

Where has the relief gone?

Authorities not doing a good job

The flood situation in Bangladesh has adversely affected the lives of some 2.1 million people in 24 districts (99 upazilas) and allegations are being made that authorities are not reaching the affected people. Reportedly, a lot of the people in the various affected areas have been left off the list of flood-hit populace. Although the concerned ministry claims that it is doing the utmost to distribute rice, packets of dry food, tents and bundles of tin across the country, a report in this daily has found that thousands of people, cut off in waterlogged areas, remain unemployed and have little access to food and drinking water.

And when it comes to refuting the statement made by an official of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief that it is only distributing materials to those “who really need it”, our district correspondents have found, after talking to flood affected people in a village near the Teesta River basin in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat, that many of them did not get any relief as yet and some have alleged relief being given to affluent families. These allegations need to be looked into seriously.

The flood situation is deteriorating further in the districts of Bogura, Sirajganj, Tangail, Manikganj, Faridpur and Munshiganj, which tells us that more people will be in need of relief in terms of both food and other materials. There will always be those in local administration who will seek to profit from natural calamities, but the last thing the government needs is profiteering from people’s misery. Since the government has declared a war on corruption, we hope the anti-graft body will take a closer look into these lapses in distribution so that those who need relief the most, get it.

City corporations’ lackadaisical fight against dengue

Too little, too late

We are dismayed that despite dengue becoming a formidable menace for months, the Chief Health Officer of Dhaka South City Corporation is now talking about forming 57 committees in 57 wards of the city in order to destroy mosquito breeding grounds. It is incomprehensible that the city corporation should have such delayed reaction in the wake of what health experts and even the High Court have termed as an epidemic. Already 5,500 cases of dengue (from January to June) have been reported and the disease is taking dangerous turns as more and more children are being infected, many of them with the haemorrhagic strain. Children are especially vulnerable to dengue because of their weak immune systems.

Dengue cases have been reported since January so what was the city corporation waiting for all these months? The disease has been a regular feature for many years and it is the city corporation’s job to destroy mosquito breeding grounds and apply appropriate insecticides and create public awareness regarding prevention of Aedes mosquitoes’ breeding. Mosquitoes have become resistant to the insecticides normally used to eradicate them. If that is so, why hasn’t the city corporation taken steps to obtain alternative insecticides/methods beforehand instead of waiting for the disease to spread? Already people have died of the fever and many, including children, are hospitalised and suffering.

The callousness with which the city corporation has treated this crisis is disappointing and reckless to say the least. Early intervention in terms of awareness campaigns, destroying breeding grounds and eradicating the mosquitoes with the right insecticide could have prevented the disease from spreading so quickly and affecting so many people. Haemorrhagic dengue causes internal bleeding of organs and can be fatal if not treated properly. But it also has long-term effects on certain organs. Surely this is a serious enough issue for the city corporation to take steps long before such an epidemic occurs?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Stop sexual abuse of children

The government and citizens alike are responsible for establishing a society where children can live and grow up peacefully. Children are being sexually exploited in many ways and this trend is alarmingly increasing. Incidence of rape has risen this year according to Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF). In the first six months of 2019, there have been a total of 496 reported cases of child rape, while the number was 351 during the same period last year. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child abuse in South Asia.

Negligence of duty on the police’s part and the social mentality here further aggravate the situation. Sexual abuse of girls is prevalent even in educational institutions. And in many cases, a lot of the victims are molested by their very own family members, relatives and neighbours.

The reality might be much more terrifying, as these numbers only reflect the cases that have been reported. No one has the answer to why this is happening. Maybe the lack of law enforcement, problematic upbringing and insufficient awareness combined are providing an impetus to this culture of rape. We are the future generation of this country and it is high time everyone stepped up to prevent these occurrences.

Medha Moumita, SFX Greenherald International School, Dhaka

How elite capture of society prevents equality



AZM SAIF

FROM Socrates to Sartre, since the dawn of time, it has been more or less accepted, although not always implemented, that the tools for transformation should be made available to people from all walks of society. However, in a rapid and often “might is right” culture, the world, while transforming into a global village, is also becoming the cauldron for cooking up policies, positions and practices that ensure that the reins remain in the hands of the elite few. Rules are ideals set by rulers as they always have been, and the result is a so-called global village, where an elite few (around 1 percent) control the total assets and values of planet earth (99 percent). “At any time up to 1939, the case for greater equality, at least of incomes, seemed self-evident. By making the rich less rich, the poor could be made less poor” (*The Future of Socialism*, Anthony Crosland).

While it is no news that education and access to sources of entrepreneurship are the only way out for an ever-expanding population booming beyond the barriers of the 7 billion mark every second, the “criteria” to qualify for those same “rights” are being decided by a few, the crème de la crème of society. The rule that applies to the Chosen Few (as Carl Jung terms them) pervades from economics to industry, from governments to governance. But does that mean everyone in the higher tiers of society, in a position to ensure the existence and maintenance of rules, is gripped by this self-serving philosophy? Obviously not! However, the fact that they are often short-sighted cannot be denied.

Our intention is not to engage in battle rather to try to point out to ourselves where we are going wrong. Because sad as it might be for us to conceive, many of us “participating” in this article at this very moment are willingly or unwillingly helping to broaden the gap between the social classes. Coming back to the point of how the cog that turns the wheels of economics, one needs but only a casual



ILLUSTRATION: MATT MAHURIN

look for one to realise that there is more at stake than is evident on the surface.

When donor organisations select a particular point of action, a place (region, country, and neighbourhood) they want to help with their financial and/or other forms of aid. But more often than not they fail to choose the best possible candidates to run the projects. A classic example is the education sector, which actually fits the description of a catch-22 situation perfectly. Schools that excel in quality are monitored and controlled (for lack of a better term) by the top tiers. On the other hand, let’s look at our own position where the ratio of secondary school students to teachers is a shameful 42:1 (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, 2017).

First let’s turn our microscope towards the reasons the problems are arising. Those who make vital decisions don’t care about the needs of other brilliant people. The answer, in one word, has been acclaimed by every Fortune 500

CEO since 2012: entitlement. When one has a false sense of entitlement to the work, they also suffer from insecurity. They tend to see newcomers as threats. This eventually contributes to the “rich-poor gap” eventually turning it into a “rich-poor gulf”. In the job market, there are many educated individuals waiting to get employed. They are educated up to the doctoral level but they can’t find relevant jobs. That is a point to ponder.

Way back in 1844, before the advent of social media and the promises of it bringing us together, Marx said, “Man is alienated from the product of his work and the act of producing from his own social nature and his own fellow man” (*The Nature of the Psyche*, Carl Gustav Jung). How amazingly accurate that farsighted visionary seems today, within and all around us! The kind of work one does determines his/her social position, and that in turn determines whether or not he/she will be able to mingle with those “above” him, and his access to benefits that are expected to be basic

human rights, for all.

The major reason behind this is that the considerable number of individuals, who are lucky enough to represent the more affluent parts of society, refuse to leave their posts. Many young, talented and promising candidates are not only missing out on opportunities, but are helplessly witnessing the decay of the overall fabric of society. Connections create career, not calibre.

Perhaps Hegel was not totally wrong about the wrongdoings and wrathful influences money can bring. Public awareness is not enough anymore; maybe a public that is more vocal about their rights is the answer. Public inclusion means accepting ideas from the people. They also need to recognise outstanding individuals to accomplish the work. Accountability and transparency need to be practised by the decision-makers. All the resources allocated need to be accounted for. This will help eliminate the misuse of resources that have led to the control of societal barriers.

Whether we like it or not, whether we turn a blind eye at emerging segments or not, there is a significant number of unemployed youth that our society is comprised of. Giving them not only opportunities, but showing them the incentives to grow, has proved to get the optimum benefit from them. All knowledge centres and all aspects of knowledge creators should be equipped equally in a society. This will allow all students to get quality education. Thus, the cycles of poverty will be broken—if not today, then certainly in the near future. An equal society is the ultimate one in terms of well-being and productivity as well as harmony.

But it is also true that human beings have an innate knack to get out of any troublesome situation. Charity begins at home, and as individuals, we must begin with ourselves, and soon that day shall come when the words, “The elite want power but human beings are driven by mutual love,” (*Marx at the Millennium*, Cyril Smith) will take true meaning in the words of the Great Maestro himself. When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.

AZM Saif is Managing Director, Paper Rhyme Advertising Limited. E-mail: saif@paperhymebd.com

Environmental challenges dictate need for South Asian peace

BHARAT DOGRA

DESPITE serious discord and disputes between the countries of South Asia, the concept of a common future of the region based on increasing cooperation among the people and governments has somehow survived because of strong geographical, economic and cultural factors. More recently however, this concept itself has been increasingly threatened. India has moved closer towards its eastern borders. Pakistan had already leaned more closely towards both China and some Arab countries. To a lesser extent, Nepal and Sri Lanka have also moved towards China. Sectarianism has weakened cultural relationships in South Asia level. Terrorism has become an issue of relentless discord and tension.

The decline of the overall prospects of close cooperation at this juncture is tragic as this is probably the time when close cooperation is most needed. South Asia is passing through a critical phase of climate change which requires various countries to focus on new emerging developmental and environmental challenges as well as increase cooperation to face these extremely difficult challenges for which the region is not at all well prepared.

South Asia has 16 percent of the world’s population, over 30 percent of the world’s poor, only 2 percent of its land and 1 percent of oil resources. So, the developmental challenges here were already acute before the advent of the disruptive manifestations of climate change.

Experts see South Asia as a region where some of the most serious impacts of climate change are likely to emerge. In addition, a range of related life-threatening environmental problems have also been worsening in the region, including freshwater scarcity, decline in water tables, serious threats to rivers, deforestation, soil/land erosion and sharp decline in natural fertility, air quality, threats to safe food and proliferation of various hazards. The need to reduce GHG emissions while meeting basic needs of all people with dignity is a huge challenge, the most important real challenge for South Asia.

South Asia can stand up to this challenge in a sustained situation of peace and stability where it is possible to devote most efforts, talents and resources for this. The actual situation, sadly, is a



People attempt to stay dry above flood waters in Dhaka.

PHOTO: AFP/MUNIR UZ ZAMAN

very different one.

South Asia is commonly seen to consist of eight countries—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives. Two of these are nuclear powers. The chances of actual use of nuclear weapons have increased in recent times. It is well known that any use of nuclear weapons, or any accident relating to these, can have destructive impacts not just in the nuclear weapon countries but also in neighbouring countries. While six out of eight countries of South Asia have absolutely no involvement with nuclear weapons, they may have to bear the consequences of their use or even deployment/storage by two countries.

South Asia has emerged as one of highest arms-importing regions of the world. Combining direct and indirect expenses, the total military expenditure may be much higher than what is stated officially, denying precious resources for urgent development and environment

protection tasks.

South Asia has seen two extremely violent partitions and a much higher number of violent secessionist movements and insurgencies. It has also seen four wars involving India and Pakistan, and a persistent state of foreign invasion and internal violence in Afghanistan for over four decades. Terrorism is a big source of violence but also has a larger and more destructive role as a trigger for an all-out war. On the whole, war and civil war, secession and insurgency are likely to have claimed nearly six million lives in South Asia in the post-World War II phase. The number of people who were displaced or ruined in other ways is higher.

Sectarianism and sectarian violence remain at high levels. Secularism has very dim prospects. Democracy has had its ups and downs in various countries of the region. It survives at rather low levels of achievement.

Democracy needs to be strengthened

from many points of view, one of the most important being the creation of conducive conditions in which alternative viewpoints can emerge and acquire strength. These alternative views should seek peace, harmony, environment protection, justice and equality (including gender-based justice and equality).

An accompanying effort would be to make dedicated efforts to spread values of universal peace, non-violence, non-dominance, non-discrimination and social equality (including at the gender level), a wider understanding of honesty and sincerity as well as some basic human rights and duties. Such an effort if sustained for about five years can help to change public perceptions so that democratic leaderships devoted to peace, justice and environment protection can emerge.

Bharat Dogra is a freelance journalist who has been involved with several social movements and initiatives. Copyright: The Statesman/Asia News Network