

Shortfalls of public colleges

Address them immediately

A conference participated by principals of 327 public colleges has revealed the dire state of these institutions that are supposed to provide mainly higher secondary education – a crucial stage of academic life for a student.

The most glaring deficiency in these colleges is a severe shortage of teachers which no doubt has significantly compromised the quality of education. One of the principals informed that in his college there were only 70 teachers for 2,400 students! Despite informing the authorities nothing had been done. The Education minister has pointed out that despite so many vacant posts teachers are unwilling to leave Dhaka city and go to rural colleges. If this is the case then proper incentives have to be given to teachers so that they are encouraged to move outside Dhaka. Besides this, the slow process of recruitment is also to be blamed for this shortage. This must be rectified so that students do not suffer.

The other problems reiterated at the conference includes shortage of classrooms, lack of training opportunities for teachers, not enough reference books and ill equipped science laboratories as well as a lack of infrastructure. These bottlenecks have to be removed on an urgent basis.

Most of these public colleges have been running for many years. The education ministry can no longer ignore these glaring deficiencies of the most fundamental prerequisites of a college.

The Ministry must also accelerate its efforts in training and recruiting teachers, ensuring better and timely salaries along with incentives to move to rural areas, constructing bigger buildings to accommodate more classrooms and providing appropriate apparatus for the laboratories. Without these basic requirements fulfilled there is no point in expecting public colleges to perform well academically.

Reckless jaywalking

Get rid of this dangerous culture

We are appalled by a number of photographs published in this paper yesterday depicting pedestrians nonchalantly crossing busy streets while the nearest footbridge is only a little away. This, coupled with reckless driving, is one of the primary causes of mishaps in the streets of the capital. That this scourge has not been removed despite some much-publicised deaths is simply disappointing.

Some pedestrians appear to be under the impression that they are impervious to mishaps or accidents. This behaviour is at worst foolish and at best criminal as it puts the lives of the others also in jeopardy. More disturbing is the sight of parents jaywalking with children. It defies logic and, more importantly, common sense that one would risk the safety of one's child in such a slipshod manner when the foot-over bridge or the footpath happens to be nearby.

There is no denying that Dhaka is far from a pedestrian-friendly city. There are few pedestrian signals; sidewalks and foot-over bridges are taken up by hawkers; and most footpaths are broken or unusable. These need to be fixed on an immediate basis. Jaywalkers must be handed down a hefty fine and the law enforcers cannot remain an impotent bystander while this suicidal behaviour takes over our streets. Also, more zebra crossings are needed and the police ought to help women, children, the disabled and elderly to cross the street. And the city dwellers must be sensitised about the importance of the use of foot-over bridges and pedestrian pathways.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Take mental illnesses seriously

It is alarming that 64 and 69 Lakh people of our country are suffering from depressive and anxiety disorder, respectively, according to the WHO study published by The Daily Star.

Poverty, unemployment, low salary, relationship issues etc. have been identified as some of the main causes of these illnesses. We can see manifestations of these issues in the high number of suicides occurring every day.

We must take these issues seriously and try to solve them in an organised way. I completely agree with the ideas of Dr. Sultana Algin, Associate Professor of Psychiatry of BSMMU, quoted in the DS news report. Moreover, counseling services should be mandated in all education institutions so that students receive help and support in dealing with difficult situations.

Mazhar Mishu

Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management

Hypertension causes kidney failure

The report titled "What if kidneys fail?" recently published by The Daily Star was insightful and rich in detail. A significant fraction of individuals develop kidney failure because of hypertension, which affects around one fifth of Bangladeshi adults under 25. High levels of salt consumption, particularly from drinking water in coastal areas, are a likely cause for this. Because hypertension has no symptoms, treatment can be expensive, and ways to reduce salt content in drinkable water are lacking, kidney failure can be expected to rise among future Bangladeshis.

Bangladesh urgently needs to invest in research into these areas.

Reza Salim
Director,
Amader Gram Cancer Care & Research Center

Militancy strikes Pakistan hard



NO FRILLS
SYED MANSUR
HASHIM

RECENT attacks in Pakistan including incidents in Punjab, Sind and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa suggest that the various militant outfits are trying to

coordinate attacks on Pakistani security forces and religious minorities that include Shias, Christians and Hindus; members of the judiciary, civil society activists are also on the hit list. All this points to a whole new scenario for the military that is already overstretched and one that is suffering from a trust deficit with its age old ally, the United States (US).

With over a hundred people wounded or killed in the attacks, the military responded in kind with some 100 militants killed in counter insurgency operations, and as reported by Jane's Terrorism & Insurgency "The military also announced the indefinite closure of the border with Afghanistan, following further public criticism of the Afghan government's perceived reluctance to crack down on Pakistani militants on the Afghan side of the border." The fact of the matter is that terrorism cannot be rooted out by military operations alone. The US intervention for more than a decade in the Middle East and elsewhere is testament to that. For Pakistan, things seem to be going from bad to worse as mass casualty due to terrorism is on the rise.

As per media reports, we are informed that the military is reorienting its operations with a counter terrorism focus and has led to ordering an unspecified number of AW139 helicopters from the Italian defense firm Leonardo S.p.A. Despite strained relations with the US, Boeing is

delivering 3 AH-1Z Viper twin-engine attack helicopters this year and the remaining 9 will arrive in 2018. These helicopters will be deployed in counterinsurgency operations and as per a US Defense Security Cooperation Agency statement in April 2015: It will enhance "Pakistan's ability to conduct operations in North Waziristan, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Fata), and other remote and mountainous areas in all-weather, day and night environment." From Russia, Pakistan is getting 4 Mi-35M attack

strained relations with Kabul, terrorists move with ease from one country to another in the face of large military operations. One has to take into account that the terrorist outfits do not operate alone anymore, they have allies and sympathisers who are united by ideology and as in the case of Pakistan, also sometimes by tribal ties.

A different view to the conflict is presented by Abbas Nasir, former editor of Dawn in his article 'What military ops can't deliver' published in that paper recently: "To me, a larger battle

We keep forgetting that to make a dent in the recruitment of terrorists, which is increasingly sophisticated in nature (as seen by Islamic State's ability to draw people of different educational qualifications from different parts of the world to fight for what it calls the 'Caliphate'), countries like Pakistan or Bangladesh for that matter, need to engage the moderate clergy. Because it is to them that the devout turn to for solace and guidance in Muslim majority societies.

helicopters this year. Indeed, Islamabad may also be getting the T-129 attack helicopter from Turkish Aerospace Industries and from China; it may acquire the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group's Z-10 as an alternative to the Russian Mi-35.

While all these military hardware will certainly help to conduct better counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, the solution to the problem that Pakistan faces is not entirely military in nature. With a porous Afghan border and

will be the one to somehow move society to a 'live and let live' state from the current intolerant, even bigoted, environment. I recall with horror the recent forced disappearance of five social media activists (one remains missing). All their detractors needed to do was to plant a suggestion or two in the public sphere that those gone missing were guilty of blasphemy for some of the self-proclaimed guardians of our faith to start acting like a lynch mob and baying for their blood. Did a single one of them bother to ascertain

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS An endemic in South Asia

BIRAJ PATNAIK

FOR all the differences South Asia's countries insist on, they have depressingly similar attitudes when it comes to human rights. Over the past year, as Amnesty International documents in its Annual Report, civil society organisations have been harassed and shut down, journalists have been targeted, crude colonial-era laws have been unleashed against government critics, new laws have been invoked against critics online, and brutal practices have endured in areas afflicted by conflict.

Scarcely has it been more dangerous to be a blogger or a journalist in South Asia. After a gruesome 2015 in Bangladesh, where five secular bloggers were slain in separate attacks, the machete killings continued without any determined action from the government. LGBTI activists, Hindus, Christians, Sufi Muslims and academics became new targets.

In Pakistan, this year began with the suspicious disappearance of four bloggers. They've all since returned home, but the government hasn't investigated who took them. In 2016, according to the Pakistani Press Foundation, two journalists were killed, 16 injured and one abducted. The case of Zeenat Shahzadi, who was abducted on her way to work in August 2015, remained unsolved. Leading columnist Cyril Almeida was subject to a travel ban by the government for writing an article on tensions between the civilian government and the military.

In India, home to a lively media, two journalists were also killed last year. Karun Mishra was killed by gunmen in Uttar Pradesh, apparently for reporting on illegal soil mining. Rajeev Ranjan, a journalist with *Hindustan*, who had faced threats from political leaders for his writing, was shot dead in the town of Siwan.

Freedom of expression was curtailed by the authorities in several cases. An outdated sedition law was used to target three students at Jawaharlal Nehru University in February for allegedly raising "anti-national" slogans. In the same month, an academic was arrested on the same charge by the Delhi police. India has also used the draconian, emergency-era Foreign Contribution Regulation Act to harass NGOs, and cancel or refuse to renew the foreign funding licenses of dozens of organisations without valid reasons.

Activities online have come under increasing assault. In Bangladesh, a 22-year-old student, ran afoul of the

country's Information and Communications Technology Act for

visit to the country last May. While the problem is at levels lower than



A candlelight vigil held on Dhaka University campus protesting the murder of writer Avijit Roy.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

allegedly making "derogatory remarks" about political personalities on Facebook. In a similar case, two men were arrested in India's Madhya Pradesh under the Information Technology Act for allegedly sharing a satirical image of a Hindu nationalist group.

Pakistan, not one to be left behind, passed the Prevention of Electronic Crime Act last year, giving the authorities broad and invasive powers to monitor citizens and censor online expression. Nepal arrested and expelled a Canadian lawyer, Robert Penner, claiming that he was sowing "social discord" through his Twitter account.

Repressive laws continue to hinder Sri Lanka's transition out from under the shadow of the decades-long conflict there. Despite commitments to deliver on accountability for alleged crimes under international law, the authorities made frequent use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), despite the government's 2015 pledge to repeat it. Tamils suspected of links to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continued to be detained under the PTA, which permits extended administrative detention and piles the burden of proof onto the detainee alleging torture or other ill-treatment.

It is a problem that was noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on torture, who said the practice persists on a

during Sri Lanka's conflict, impunity still prevails for both old and new cases. The government is similarly failing to hold people accountable for enforced disappearances and extrajudicial executions that took place during the conflict.

In Afghanistan, the conflict has been widening. As the Taliban and other armed groups seize more territory, punctuating their advances with horrific attacks on civilians, the number of people displaced has risen to record numbers. More than 1.5 million people now languish in overcrowded camps, where they go without adequate food and water in freezing temperatures.

The humanitarian catastrophe is set to worsen as the world turns its back on Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers. In Pakistan, even as the UN noted that civilian casualty figures have reached their highest point since records began being compiled in 2009, the UN refugee agency worked with the Pakistani authorities to forcibly return tens of thousands of Afghan refugees. The returns breached the international principle of non-refoulement: people cannot be sent to a country where they are at risk of serious human rights abuses. That the UN is directly complicit in this does not bode well for the rights of refugees in the

for themselves – as decency, law and most of all any faith would require – if what they were accusing the 'disappeared' of was based on facts? No. It is much easier to join a galloping, frothing-at-the-mouth hysterical herd than to stop and examine the facts."

As pointed out by Mr. Nasir, the sermons by radical religious leaders that followed the sentencing and later execution of Mumtaz Qadri, the man who killed the Punjab Governor Salman Taseer have not stopped. It is also worth pointing out that the head of the Ruet-e-Hilal Mufti Munibur Rahman, who happens to be a leading religious leader has gone as far as to state that dhammal which is a dance done at Sufi shrines and which is participated by both men and women apparently goes against the teaching of the saints.

Those are the ground realities in Pakistan as elsewhere in other Muslim majority states including Bangladesh where the State essentially views religious extremism as a security problem that can be exterminated using overwhelming force. But as pointed out by Mr. Nasir and others, the root of terrorism is deeply ideological in nature and ideas must be fought with ideas as well as with arms. We keep forgetting that to make a dent in the recruitment of terrorists, which is increasingly sophisticated in nature (as seen by Islamic State's ability to draw people of different educational qualifications from different parts of the world to fight for what it calls the 'Caliphate'), countries like Pakistan or Bangladesh for that matter, need to engage the moderate clergy. Because it is to them that the devout turn to for solace and guidance in Muslim majority societies.

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region.
Like so many other countries who

have abandoned refugees over recent years, Pakistan justified its behaviour on grounds of national security. The government alleged that the refugee camps hosted armed groups. While countries are entitled to take necessary steps to protect their populations, these must never come at the cost of human rights.

It's a principle that the Pakistani authorities have abandoned in Karachi and Baluchistan, where security operations have perpetuated a range of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, and extrajudicial executions. And it's a principle the Indian authorities abandoned in Jammu and Kashmir last year, where authorities imposed curfews across the valley and security forces deployed excessive and unnecessary force against protesters, even blinding hundreds of young people with the use of inherently indiscriminate pellet shotguns.

Instead of replicating each other's failures on human rights in a race to the bottom, South Asia's countries might want to focus their rivalries instead on who can provide a better future for their people – where each country is distinguished by the value it puts on human dignity.

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