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Violence against children goes on unabated

Strong social movement needed to stop it

WORDS are not enough to express our shock and horror at the cruel way Tuhin Miah, a five-year-old child, was murdered at the Kejaura village of Sunamganj’s Derai upazila on October 14. The disturbing details of the torture and murder make us wonder if we still live in the dark ages, in the absence of any law and order. Otherwise, how can people kill a child in such a brutal manner?

Unfortunately, such incidents are not rare today. Many such incidents of violence against children, including rape and murder, have been happening regularly around us and only a fraction of them are reported in the media. Only on October 11, a man allegedly raped four children in Savar’s Dhamrai upazila, all of them aged between five and seven. According to Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), an average of 28 children are murdered and 49 raped in the country every month. The BSAF reported that a total of 4,566 children became victims of different types of violence and torture in 2018. And according to Ain o Salish Kendra, from January to September this year, at least 1,644 children faced violence and 182 of them were murdered.

In order to stop this social malady, it is of utmost importance that we raise a social movement against all forms of violence against children, which should be supported by all the social and legal organisations. Such social movements are essential to break the culture of impunity that the perpetrators of such crimes enjoy. The legal loopholes through which the criminals get away after committing the most despicable crimes against children must be removed. The government should come down heavily on all the perpetrators of child violence and make sure that the cases filed against them are disposed of quickly. Only by raising a strong social movement and ensuring rule of law can such crimes be abated.

Kurds in the line of fire

They shouldn't be discarded

KURDISH fighters constituted some of the most effective forces in the fight against ISIS in the long-drawn-out Syrian conflict. With the demise of the so-called Islamic State, the tables have turned on the Kurds and we are witnessing the declaration of withdrawal by US forces and Turkey’s operation in Northern Syria. The present situation in Syria is complicated, and few conflicts in the Middle East have drawn in so many powers, both super and regional, everyone with their own geopolitical interests. Inevitably, the Syrian conflict has rendered a large number of Syrians homeless, 3.2 million of whom are being hosted by Turkey. But the resultant action by Ankara, to set up a safe zone in northeast Syria so that hundreds of thousands of Syrians refugees could be returned, has endangered the survival of the Syrian Kurds.

Our concern is that with a full-blown military campaign comes the unnecessary loss of civilian life and destruction. It shouldn't be forgotten that the Kurdish YPG militia had helped US wrest control of territories ruled by ISIS. Now that the Kurds have bled in the fight against the greater evil and the common enemy has been overcome, it does not mean that the world should turn away from them.

Unfortunately, history is full of such instances, but we can only hope that the Kurds will not be left to their own devices to face an overwhelming odd. It should be remembered that the operation in northern Syria not only endangers the Syrian Kurds, it gives the fanatical zealots the space they need to reorganise, rearm and relaunch their movement.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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First aid training is of utmost urgency

Often non-fatal accidents may lead to severe injuries, which, if left unattended, may turn fatal. First aid treatment is an instant temporary solution for many such minor accidents. During an emergency, it allows people with the knowledge of first aid to take necessary steps, the lack of which might endanger lives. Therefore, it must be ensured that first aid training is provided across different institutions, including the likes of schools, colleges, universities, corporations, banks, etc.

Unfortunately, the shortage of technical know-how about such life-saving procedures amongst us is rather widespread. If we are well-trained in such methods like cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and others, our efforts may help keep a victim stay alive until professional help arrives.

The training campaigns can be of short durations and supervised by certified health officials, either from the government or from NGOs. Through such trainings, the general public will become more knowledgeable about first aid, and in turn help save lives when the time comes. My earnest request to the authorities concerned would be to take necessary steps in this regard as early as possible, because every life counts.

Imran Ahmed Hemel, East West University



THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

as revelations about how supporters of the ruling party’s student wing have been regularly terrorising ordinary students, with full exemption. Among them is the role of political activities on university campuses.

Debate over whether student politics should be banned from campuses has re-emerged with the Buet authorities already implementing the ban. Last Saturday, representatives of multiple student bodies called on the Buet authorities to review their decision. And made clear that it isn’t student politics that’s the problem. The problem is party-based politics on university campuses.

Between 1974 and 2009, there have been 151 killings on university campuses. Without getting into the particulars, the blame for most of these deaths can be assigned to the various student wings of the country’s major political parties. Sadly, justice is yet to be delivered in any of these cases but one—the seven murders in Mohsin Hall of Dhaka University.

All political parties are equally culpable for this. When in power, they’ve granted their respective student wings the license to do whatever they want, without any repercussions guaranteed—which has been used as a license for any sort of violence.

The influence of political patronage on public university campuses has been evident in the fact that on election day, control over student halls would flip overnight when it was seen that a new party was about to get voted into power—even though no party should have control over student halls at all in the first place. Thus the belief that public universities enjoy autonomy and independence from national politics has long been a myth. The main difference in the last 10 years has been the complete dominance of AL in national politics, which has ensured that the BCL enjoys a similar control over campus politics and power over all university activities as an extension of that.

Aside from having unmatched power, and being granted a license of immunity to exercise it at will, the BCL has also become normalised at committing violence. Every time an individual or

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

and we will have to make some brave choices that will determine the quality of our development over the coming decade or more.

This decision is regarding how we decide to treat the environment and climate change as we make our investment decisions going forward. At the moment we are headed in the wrong direction with economic growth being achieved at the cost of destroying our environment and making us more vulnerable to adverse



The Sundarbans is the world's biggest mangrove forest and a World Heritage Site—which means that we are responsible for protecting it not just for ourselves but for all of humanity.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE

climate change impacts and this is an unsustainable pathway in the long run.

One of the new concepts that has emerged out the United Nations Climate Summit held in New York last month was the promotion of the emerging concept of Nature Based Solutions (NbS) for Development going forward.

This concept, although a new term, encompasses previously used terms such as Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EBA) or Participatory Natural Resource Management (PNRM) or other similar concepts that have been in vogue for some time now.

group has tried to express some sort of dissatisfaction with the government or its action, the BCL has been deployed to forcefully silence the dissenters using any and all violent means necessary—as demonstrated during the recent quota and road safety movements.

During both of those movements, we saw BCL cadres beating up students and journalists alike, right in front of the unmovable police. That could not have happened without the police receiving orders from above, telling them not to intervene. No meaningful investigations into those attacks were ever launched. And no sign that justice will be delivered has yet appeared.

Therefore, comments about how “a

dissent and go after those who are perceived to be oppositional to the ruling party through means that fall outside of the law, it is not difficult to understand why Chhatra League members now see themselves as above the law. It is because they have received a free pass for breaking the law every time on behalf of the ruling party, which has given BCL members a sense of untouchability.

Once such feelings have settled in, it is only a matter of time till party cadres break the law of their own volition, for their own gain and to secure for themselves a bigger slice of the pie—as we recently saw in the case of the Jahangirnagar University development project scandal. And oftentimes, it leads

the Chhatra League may not be in their best interest, especially given the backing they have regularly received in the past from members of the ruling party, even when they were found to have blatantly broken the law.

Abrar Fahad was just one young man. His death is the death of only one human being. However, his case has brought to the fore the immorality and viciousness that has trickled down from the very top, to all the way down, affecting our entire nation of more than 160 million people.

His death did not result only from the barbaric acts of “a few rotten” apples. It resulted from the fact that we have established a system that is churning out, and is, in fact, forcing apples (or



Students of educational institutions in Tangail, Rajshahi, Bogura and Sylhet brought out rallies, human chains and candlelight vigils, protesting the killing of Buet student Abrar Fahad.

PHOTO: STAR

few rotten” apples from within the ruling party’s student wing is giving the whole party a bad name is nothing less than an insult to people’s intelligence. The fact is, the BCL has essentially been turned into a mercenary group that is regularly unleashed upon anyone or any group that the ruling party feels even a tiny bit uncomfortable with. Thus its “errant” ways—intolerance towards disagreeing views, discrimination and ill treatment of those that don’t belong to its inner circle or group, maligning people to justify committing violence and injustice against them, etc.—are simply a microcosm of the larger crisis that we are currently faced with.

Having been used to shut down

to the kind of moral decay that we saw in the case of Abrar’s murder, as well as numerous other stories that have come to light since then, having to do with how BCL members have been tormenting ordinary students on university campuses simply for their own amusement—including through maintaining “torture cells” inside the university premises.

Here, the university authorities too are culpable. As there is no acceptable excuse that the authorities can give for not stopping these horrific practices.

At the same time, it is also a matter of fact that the university authorities are somewhat placed in a similar position as the unmovable police were—knowing full well that taking action against cadres of

people) to rot in bunches—a system which rewards those who blindly follow the instructions of those in power, by slowly but inevitably sacrificing their own conscience, and punishes those who refuse to silence their own voice, in order to dance to the tune of others.

Such a system is dangerous for the future of the country. And it cannot coexist with the principles and values of any civilised society, nor any people that believe in justice and the rule of law.

It is the system that we have that is rotten. And it is the result of a rot that starts way above the level of BCL.

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Real development needs nature-based solutions

What is new about NbS is that it draws on the older concepts which were largely confined to the world of nature conservation and adds them to the spheres of development as well as Climate Change for both mitigation as well as adaptation. Hence it is a much wider concept that needs to be understood by development decision makers, both in the public and private sectors.

This is particularly important for a country like Bangladesh where over 160 million people live in less than 150,000 square kilometres on the delta of three of the world’s biggest rivers. Our development pathway to take our people out of poverty must necessarily be compatible with preserving and conserving the ecosystems in which we live.

This now includes not only the natural ecosystems such as forests, rivers and wetlands as well as the sea, which are very important, but also the farms and towns where people live. We need to find nature based solutions in each and every ecosystem, village and town in Bangladesh if we want to achieve genuine

and similarly the fish production increase has come from aquaculture with a limited number of species while our open water fisheries with hundreds of species has declined very considerably.

This loss of biodiversity of both trees and fish is a very important loss that we need to rectify going forward. Simply having more trees and more fish is no longer an acceptable goal in itself.

While every district and locality needs to address possible NbS for themselves I will focus on two major opportunities for us to take new and more environment friendly pathway going forward. If we do things right we can have our development as well as protect our environment, but if we do things wrong (and that is what we are doing now) we may achieve economic growth but it will be at the cost of our environment.

The first example I will cite is the Sundarbans which is the world’s biggest mangrove forest and a World Heritage Site—which means that we are responsible for protecting it not just for ourselves but for all of humanity. As we are developing the Padma bridge which will connect the southwest of Bangladesh, where the Sundarbans is located, with Dhaka we expect much greater economic development of that region which is a good thing. However, if we allow unchecked development of industries of the wrong kind then we can expect the forest to be depleted very rapidly and this is where we are headed unless we take measures to prevent the wrong kind of development and replace it with the right kind of development. This means preparing a red list of prohibited industries in the zone around the forest (and actually enforcing that prohibition), while promoting ecosystem friendly forms of development such as eco-friendly tourism.

The second example is the rapid expansion of Dhaka city to the east which is still consisting of largely wetlands and croplands. If we allow the unchecked construction to the east of Dhaka that we allowed for the existing parts of Dhaka, then we are going to see not just the loss of some important wetlands but the people who will live there will face flooding during heavy rainfall situations as we are already facing in Dhaka city now. We need to learn from our mistakes and not repeat them.

In this particular case it is not the lack of plans on paper, but the lack of enforcement or abiding by those plans by the authorities as well as the developers. Hence we will need to become better at policing ourselves as well as making the relevant authorities do their jobs properly.

Finally, we need to shift the development paradigm of our country from economic growth at any cost towards economic growth with environment protection, which is indeed possible if we are able to adopt concepts such as Nature Based Solutions for Development.

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