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| CORRUPTION |

CALLING IN CORRUPTION



PHOTO: ZIAUL HAQUE OISHARIJH

“God is a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere.”

— Voltaire

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Repression of Rohingyas

It is with great pain that the whole world is watching the Arakan version of the Rwanda and Srebrenica massacres. Leading commentators, campaigners, politicians, Nobel Laureates and people of the world have been flabbergasted by the stance of the unofficial head of the Burmese government, de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, known worldwide as an icon of liberty and freedom.

Some view her inability to stop the genocide as actions crafted and executed by the Burmese military against her wishes. It is even more painful and upsetting that three major world powers—namely China, Russia and India—have been silent observers of the plight of Rohingyas and are not taking steps to resolve the on-going crisis. Hats off to Bangladesh for playing a crucial role in giving shelter, food and water to the desperate Rohingyas who have fled their homes and have nowhere else to go.

We urge world leaders and renowned international organisations such as the United Nations to make an effort stop this repression of Rohingyas immediately. Let humanity prevail above all.
Nuzhat Rifa Ehsan
Baridhara, Dhaka



PHOTO: KAZI TAHISIN AGAZ APURBO

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

An urge from a teacher

Our lifestyle changes with the demands of time but what about the values and principles that determine one's personality? Do they belong to any particular era? Are they also changeable? Always speak the truth, respect your elders, do not quarrel with anyone and be kind in your life—are these pieces of advice no longer applicable in this competitive world?

As a teacher, I strongly feel that children are victims of the rapid changes around us. Modern lifestyle has left them with no other option but to construct their own world with lifeless gadgets. This creates a huge obstacle in their emotional development. Children nowadays remain glued to their gadgets most of the time. Visiting relatives with their parents seems boring to them. Traditional parent-child interaction—listening to stories by their parents, answering their many questions—is also declining and may possibly be weakening these bonds.

As adults, we should be teaching values through our actions such as being kind to those in hardship such as the beggars you see on the street or the rickshaw puller taking you from one place to another. We need to point out the wrong in being dismissive or rude to these people and emphasize the difficulties of hard labour and living without a roof over your head. Gadgets cannot help our children identify right and wrong. It is our guidance from which they will learn.

Rukhsana Ahmed
Shyamoli, Dhaka

NAIMUL KARIM

“How much money did you pay him in bribes for the papers?” asks an officer with his headphones on, while scribbling down the main points of the reply on a piece of paper. “BDT 1200... and now he wants more?” he further inquires as he briskly takes a sip of instant coffee from a disposable cup.

There is a similar sense of urgency in the cubicle across. “He has been occupying your land for more than two months now. Is that right?” another officer, slightly older than his neighbour, asks as he lowers his eyebrows and tries hard to understand the situation.

These are scenes from an afternoon shift of the country's anti-corruption hotline office in Segunbagicha. The hotline Number 106, which was launched a month ago to crack down on corrupt activities related to government services, has already witnessed more than two lakh calls.

There are 60 Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) officers, ranging from Deputy Directors to Assistant Directors, who receive calls using five computers in different shifts.

Spend an hour in this office and you realise there is barely any time for them to take a break during these two-hour shifts. When asked how much time they get in between calls, one of the officers smiles and says, “10 to 15 seconds,” before diverting his attention to a new caller.

The problem though is that there is not a lot that the ACC can do regarding a majority of the calls that they receive. According to the Director of the project, Zahed Hossain Khan, 84 percent of the calls that they receive do not fall under their purview and they cannot do much to solve those issues.

He explains that the ACC can only accept and work on cases, which fall under the Prevention of Corruption act (1947), Money Laundering Prevention Act (2012) and Anti-Corruption Act



CARTOON: E R RONNY

(2004). The first act deals with any kind of corruption related to public servants. Under the other two acts, anyone involved in money laundering or illegal ownership of property can be brought to the book.

“In spite of that, we try to help our callers in every way possible. What we have realised is that many people don't know the basics of many things. For instance, we got calls from people who lost their voter IDs and did not know what to do next. These are small issues, but our officers still tell them to file a GD and explain the process to them,” says Zahed.

“And then people often ask us under what law they can file a case against someone, because they know that if they go to consult a lawyer, they will have to pay money regardless.

“On Sunday, we got a call from a patient in the Rampal Health Complex saying that the food they were serving was not up to the mark. This does not fall under our purview, but we still ensured that the ACC called the concerned authority from that region to put pressure on them to fix the issue.

“These are certain services that we provide because we want to help them, but we don't record these,” he adds.

Of the two lakh calls, only 16 percent of the cases were deemed workable by the ACC this month. And of the 16 percent, 13.5 percent of the cases lacked enough information for the ACC to make a move or send a team. As a result, they have managed to work on only 2.5 percent of the calls.

One of the success stories of the 106 hotline team deals with a blind man who

was cheated by a government employee. The man, in his early 30s, was approached by a clerk and told that he would get a government job if he managed to pay BDT 80,000.

Submitting to the ploy, he and his wife—who is also blind—managed to take loans from various sources and gave the clerk the money. He was supposed to start working after Eid. However, after the holidays, the clerk asked for more money. According to Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, the spokesperson of the ACC, the clerk said that he needed BDT 50,000 more to seal the deal. That is when the victim decided to call 106.

“After our officers heard his story, they asked him to come to the ACC immediately. We made a plan to trap the clerk. We told the victim to carry on as

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JUST A HOOK TO SOME LOVED ONES' SAFETY TO US

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