need to be established. The governments, who are highlighting the developmental outcomes of migration, should move away from a migration policy framework rooted in deterrence.

The PGA concluded that migrants as stakeholders should have direct participation at national and inter-governmental policy spaces. Migrants need their human rights protected, but they also need their agency to be recognised and respected. This is especially true of women migrants, who are often discussed in terms of vulnerability. The civil society representatives expect that GFMD 2016 will be able to make a major breakthrough on the above areas that are crucial at this critical juncture of globalisation, migration and development.

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EDOUARD BEIGBEDER

THIS year, UNICEF is celebrating its 70th anniversary just when Bangladesh is approaching 45 years of independence. UNICEF's 70th anniversary is far beyond a milestone, it gives us the opportunity to celebrate our work for children over the seven decades. It helps us reminisce why UNICEF came into existence 70 years ago: to meet the

desperate needs of children affected by World War II, to bring lifesaving aid, long-term support, and hope for children risked by conflict, crises, crushing poverty, and now increasingly, by the effects of climate change.

In 1946, UNICEF started its journey to meet the urgent needs of children affected by World War II, despite the geographical location and role of the country where they lived in during the war. With the simple words "The hope of the world rests in the coming generations" the General Assembly recommended the establishment of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UNICEF.

The organisation targeted the children at greatest risk and need, struggling to survive in the aftermath of the war and brought them life-saving humanitarian support and long-term assistance. UNICEF aimed at providing children a normal childhood and a better future. Since then, UNICEF's influence cuts across multiple sectors and the organisation stands as a symbol of hope for children everywhere -- and for every child.

Since 1952, UNICEF has had a long standing and strong partnership of trust and collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh. After its inception here, UNICEF mostly provided supply assistance in the remotest villages of the then East Pakistan for about 20 years. During the country's liberation war in 1971, UNICEF provided emergency assistance to thousands of war refugees and children.

Actively doing the "doable", UNICEF Bangladesh gradually evolved into a full-fledged development agency. UNICEF, now works with development partners, donors, civil society and the people for the survival, development, protection and participation of children and women in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is now entering into the era of the Sustainable Development Goals, attaining remarkable achievements in many Millennium Development Goals. This includes higher enrolment and gender parity in primary and secondary schools, immunisation, child

## 70 YEARS OF UNICEF

# Being there for children, wherever they are



mortality - going down from 94 in 1999 to 46 in 2014 and maternal mortality from 340 in 2000 to 170 in 2013. More people now than ever have access to improved drinking water and sanitation. In all these development efforts UNICEF has been a partner with the government. Yet more effort needs to be put to addressing the causes of under-five mortality, preventing child marriage, promoting child participation, so that children have a greater say in their lives.

In the coming years, UNICEF will continue its support to advance the universal realisation of the rights of children, particularly for the most disadvantaged and excluded in Bangladesh. These include children, adolescents and their communities living in poverty and areas that are hard-to-reach or vulnerable to climate change and those from ethnic and religious minorities.

An emergency responder, a champion of child rights and a force for equitable development, UNICEF has a long record of success. Through Country Offices and National Committees, UNICEF works with partners in 190 countries and territories to advance child-friendly

social policies. By celebrating UNICEF's 70th anniversary, we take the opportunity to highlight the urgent needs and the impact of our work on children and the challenges faced by them in some of the world's toughest places. We aim to save more lives and give hope to more children in need and at risk, making our work as relevant as yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Seventy years on, UNICEF has played its part worldwide in dramatically reducing child deaths and helping millions of children fulfil their potential. Yet, the cause of children has gained importance even more -- and UNICEF's work for the most disadvantaged, excluded, and vulnerable children is becoming more relevant and urgent every day. We are there for children. Wherever they are. Whoever they are. Whenever they need us - now, more than ever.

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The writer is the Representative of UNICEF Bangladesh.

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