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Bullying at schools should stop

Create safe school environment for children

BULLYING at schools, which often leaves negative impact on children’s mental development, is largely going unreported and thus unaddressed according to a report in this newspaper yesterday. And the problem has become prevalent according to Unesco, which estimates that 23 percent of school students in Bangladesh are becoming victims of bullying.

According to a Unesco report, victims of bullying are nearly twice as likely to feel isolated, be unable to sleep at night, and contemplate suicide. It can also affect how well a child is able to concentrate on their studies, cause increased absenteeism or even lead to them dropping out of school. As a result, it is crucial for school authorities to ensure that children are able to attend and enjoy school, without the threat of harassment.

Unfortunately, our schools are not doing enough to ensure a secure environment for their students, as evident from the large percentage of students that are reportedly being bullied. And in some cases, teachers and school staff themselves have been guilty of mistreating students. When the adults fail to realise what kind of impact this may have on young impressionable minds, then we have a serious problem on our hands.

Following the suicide of a school student after one of her teachers humiliated her parents in front of her, the government decided to prepare an anti-bullying policy, keeping provisions of punishment for offenders. This is indeed a good initiative. However, what is also necessary is awareness among school authorities and staffers in particular, about the problems of bullying and how to properly deal with students—whether they be victims of bullying or the perpetrators. What is also essential is for schools to have qualified counsellors that can help students navigate through different challenges, including that of bullying.

The oddity of being at odds

Shakib-BCB tiff unwarranted

IT is after navigating through many odds, overcoming numerous ups and downs, enduring frequent failures and heartbreaks, Bangladesh has ensconced itself in the world of international cricket. The combined efforts of the players and board officials at the seminal stage of our cricket had helped carve a niche for Bangladesh in the company of the illustrious. Suddenly all those achievements seem to be facing the risk of being undone.

The first error was the sudden, albeit short-lived, strike by the cricketers. Going to the media before seeking remedy from the BCB, the normal procedure, was in bad judgement on the part of the players. Understandably, the cricketers’ demands had been communicated to the authorities, although in bits and pieces and from time to time, but left unaddressed by the BCB. However, while the players’ move was unwarranted, the ham handed, injudicious and brusque manner in which the issue was handled by the BCB president was an even greater blunder. Calling the players’ action a conspiracy was perhaps the most bizarre reaction of the board president.

It was after the PM’s intervention, as we understand, that the issue was quickly resolved. And when we had hoped that things would be normal and the players would concentrate on the forthcoming tour of India, one has been confronted once again with a new situation arising out of the BCB-Shakib squabble. The BCB has charged Shakib with alleged violation of the terms of agreement. Surely Shakib is not above the law, but this matter should have been addressed more professionally instead of BCB going public and demeaning him. Would we be remiss in suggesting that the board has an axe to grind against Shakib because he had led the players’ strike? Blaming Shakib alone for the team’s loss against Afghanistan betrays this very mindset of the board regarding Shakib.

Despite all his shortcomings Shakib happens to be the world’s leading allrounder. He needs to fully concentrate and prepare for the forthcoming India tour. This is a full tour, one that has been coveted for a long time. And his role is even more vital given that the team will be without another leading player Tamim Iqbal. The matter, we suggest, be resolved quickly and Shakib be left to concentrate with the team on the uphill task ahead.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Reduce onion prices

Onion prices have gone up to their record high for this year in kitchen markets. Normally, prices of onions vary between Tk 40-50. But in recent months it has gone up to over Tk 100.

Although traders have used different excuses for charging so much, the truth is that prices have shot up because of collusion and hoarding. The government has been slow to react and has barely made any difference.

Onion is an essential commodity. Traders know this and they have abused this fact along with the government’s nonchalant attitude. As a result, it is the ordinary people who are suffering.

The government needs to step in and make sure such collusion ends and ensure that onion prices go down to their normal level urgently.

Basharat Hossain, Banani

Making the SDG goals a reality

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

of the Economic and Social Council of the UN, Bangladesh’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN indicated that the government will submit a VNR report describing our experiences, including our successes, challenges and lessons learned during the five years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will convene the 2020 session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York from July 7-16 July, 2020.

Each country that willingly engages with the UN to prepare and present the VNR report to the HLPF commits to undertake a cooperative and nation-wide process. Accordingly, it is expected that all the stakeholders in Bangladesh’s SDG initiative will be asked by the government to provide input for our VNR. While the UN guidelines call for intense stakeholder engagement, this requirement may be of concern for Bangladesh since it has been reported at an international conference last month at Harvard University that the country is not yet experiencing the level of collaboration that’s necessary. At the official level, the Chief Coordinator for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Affairs in the Prime Minister’s Office is sanguine about the year-long process. Various officials have voiced optimism that Bangladesh is already working to make these efforts more inclusive, bringing together the private sector, NGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs), members of the media, and many others.

This is the second time Bangladesh has joined a select group of nations which have provided VNR, a progress report on SDG implementation. Earlier in 2017, Bangladesh completed its first VNR in accordance with the UN General Assembly resolution 70/1 which created High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) to be convened each year in July under the auspices of the ECOSOC. HLPF adopts negotiated declarations, reviews commitment and the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Bangladesh’s second VNR will follow the guidelines provided by the UN, which implies that GOB is expected to deliver the Main Message around mid-May 2020 and the VNR report in mid-June 2020. These dates

would be finalised in the coming months, once the theme is announced by the President of ECOSOC.

As of October 10, 2019, there are 54 countries intending to participate in the VNRs in 2020. Additional countries had volunteered to present, but the ECOSOC Bureau agreed to give priority to first- and second-time presenters, and those that did not present in 2019. It has been variously reported that in most of the countries that will come to NY next July, progress has been very slow and they are struggling to be inclusive.

In Bangladesh, the Prime Minister’s SDG Directorate will undertake an assessment of the progress and communicate it to the UN. As mentioned, Bangladesh has some experience in the process since it participated in the 2017 VNR. In the 2017 report, the government highlighted the significant achievements made during the first two years, i.e., 2015-17. While the SDG encompasses 17 goals, the country report focused on seven thematic areas namely poverty, hunger,

will also provide a Main Message summarising key findings. These main messages are also posted in the VNR database.

So, what can Bangladesh do this time around? First of all, it is to be noted that since Bangladesh is presenting for the second time, the report needs to address the gaps identified in 2017 and document progress on the goals left out in the last report. Secondly, in a letter from the ECOSOC President on September 12, 2019, details of the July 2020 meeting are given. The VNRs will begin on Monday, July 13, 2020 and proceed for the three days of the ministerial segment of HLPF (14-16 July 2020). In accordance with past practice, countries presenting a VNR for the first time will be allocated 30 minutes each in the programme; countries presenting a VNR for the second time, including Bangladesh will be allocated 20 minutes each in a panel format.

Thirdly, the PMO ought to pay close attention to the requirements of VNR which aim to facilitate the sharing

risk of being left behind, including persons with disabilities, LGBTIQ persons, victims of domestic violence, older persons, Rohingya migrants, the underemployed, villagers in remote areas, and residents in deprived pockets of the northern districts.

It is widely recognised that effective follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda requires the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of an unprecedented amount of reliable, timely, accessible, and sufficiently disaggregated data. Bangladesh did a superb job in the Data Gap report and the identified gaps in data and methodology. What has been the progress so far in this area?

Across the globe, the top three data challenges highlighted by countries in 2017 include the lack of disaggregated data, the lack of capacity in data collection and management, and insufficient financial and technical support. To address these issues Bangladesh, like other countries, could branch out to new data sources,



health, gender, infrastructure, life under water, and means of implementation. This narrower focus was driven by the overarching theme of 2017, which was “Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity in a Changing World”.

Incidentally, about a third of countries, or 30 percent, addressed all the SDGs. A similar number of countries (28 percent) covered the set of SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14 and 17 that were subject to in-depth review at the 2017 HLPF. Other countries (or 42 percent) included a set of goals of their choosing, based on national priorities.

The VNR countries are expected to submit comprehensive written reports that will be made available in the VNR database. In addition, each VNR country

of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilise multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the SDGs. Therefore, it is also a good idea for the government to showcase some of the initiatives in the following areas, which cut across the SDG categories: leave no one behind, data limitations, multi-stakeholder participation, and progress in the areas of climate change.

Leaving no one behind is one of the key principles of the 2030 Agenda. Our report must attempt to quantify the number of people who are at

involving stakeholders *and* by mobilising resources through multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Last, but not least, it would be a good idea to report on the progress to fight the virus of corruption. Various stakeholders have identified significant barriers which hamper our efforts to boost investment, and corruption is regularly rated as number one. Bangladesh, like other countries including Nepal and Philippines, could showcase its fight against corruption and report our progress on the UN’s “Innovative Approach” website.

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PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

Anti-globalisation bias and public policy

SHANG-JIN WEI

everyone gets a larger slice, and many may receive a much smaller piece than before because of competition from foreign-made products. Such concerns help to explain why many blue-collar American workers voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election, and why French farmers and workers often take part in anti-globalisation demonstrations.

But we should not exaggerate the importance of this point. In fact, three other inherent anti-globalisation biases are at work in many societies, and often contribute to the emergence of misguided public policies that benefit neither employers nor workers.

First, although globalisation frequently creates many more winners than losers, even before government redistribution programmes, many winners mistakenly think they are losers because they fail to recognise globalisation’s significant indirect benefits.

Consider the example of US imports from China. As many often point out, US sectors or regions that compete most directly with Chinese imports tend to fare less well, because these imports displace US jobs. But as my colleagues and I highlighted in a recent paper, US sectors that use relatively more Chinese-made intermediate inputs—such as computers and other electronic equipment, furniture, and lab coats—tended to experience faster job growth and larger increases in real wages between 2000 and 2014. Yet, opponents of globalisation often ignore such findings.

Moreover, whereas only a subset of US manufacturing jobs is displaced by imports from China, America’s much

larger service sector (and many of its manufacturing industries) benefits from cheaper Chinese-made inputs. Less than one-fifth of all US jobs are in manufacturing, while the service sector accounts for about three-quarters of employment—a pattern that also holds for all US states and almost all US cities.

We therefore estimate that when the total effects of US-China trade are considered, the real wages of three-quarters of American workers have increased (whereas if one focuses only

That is not surprising. When a US firm fires workers, its human-resources manager may say, “Sorry we have to let you go, but you should blame our country’s imports from China.” Trump and much of the US media have repeatedly reinforced this idea. Our analysis, however, suggests that US job expansion is also linked to trade with China.

On the other hand, when a US firm hires new workers, often at higher wages than they would receive in shrinking



Shipping containers are seen at a port in Shanghai, China July 10, 2018.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ALY SONG.

sectors, its boss is highly unlikely to say, “Congratulations, and you should thank imports from China for your new jobs.” Instead, they are far more likely to say, “You’ve got your jobs because I am a great entrepreneur.” This asymmetry in perception generates an inherent anti-globalisation bias.

The second source of such bias is an asymmetry in public discourse. Technology, education, and globalisation all contribute to the reshuffling of the job market and its impact on individuals.

But national politicians and media often find it more convenient to blame societal woes on foreign firms or governments than on technological advances, the failure of public education systems, inadequate parenting, or individual shortcomings. After all, teachers and parents vote, and technology firms donate to political campaigns. Foreigners, by contrast, do neither.

Finally, the asymmetric benefits of bad policies also fuel an anti-globalisation bias. Companies and individuals who profit from trade barriers have a strong incentive to organise themselves and lobby for such measures. By contrast, most people who lose out as a result of protectionism do not spend enough time and effort to understand the issues, or lack the resources to lobby for better public policies.

These three sources of bias suggest that societies can all too easily adopt anti-globalisation measures that hurt most people. In fact, most countries have barriers to economic openness which, upon careful scrutiny, tend to hurt citizens’ wellbeing.

To be sure, societies need to do a better job of distributing the gains from globalisation and new technologies. But they also must step up their efforts in two other areas.

Higher-quality research and journalism would help citizens to understand better the indirect as well as the direct effects of open trade. Furthermore, better education systems and greater individual efforts would improve skills and boost workers’ ability to seize opportunities arising from technological progress and globalisation.

The globalisation debate is often tinged with nationalism, self-interest, and lack of economic understanding, resulting in misguided public policies. Redressing the negative bias in the discussion could enable more enlightened policies.

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