

## A city in mourning

### Dhaka loses a promising mayor

WE are deeply saddened by the passing away of Mayor Annisul Huq who has been fighting against a rare cerebral disease for the last three months. He left behind not only his family, relatives and a legion of friends from diverse walks of life but also many citizens who admired and respected him for his work as Dhaka North City Corporation's mayor.

Such admiration was not unfounded. After being elected as mayor in 2015 he tirelessly worked to clean up the city and bring qualitative changes in delivering civic services. In fact, before his illness, he accomplished what many of his predecessors have not been able to do. This included clearing some major roads and public spaces illegally occupied. The DNCC mayor has freed several areas in the capital from illegal parking: Gabtoli-Aminbazar, Uttara-Abdullahpur, Pallabi bus stand, Tejgaon Industrial Area and Tejgaon Truck Stand, Mohammadpur, Mohakhali Bus Stand and Karwan Bazar. Needless to say that the eviction drives were far from smooth and in many cases Annisul faced obstruction from transport workers while conducting them. A notable example of his perseverance and determination to not be intimidated was when he had to face a violent clash between transport workers and police while trying to free the busy road in front of Tejgaon Truck Terminal from illegal parking.

But even before his mayorship, Annisul Huq was a well-known figure. A successful businessman, he became the chairperson of nine export oriented organisations under the Mohammadi Group, employing thousands of people in the garment sector. As president of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Federation of Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) and other important business organisations, he was well respected in the business community.

Once a popular television personality who charmed his audience with his wit, eloquence and knowledge, he retained his likeable, energetic persona throughout his life. As a mayor he gave Dhaka's citizen's a ray of hope that somebody would save this city. He will be sorely missed.

## MJF survey on violence

### Marginalised communities need security, protection

A recent study by Manusher Jonno Foundation gave this perception a statistical foundation as it tracked incidents of violence and harassment in 2016 and came to the conclusion that around 60 percent members of the surveyed communities had experienced different forms of violence twice last year. On average, members of 33.9 percent households became victims of physical violence. The survey involved 16 communities in 18 districts but it is reasonable to think that other communities facing marginalisation—because of their religion, ethnicity, gender, occupation, and physical condition—in other districts are more or less exposed to violence, discrimination, exclusion, and rights violation.

Bangladesh needs to seriously consider how its minorities are being treated, and instead of looking at the big picture, address the problems faced on a daily basis. We boast of our diversity, but seem unwilling to do what's necessary for the society to be truly pluralistic in which diverse opinions, beliefs and conditions will be tolerated and respected. The religious and ethnic minorities are especially in danger, as some recent events have proved. Just a few weeks ago, more than 30 homes belonging to Hindu families in Rangpur were ransacked and looted over a rumoured Facebook post.

The violence and threats generally faced by the minorities and our overall records in human rights should be addressed as a matter of urgency. We cannot lecture other countries on human rights violations when we have violations taking place right in our backyard. The government should urgently address the issues behind these problems and take steps accordingly.

## Annisul Huq: A glimmer of hope gone

MUHAMMAD ZEESHAN MOHSEN, Barrister, Inner Temple

Annisul Huq, the confident, charismatic, inspiring and bold mayor of Dhaka North City Corporation, has passed away, and with him a bit of hope for millions of city dwellers.

He was indeed an inspiring leader for many of us, but what he truly and in reality was is a glimmer of hope. Parts of Dhaka under his careful watch are now cleaner than before. His tireless efforts to get Gulshan rid of waterlogging were a great success. He had reinstated a sense of security and hope among the city dwellers in the aftermath of the traumatic terror attack of last year. He had evoked hope of a cleaner, greener and livable Dhaka amid a litany of press reports disparaging Dhaka as one of the most unlivable cities on earth.

His shoes are too big to be filled by anyone else. The precedents of courage and competence he set will be difficult, if not impossible, to replace.

We all will remember Mr Huq with great fondness. He has shown that city development is possible with limited resource and power if there are genuine dedication and commitment.

Mr Huq, I thank you, on behalf of millions of residents of this city for giving us hope—hope of what we can turn our city into. We thank you from the bottom of our heart for your sincerity, sagacity, boldness and tremendous hard work you employed in transforming the city.

# 20 years of the elusive CHT Accord

JOHN TRIPURA

THE Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord (CHT Accord), signed in 1997 with the promise to end armed conflict and grant a host of benefits to the indigenous Jumma people in the south-eastern region of Bangladesh, has rather increased tension in the last 20 years. The accord had ended a decade-long conflict between the Jumma people and the government of Bangladesh. After it was signed, it was hailed by not only the indigenous people and democratic and progressive forces in the country, but also the United Nations, European Union and many democratic governments of the world as well as national and international organisations.

Unfortunately, even after two decades, the accord has yet to bear fruit, while the sufferings, subordination, and exploitation of the Jumma people continue unabated. The region is still unstable and there is growing resentment due to the delay in fully implementing the accord. That failure has also led to the continuing sufferings of the internally displaced families and India-returned refugees of the Jumma—who were victims of the atrocities and conflicts in the 1980s and 90s. Ironically, in the 20 years since the CHT Accord, many scholars have done their PhD on it but the agreement remains unimplemented to this day.

The main objectives of the 1997 peace accord included protection of the land rights of the indigenous people, revival of their cultural uniqueness, rehabilitation of internally displaced people and refugees who had left the country, withdrawal of the military from the CHT (with the exception of permanent military establishments), and self-government through regional and district councils. The signing of the accord was an important achievement for the then Awami League government and the indigenous representatives of the Parbatiya Chattagram Jana Samhiti Samiti (PCJSS). The accord greatly enhanced Sheikh Hasina's image internationally, and she was awarded the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Peace Prize in 1999. But it failed to change the life of the people who had fought and shed their blood to make it happen in the first place.

The fact is, political instability and the lack of a firm political commitment have crippled the accord. The costs of failure are high: disruptive activities, armed



Abul Hasnat Abdullah, MP and Convener of the National Committee, on behalf of the government of Bangladesh and Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma, on behalf of the peoples of CHT are seen signing the CHT Accord, 1997. Seated extreme left is Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

warfare, violations of human rights, losses of lives and resources, exposing the border regions to external threats—all of which will continue if lasting peace is not achieved. The failure also resulted in serious consequences for the indigenous people: intra-group rivalry and conflicts, fragmentation within the communities, a dwindling economy and stagnating social and human development due to the poor healthcare and education sectors.

The accord comprises four parts—General; Hill District Local Government Council; the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council; and Rehabilitation, General Amnesty, and Other Issues. It was implemented to some extent in the first couple of years, with the demobilisation of PCJSS, repatriation of Jumma refugees, enactment of the three revised Hill District Council Acts and Regional Council Act, establishment of CHT Affairs Ministry and so on. But a number of key provisions, such as the withdrawal of temporary military camps, resolution of land conflicts, and making the hill district councils and the regional council functional, remain unimplemented.

Moreover, there is an increasing Bangali Muslim population in the region, in contrast to a declining trend for the Jumma population. Ushatan Talukdar, in a paper presented at the International

Conference on Civil Society, Human Rights, and Minorities in Bangladesh, held in Kolkata in 2005, mentioned that the Bangali Muslim population, which was around two percent of the total population of the CHT in 1947, rose to 49 percent in 2003. On the other hand, the Jumma, who comprised 98 percent of the total population of the hill tracts in 1947, declined to 51 percent in 2003. The Jumma people seem destined to become a minority in their own land if the present trend continues.

The official figures, however, are widely seen in the CHT as being politically motivated and manipulated. Indigenous sources put the Bangali Muslim settler figure at more than 65 percent. It is alleged that the Bangali settlers frequently grab land by force, sometimes with the tacit consent and connivance of the local administration and sometimes by luring illiterate indigenous people and forging documents. The eviction of the indigenous people and land grabbing by the Bangali settlers, in collusion with government officials, are clearly visible in the hill tracts.

In these 20 years, Bangladesh government has undertaken different elusive development projects to evict the indigenous people from their ancestral land. Tourism, for example, is being used to force the Jumma people to leave and to

grab their land in the name of development. Settlers have also replaced many Chakma-Marma names of places with Bangali and Muslim names.

The signing of the peace accord had rekindled hope among the Jumma people that they would be able to live in peace and dignity. That desire did not materialise in the last 20 years, as the state failed to implement most of the provisions of the accord. As a consequence, the indigenous people became divided and resumed revolutionary activities. The conflict between the government and the people grew again.

The government of Bangladesh needs to implement the accord fully, and all promised institutions should be established and function properly. It is true that the accord was able to bring peace in hill tracts for some time, but without these elements of a comprehensive solution, the prospects for regional security, stability, and trust between the settlers and the indigenous people will remain distant, and there will never be an end to the violent conflicts in the CHT. It's time to end the waiting and implement the unimplemented conditions of the accord.

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# An insidious silence

## The pervasive problem of domestic violence



SHAGUFTA HOSSAIN

WHEN I was an undergraduate student, I remember reading about a campaign in Libya by a grassroots organisation, Voice of Libyan Women. They were, at the time, running a campaign against domestic violence. They started out by handing out eye-catching fliers with messages about domestic violence, something that had been a successful approach elsewhere in the world. But much to the frustration of the members of the organisation, what had worked elsewhere, simply wasn't

neighbour, who was swearing profanities at his wife.

My neighbours in Bangladesh aren't any different. Domestic violence is a universal problem that is often swept under the rug. Maybe, unlike Libya, anti-domestic violence campaigns aren't met with hostility. But what happens inside a home is people's private matter. So we let it stay silent.

In a recent study quoted by *The Daily Star*, over 80 percent of the currently married women in Bangladesh have experienced violent behaviour from their partners at least once. Moreover, up to 55 percent of the married women faced physical or sexual harassment in their lifetime as found in the Violence against Women Survey 2015 carried out by the

Delta Med Col J. Jan 2017, where a total of 1,143 cases of the victims of Violence against Women, who underwent treatment at One Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) and burn unit of Dhaka Medical College took part in the study. The report found that 71.91 percent of the victims were married. Majority of the victims i.e. 60.37 percent were homemakers. The perpetrators were mostly husbands (64.65 percent).

Before someone gets defensive, I am not making sweeping statements like all men are abusers, or all women who choose to be homemakers are abused. I am well aware that men can also be victims of domestic violence and women who choose to be homemakers are perfectly capable of exerting control and power over themselves and over the

than I wouldn't hear my next door neighbour screaming profanities as often as I do. I live in a fairly "classy neighbourhood". And while I want to go knock on her door, and ask her why she can't just leave I have to remember that the best way to help those suffering domestic violence is to listen. Believe them. To not judge, and respect their decisions. And for that I have to wait until she volunteers to tell me her story and then remind her how brave she is being in telling me her story. Each domestic violence story is unique, disturbing and troubling in its own way. And the seemingly simple solution of "turn the abuser in" is never that straightforward, but a complex, twisted compilation of lives involved.

But on a less individual, and more structural level, the first thing to do is to challenge beliefs and behaviours about women and men that contribute to intimate partner violence, including cultural messages that exalt a violent model of masculinity, glorify aggressive men as our heroes in popular culture, excuse controlling behaviours as typical parts of romantic relationships, and tacitly or overtly accept violence against women as normal. This is not to say that men suddenly have to be "feminine" or "effeminate". This is to say that aggression doesn't make you male, and there is no reason to glorify it. The second is to educate the public about the common dynamics and patterns of abuse that are extensively recognised by experts but largely unknown or misunderstood by the general public. And the third is to redefine norms about how we bystanders should act in response and what we can do when we see signs of domestic or sexual violence.

As this challenging conversation evolves, it is essential to remember that the problem is bigger than the act of violence itself. Domestic violence is a pervasive, complex public health issue that necessitates an equally pervasive and multi-layered response. It has devastating psychological, physical, and economic consequences for those who experience it. A myriad of long-term physical and mental health problems that have a significant impact on their ability to live a healthy, productive and fulfilled life plague survivors. And it's not something that happens just to other people. It could as easily happen to me as to you.

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Contrary to popular belief, I would assert that it is not limited to a class either. The "rickshawalas beat wives-not us" argument doesn't fly.

working in Libya. Schools would not open their doors. Shopkeepers refused to allow them to leave their leaflets. Even the young men and women they targeted would immediately dispose of the materials. So Murabit, the founder, and her team were naturally at a loss.

It was later concluded that domestic violence, wasn't seen as a problem in the country. Problematising the phenomenon was thought of as a "western agenda". They then customised the messaging accordingly to better suit the culture of Libya resulting in the Purple Hijab Day.

In my early twenties, I was intrigued by the campaign primarily because of the clever solution they proposed. But also, a few months before I read about the case, I had called the police to report my then

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, cited by UN Women according to the same report. Also only 2.6 percent took any legal action for physical or sexual violence by a partner.

Let us first define what domestic violence is. Domestic violence, also known as Intimate Partner Violence, can broadly be defined as a pattern of abusive behaviours by one or both partners in an intimate relationship such as marriage, family, friends or cohabitation. Domestic violence has many forms including physical aggression or threats, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, controlling or domineering, intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse (e.g. neglect).

A cross sectional study was carried out from July 2013 to June 2014, published in

household. I have fine examples at home.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while there is a general silence and stigma surrounding violence against women, the silence and stigma around intimate partner violence is even worse. Domestic violence can be, and is, an extremely difficult topic for people to talk about. Or even hear about. But that is what makes it crucial that more people start to recognise when either themselves or someone they know has become a victim of domestic abuse.

Contrary to popular belief, I would assert that it is not limited to a class either. The "rickshawalas beat wives-not us" argument doesn't fly. Even though there is no data on this, if the idea that "poor uneducated people beat wives" held merit,