

Is poverty a dirty word?

If not, why do officials downplay the existence of poverty?

Why rape is increasing

Law enforcers, legal process and community must protect the vulnerable

ALTHOUGH we are confronted with the news of rape practically every day, it is always a shock when we hear of the actual statistics. Mahila Parishad has found that just last month on average more than seven women had been raped everyday—a record high in a single month since 2010. Even more horrifying is that out of the 232 rape incidents in September, 15 of the victims were murdered after rape and 19 of them were gang-raped. The last statistic indicates that there has been a rise in gang-rape which demonstrates a growing confidence among these rapists that they will somehow get away with such a heinous crime.

Why have these sexual predators become so emboldened? As we have said ad nauseum in this column that it is the culture of impunity that these perpetrators enjoy that encourages them to carry out these crimes. Many of the perpetrators are in positions of power (in educational institutions for instance), politically well-connected or have enough money to influence the legal process. This paper has reported on how a police high up actually forced a gang-rape victim to marry one of her rapists in order to sweep the case under the carpet. The sheer helplessness of the victims—who are invariably poor, have no one to help them or are in positions of less power than their attackers—make them easy targets. Just yesterday we came to know about a widow and her minor daughter, a sixth grader, from Kushtia, who have been victims of continuous rape by two brothers in their upazila for one whole year! How is it possible for two men to carry out such reprehensible acts for a whole year without any hindrance from the community members or from the law enforcers?

These chilling incidents which are clearly on the rise indicate how little the state and its machinery as well as the communities that these victims belong to have done to stop these crimes. It is appalling that all these victims and many whose ordeals will never be recorded, could not be saved because the perpetrators are so powerful that they believe they can get away with their crimes. Communities and law enforcement agencies must be more protective of women and children who make up the majority of victims so that they can prevent such crimes and in the case they are committed, make sure the rapists are identified and punished under law.

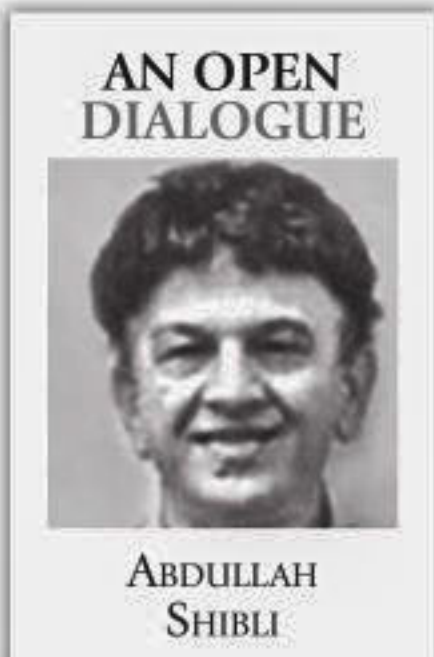
HUJI(B) resurrecting

Anti-militancy drive must be a constant effort

THAT the HUJI(B) is reorganising is not a surprising news. The news was obtained from a recently captured senior leader of the banned militant organisation who had returned from abroad six months ago. The Counterterrorism Task Force deserve kudos for netting, what they claim, a top HUJI(B) brass. And what that proves is, it is premature at this stage to suggest that a phenomenon that is hydra headed can be ended till such time the factors that sustain such a monstrous threat, are effectively addressed. That is something that we have been harping on constantly while commenting on issues in this regard, particularly some policymakers suggesting that militancy in Bangladesh has all but ended.

We must never let our guard down when it comes to fighting militancy and constantly keep in mind that the reasons that fostered the growth of religious extremism in Bangladesh have to do not so much with the internal dynamics of the country as much as certain external developments. And the menace, having assumed a global context given the developments in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria in particular, the extremist groups in this country, aspiring to establish a Khilafat in this country too, are motivated by their acts of terror and propaganda. While there may not be an organic link between the local and the international extremists, the extremist groups in Bangladesh draw inspiration from extremist groups like the Al Qaeda and IS.

We would like to also stress, as we have done in the past, that for violent extremism or for that matter any other kind of violent radicalism to be ended, we must end the grounds that cause their germination in the first place. And for that we should draw up a comprehensive line of effort to address the catalyst along with reinforcing our intelligence effort, to preempt the extremists from recruiting as well as conducting terror acts.



ABDULLAH SHIBLI

IN most countries in the world, barring a few, poverty appears to be a dirty word. Even in rich countries such as the USA and UK, it is difficult to find any reliable statistics on the existence of poverty, the level of poverty, or a headcount of poor people. It has recently come to light that some developing and middle-income countries are fudging the numbers in an effort to conceal the existence of poverty within its respective political boundary.

For example, in 2019, UN disputed the poverty figures released by Malaysia, an upper middle-income country. Across the globe, governments in many countries downplay the existence of chronic poverty and this is not only adversely affecting the focus of their development programmes, but most importantly their children and future social cohesion. At a recent conference at Harvard University, several attendees from the Government of Bangladesh openly declared that Bangladesh has banished poverty or is about to do so within a couple of years.

I will provide some details on a few of the issues surrounding calculation of the incidence of poverty. I will do so to illustrate how poverty can be measured in different ways, and to show how numbers can be wrong even when calculated with the right tools. In the final analysis, it's a matter of what the numbers are used for and how they are interpreted. As the old saying goes, statistics can lie, and in fact, they often do!

A related point. Increasingly, countries that have embraced the SDG programme are conceding that household income is not necessarily the best indicator of poverty and are now measuring other ways in which one may experience poverty.

In addition to income, development practitioners have used the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) to measure poverty. MPI, developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), measures acute poverty via deprivations suffered in the areas of health, education and living standards. MPI complements traditional monetary-based poverty

measures by capturing the acute deprivations that each person faces at the same time with respect to education, health and living standards.

The latest dispute on poverty measurement between the officials and the economists happened in Malaysia. When it comes to measuring poverty levels in Malaysia, the government currently uses two methods: Poverty Line Income (PLI) and MPI. In the past, the government has claimed that its poverty level was low, but this happened because Malaysia defined poverty level as household income per month less than RM 980. Many media sources have reported that the previous regime

consider to be too low.

The differences between Malaysia and the rest of the world, so to speak, came to a head last month when the UN publicly disputed the poverty figures released by Malaysia. Malaysia stated that its poverty figures were down to 0.4 percent in 2016 as compared to 49 percent in 1970. This is because Malaysia defined poverty as household income per month less than RM 980. However, the United Nations Special Rapporteur (UNSR) on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Ashton, argued that Malaysia has set the poverty line too low. He made the case that household income more than RM 980 but less than

Malaysia's MPI comprises the current monetary PLI plus non-monetary measures of deprivation such as education, health, and living standards. Even when non-monetary aspects of well-being are considered, Malaysia's MPI counts less than one percent of Malaysians as multidimensionally poor. However, this estimate has also been challenged.

At the recent World Statistics Congress in Kuala Lumpur, World Bank staff presented new research on a potential alternative MPI for Malaysia, using the same multiple dimensions as the current MPI but setting standards relevant to an upper-middle income country. This alternative estimate pegs Malaysia's rate of multidimensional poverty at 19 percent.

The Malaysian case offers some lessons for Bangladesh which is seeking to reduce its poverty level and improve the lot of the bottom eighty percent of the population. According to estimates provided by Habitat for Humanity, there are 64 million people who live below the poverty line. But poverty appears to be a dirty word here too.

The government has a divergent understanding of the prevalence of poverty in the country. At the recent Bangladesh Rising Conference at Harvard University, many officials denied the existence of poverty in Bangladesh. They repeated a slogan which we have heard before, "Nobody dies of hunger any more in Bangladesh", which manifests a misunderstanding of the concepts of poverty, hunger, and starvation.

The website for Habitat for Humanity presents the case of Panjoboti Debborma which typifies the average poor family in Bangladesh. She said, "We have no garden, no land, and little income. We live hand to mouth. That is why I am worried about our future."

Fortunately, the prime minister, at a speech delivered at Bangladesh Civil Service Administration Academy on June 23, 2019, was more realistic, albeit optimistic.

"At present, we've brought down the poverty rate to 21.8 percent. I've a target to reduce it further. The poverty rate in the USA may be 17/18 percent. I'll have to cut down it to at least one percent less than that in the USA, at any cost," she said according to media reports.

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ILLUSTRATION: LILY PADULA

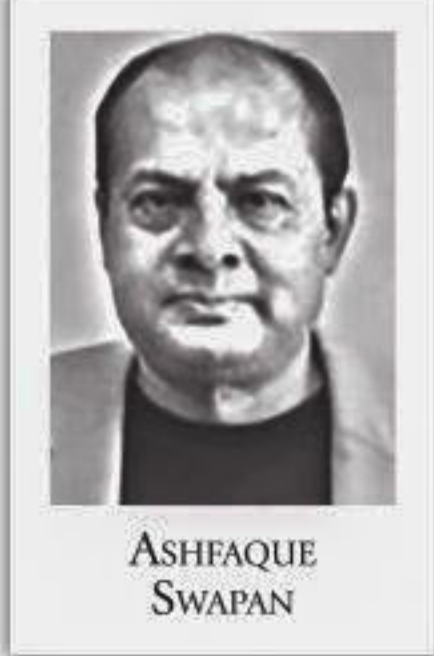
took special pride in boasting about its achievement in eliminating poverty from Malaysia. Critics, including Project Borgen, the anti-hunger NGO, point to a lack of transparency and accused the government of hiding the results and the data from the public.

The poverty numbers that the Malaysian government has been pushing for a number of years have always been questioned by independent observers, and this has recently brought the Malaysian government and the World Bank to loggerheads, after the various international agencies questioned the data on poverty and encouraged the government to revise its definition of the poverty line, and raise the PLI which the international agencies

RM 2,000 is in fact under the poverty category also. The UN is of the view that a realistic estimate of the poverty rate in Malaysia is from 16 percent to 20 percent. However, Malaysia has so far stood firm and countered that the UN assertions are incorrect.

Recent research by economist Martin Ravallion shows that countries with average incomes similar to Malaysia's have absolute poverty lines equivalent to RM 2,550 per month for a family of four, almost three times the current PLI. That poverty line would yield a poverty rate of about 15 percent, which is close to the rough estimate given in the UNSR's report, and also the 17 percent that arises from applying an OECD-style relative poverty line.

How to impeach a US president: A brief primer



ASHFAQ SWAPAN

THE possible impeachment of US President Donald Trump is the talk of the town. However, many people, particularly those outside the US, have better things to do than delve into the minutiae of US

politics and history. Here's a brief primer on how the process of impeaching a US president works.

Common misconceptions
 The first thing to remember is this: impeaching the president is *not* removal of the president. That *may* happen later, depending on developments further down the process (more about this later).

The US president most associated with impeachment in public memory is President Richard Nixon who left office following the Watergate scandal in 1974 (more recently, US President Bill Clinton was impeached as well, but the most searing memory, I would argue, is still associated with Nixon, possibly because Clinton didn't have to leave office).

Nixon was *not* impeached. The US House of Representatives was on the verge of voting to impeach him. Nixon decided to avoid the ignominy of being only (at that time) the second US president ever to be impeached. He resigned.

A two-step process
 So how does impeachment work? First of all, impeachment is a beginning of a process, similar to a criminal indictment. In other words, impeachment is a formal framing of charges against a US president accused of "high crimes and misdemeanours" as laid down in the US Constitution.

The US has a bicameral federal legislature, the Congress, comprising the 100-member Senate and the 435-member House.

The impeachment process begins in the House. A full house has to pass articles of impeachment by a simple majority.

The process then moves to the US Senate. According to precedent, the Senate holds a trial and votes on each article of impeachment. A two-thirds majority is required to remove the president.

History of impeachment of US presidents
 In US history, two presidents have been impeached.

In 1868, the House approved 11 articles of impeachment against President Andrew Johnson. In 1998, the House approved two articles of impeachment against President Bill Clinton.

Both were subsequently acquitted by the Senate. Neither was removed from office, yet both are considered impeached with the passage of articles of impeachment. Nixon, on the other hand, left office, but was never impeached, because he resigned before the articles of his impeachment could come to a vote.

It's all political
 None of this legislative arcana should

Republican effort to impeach Clinton, while successful, came at a cost. The Republicans lost seats in the following Congressional elections, and Clinton's approval in polls soared.

That's true as far as it goes, but there are crucial differences today. Clinton, whatever his faults, was extraordinarily savvy. His administration followed a focused, rigorously disciplined strategy of avoiding the issue and concentrating on governance. This, in addition to a soaring economy, gave him robust poll approval ratings.

Trump is no Clinton. Today, Trump is yet to come even close to 50 percent approval ever—if anything, a majority of respondents tell pollsters in recent times they *disapprove* of him.

Discipline is not Trump's strongest suit, as readily evident from a sampling of his

Trump is no Clinton. Today, Trump is yet to come even close to 50 percent approval ever—if anything, a majority of respondents tell pollsters in recent times they disapprove of him.



None of this legislative arcana should obscure the fact that impeachment is an intensely political process.

PHOTO: SAUL LOEB/AFP

obscure the fact that impeachment is an intensely political process. A Republican-controlled House impeached Clinton, but the Democratic-controlled Senate acquitted him.

Today, the tables are turned. It seems quite possible (some analysts say inevitable) that the Democrat-controlled House will impeach Trump. If and when that happens, the process moves to the Republican-controlled Senate, and it appears extremely unlikely that the Senate will vote with a two-thirds majority to remove Trump.

fevered public rambles at the United Nations on September 26.

It includes ugly attacks on the press ("Fake news, fake news. They're scum, many of them are scum..."), a cheap schoolyard rant against a political opponent ("And then you have Sleepy Joe Biden, who's dumb as a rock. This guy was dumb on his best day, and he's not having his best day right now. He's dumb as a rock..."), and a round of self-congratulation that's noteworthy for its callow, juvenile diction:

"And then they talk about me, and I didn't do anything. I don't know if I'm the most innocent person in the world.

But you know you look at that—most presidential, I just said I'm the most presidential except for possibly Abe Lincoln when he wore the hat—that was tough to beat...But I can't do that, that hat wouldn't work for me. Yeah, I have better hair than him."

Yeah. The president of the United States of America actually talks like that.

Although a few cracks are beginning to appear, Republican lawmakers are terrified of antagonising him. They know that hell hath no fury like Trump.

Taegan Goddard reported in his popular blog "Political Wire": "The *Los Angeles Times* reports there's no sign that the GOP-controlled Senate, where 67 votes are required to remove the president from office, is about to turn on Trump."

One senior Senate (Republican) aide said: "At this point, Trump could be caught walking out of a Federal Reserve bank with two giant sacks of money in his hands and no Republican would vote to impeach him for grand larceny."

The aide added: "Our voters want two things from their congressmen: pissing on the media and blindly defending the president. That's what being a Republican has come to."

That, in a nutshell, is the mess we are in. One thing is certain: The coming political battle over impeachment is going to be nasty, bitter and acrimonious, tearing America apart.

Fasten your seat belts, folks.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Fix Dhaka's public transport chaos

Dhaka's chaotic public transport service is a major headache for the city-dwellers. The city is notorious for its never-ending gridlock and critical lack of road safety. Rapid population growth and urbanisation, extreme inequality, inadequate road space, unplanned roads and an archaic traffic management system are among the reasons behind this problem. Usually, buses and minibuses are the preferred modes of travel for the majority of residents. In the absence of better alternatives, they often have to endure long delays, overcrowding, and sometimes lengthy walks to be able to get into a bus. All these translate into tremendous sufferings and loss of health and money on a daily basis.

We need to remember that the basic prerequisite for a good economy is the mobility of the people with access to an efficient public transport system. Dhaka has seen massive unplanned growth over the years, and if the city is to survive its fall-out with any degree of success, the city-planners must fix its transport system first, by putting in place a properly planned and managed public transport network. The government and public transport companies should come forward to help build this network.

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