

Why we need a disability inclusion revolution



SHAMSIN AHMED

ANITA'S father holds up his eleven-year-old daughter with both hands under her arms -- supporting her to stand as his wife makes the payments for groceries that they bought. An elderly man standing behind them at the counter looks over at Anita and her father. The man peers over and asks:

"Apnar meyer kihoyeche?" (What's wrong with your daughter?) Anita's father replies uncomfortably, "Kichuna o majhemajhe porey jai toh." (Nothing's wrong, she just falls sometimes.)

The man keeps staring and as Anita's father moves away from the counter, he calls out "Thik koren, thik koren, noiley biye diben kemne?" (Get the problem fixed, or else how will you get her married off?)

Anita has epilepsy. Epilepsy is a neurological disorder associated with abnormal electrical activity in the brain and can trigger loss of consciousness, or convulsions. Even if we were to ignore the sexism and the gross insensitivity of that remark, what is evident is that the psyche of our society holds that people with disabilities are inherently flawed and hence guilty of falling short in the capacity to participate in society.

Participate in what is deemed the "normal" way of life; in this case having a functional moving body, getting married, etc. Anything outside these standards, which, if you really think about it, are too simplistic anyway, need to be "fixed" or else these people and their families are condemned to live with the guilt and shame forever.

Our prejudices towards people with health conditions such as mental

illnesses, learning and developmental disabilities are often mired in our social practices through divisive concepts embedded in norms around family, class, religion and ideology.

Essentially though, exclusion is a denial of merit, of capacity. As Chinua Achebe, the famous Nigerian writer puts it in his novel *There was a Country*, "The denial of merit is a form of social injustice that can hurt not only the individuals directly concerned but ultimately the entire society. The motive for the original denial may be tribal discrimination, but it may also come from sexism, from political, religious, or some other partisan consideration, or from corruption and bribery. It is unnecessary to examine these various motives separately; it is sufficient to state that whenever merit is set aside by prejudice of whatever origin, individual citizens as well as a nation itself are victimised."

Apart from being the moral

imperative, being inclusive of disabled people is actually beneficial for the world. Designing infrastructure for disability makes life a lot easier for everyone. Also in a country like Bangladesh that is now considered a lower middle income economy, the cost of disability exclusion, which is about USD one billion per year or 1.74 percent of our GDP, is a high price. In a study conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies on the Economics of Disability and Children at Risk in Bangladesh, disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty. The paper identifies that in Bangladesh the economic cost of disability is comprised of children with disabilities losing out on school; lack of employment of people with disability; adults missing out on many employment opportunities so that they can take care of people with disabilities in their families; and children helping family members with disability missing

out on educational opportunities. Thus, the cost to the economy of not being inclusive is very high.

There are many ways in which being more inclusive of people with disabilities benefits everyone. With access to education and employment, the world's most vulnerable population can not only become self-sufficient but also prevent economic loss for our country.

With the ongoing conflicts of extremism and the onset of the fourth industrial revolution, heightened urbanisation, increasing human insecurity, poverty, natural disasters, migration, hunger, which are all drastic changes we need to cope with, it is now more than ever crucial that the world needs to be inclusive.

For too long, however, the approach to disability inclusion has been a charity based approach, largely because of lack of awareness and knowledge about disability. In most cases, the only

time people encounter people with disabilities is on the streets as beggars. There are over 500 disabled people's organisations in Bangladesh which focus on giving therapy, assistive devices, vocational skills, which is important but also accentuates the fact that "they" need to adjust to an able bodied society. Whereas, there is nothing being done to change society into being more inclusive of them.

While there are many laws and regulations passed recently on building ramps, reserving seats and quotas for people with disabilities, the rights based approach has yet to be enacted. We have buses with reserved seats but no provision such as a ramp or tactile walk way for a person with disability (PwD) to actually get on the bus. Taking to the streets with PwDs in the forefront has been limited to one-off events that bring no constructive changes to the lives of disabled people.

We need to teach the social definition of disability in our schools and workplaces which says disability is not an attribute of a society but the social barriers that prevent people with certain conditions from participating in society. People with disabilities create diversity in society; they create an environment where having the necessary accommodations and being able to perform ones duties to the best of one's ability, matters. When our social institutes, our schools, workplaces and social gatherings are inclusive of disabled people, we will be naturally promoting diversity.

As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, "A social movement that only moves people is merely a revolt. A movement that changes both people and institutions is a revolution."

That is the kind of revolution we need.

The writer is founder and Project Director, Identity Inclusion.



IMAGE: HIDOCTOR.JR

Apart from being the moral imperative, being inclusive of disabled people is actually beneficial for the world. Designing infrastructure for disability makes life a lot easier for everyone.

Wishful thinking on Code of Conduct for South China Sea



SUPALAK GANJANAKHUNDEE

RHETORIC has come full circle in the dispute over the South China Sea but can the Philippines, the current chair of Asean and a claimant state, deliver a peaceful solution for the area? So far, there is little to see apart from wishful thinking from Manila as it pledges to conclude the Code of Conduct (CoC) for the South China Sea by the end of this year.

A joint working group of officials from China and Asean have agreed on a series of meetings to speed up the work towards creating an international legal instrument that would control the behaviour of the signatories in the contentious sea. But their actions reveal a different mindset.

China and many countries in Southeast Asia have had territorial conflicts over the sea for several decades. China, however, asserted itself and occupied the Parcel and Spratly archipelagos in the 1970s and 1980s respectively. In addition to China, its rival Taiwan as well as Asean countries Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam are also claimants.

Asean began to use diplomatic tools to talk to China with the aim of creating a climate of good practices in

the South China Sea. After years of negotiations since the late 20th century, Asean and China signed the Declaration on the Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) in 2002.

Articles in the DOC clearly cited that the contracting parties should exercise restraint in the conduct of activities that could complicate or escalate the disputes.

Article five of the DOC says countries should refrain from the action of inhabiting presently uninhabited islands, reefs, shoals, cays, and other features and to handle their differences in a constructive manner. The non-binding DOC failed to prevent any of these activities. While China was moving southward to the South China Sea, countries in Southeast Asia began to secure their respective positions in the islands and archipelagos in the contentious sea, leading to numerous skirmishes.

Tension in modern times arose when Asean and China commemorated the 10th anniversary of the DOC in 2012. In April 2012, the Philippines Navy seized eight Chinese fishing boats accusing them of illegally operating off Scarborough Island, which was occupied by the Philippines. In the meantime, China began large-scale island building and reclamation in the Spratlys in 2013. China occupies many locations in the Spratlys and has reclaimed more than 3,200 acres of land there. Beijing controls the

Quartern, Fiery Cross, Gaven, Hughes, Johnson South, Mischief and Subi reefs. At least three airfields and other military facilities were built on these features.

In December last year, Vietnam made significant progress in its land reclamation activities and upgraded its air force infrastructure in the Spratlys. In fact, Vietnam had constructed an airfield in the Spratlys way back in



1977. The recent development was in response to China's move. Some of the islets and rocks that Vietnam keeps in the Spratlys include Amboyna Cay, Collins Reef, Ladd Reef, Namyt Island, Sand Cay, Sin Cowe Island and Southwest Cay.

While maintaining good terms with all claimants, notably China, Malaysia was the first to claim some of the Spratly Islands way back in 1979 in its Exclusive Economic Zone. Malaysia lays

claim to the Ardasier Reef, Dallas Reef, Erica Reef, Investigator Shoal, Mariveles Reef and Swallow Reef.

As such activities in the contentious sea raised tensions in the region, Asean looked forward to other legal instruments to maintain peace and stability once it realised that its DOC is a toothless paper.

The group called upon all concerned parties to frame a so-called CoC, to supplement – if not replace – the DOC. Initially, Beijing was reluctant to come along as it argued that the DOC had not yet been fully implemented. The Asean side insisted it wanted to have something more binding. Finally, negotiations for the CoC began four years ago when Thailand was the Asean-China coordinator. A joint working group was set up to seek common ground for the code.

The efforts to have a CoC were conducted amid differences, if not disputes, among Asean members due to their respective interests with China. There were some changes along the way over the past year.

The Philippines secured a favourable verdict from the Permanent Court of Arbitration against China but since then there has been a policy flip-flop under President Rodrigo Duterte.

The current Asean-China coordinator is Singapore, a non-claimant state.

The aggressive rhetoric coming out of Washington and the reactions from Beijing have once again raised tensions

in the South China Sea. These factors always cast a shadow over the efforts to create a CoC.

However, some technical terms such as "early harvest" and "fast track" have been contrived over the past few years whenever the two sides or their working groups met to make sure they had something to capture media headlines, implying some progress had been made.

Observers believe that both sides would take longer to finalise the CoC, and it was not likely unless both sides were sure the commitment would not affect their respective occupation and activities on the ground. Furthermore, both Asean and China would not make the CoC a dispute settlement mechanism. Beijing has made it clear that it would resolve the conflict only on a bilateral basis.

While some Asean members prefer to speak in one voice, many of them – notably the claimants – remain unsure if any multilateral mechanism could help. But the point is the CoC will likely suffer the same fate as the DOC unless the issue of territorial conflict is seriously addressed. Otherwise, it will be another well-intentioned but useless piece of paper.

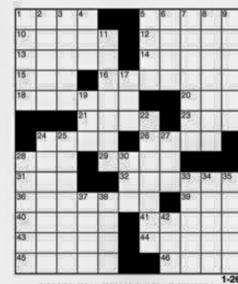
The writer is Regional Editor, *The Nation*, Thailand.

This is a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers across the region.

While some Asean members prefer to speak in one voice, many of them – notably the claimants – remain unsure if any multilateral mechanism could help.

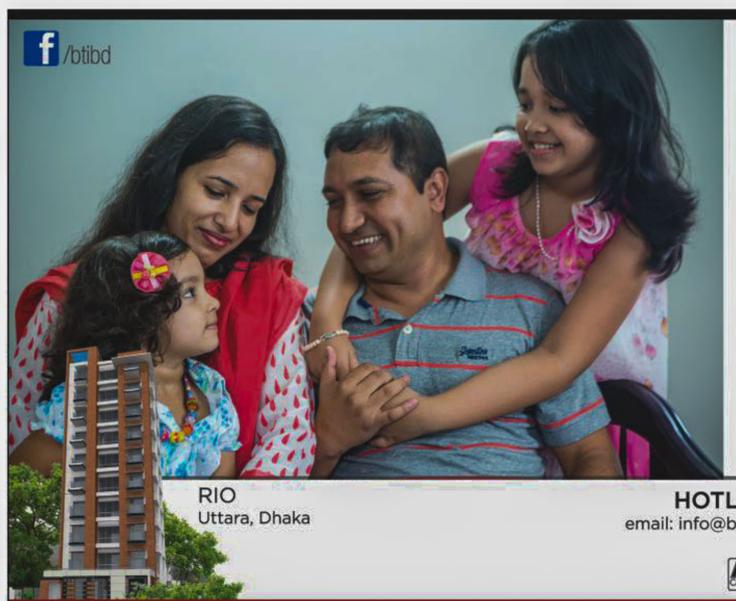
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1* - she blows!
 - 5 Crew members
 - 10 Barber's tool
 - 12 Celeb roster
 - 13 Loosen, in a way
 - 14 Gossip
 - 15 One of the Stooges
 - 16 Fair play
 - 18 Striker
 - 20 Sheltered side
 - 21 Notion
 - 23 Print measures
 - 24 Horse feature
 - 26 Ohio team
 - 28 Team backer
 - 29 Bits of makeup
 - 31 Linking word
 - 32 Box office buy
 - 36 Growth of trees
 - 39 Corn unit
 - 40 Prink shade
 - 41 Make blank
 - 43 Isolated
 - 44 Old symbols
 - 45 High-strung
- DOWN**
- 1 White House name
 - 2 Asian capital
 - 3 Early Mexican
 - 4 King of France
 - 5 "Do you mind?"
 - 6 Guinness of film
 - 7 Sounded like wind chimes
 - 8 Reverses
 - 9 Declares
 - 11 Ebbed
 - 17 Numbered rd.
 - 19 Family
 - 22 Strike mediator
 - 24 Street opening
 - 25 Fireplace tool
 - 27 PC key
 - 28 Campaign backer
 - 30 Had a snack
 - 33 Sandra's "Speed" co-star
 - 34 Moved slowly
 - 35 Lock of hair
 - 37 Soup buys
 - 38 Painter Paul
 - 42 Massage



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

RAIDER SMIEW
ALCOVE PUMA
DEEPEN JGOR
ENDING
CABS REINS
EMU WHATNOT
DIG OAT EVE
ENGARDE ASK
SOILS ASKS
NEEDED
DEER ORATOR
EAST GIGOLO
MUSS SEEMED



RIO
Uttara, Dhaka

Our customers speak for us...

"We trust the name bti for their excellent quality in construction and reliability, it was easy to choose to buy an apartment from bti."

Md. Monzurul Islam & Family
Rio, Uttara, Sector # 6

HOTLINE: 096 1319 1919
email: info@btibd.org • www.btibd.com

