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Mobile users continue to suffer

New spat between BTRC and operators

WHILE the tug of war between Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) and the two major mobile operators, Grameenphone (GP) and Robi, over the payment of VAT is still going on, users are now having to deal with another problem. Over the last year, some 62 lakh new mobile connections have become active, of which 57 lakh users are using mobile data and some 2 crore people have moved to the faster 4G connection. Unfortunately, that has not translated into faster, smoother internet speed or better call quality, because we are informed by the service providers that they need some 3,000 cell towers (new, upgraded or replaced) to offer subscribers these services.

The crux of the problem is the new licensing system BTRC has introduced whereby third parties are in charge of these cell towers and the carriers must rent them from these parties. Although these third parties are supposed to build towers within six months of obtaining license, none of them apparently has done so. Why? Apparently BTRC is going beyond the scope of tower guidelines. Instead of allowing carriers to reach bilateral agreements with cell tower companies, the main complaint against the regulator is that it is trying to impose a non-negotiated common commercial agreement on the operators. Opinions may vary amongst the operators, the regulator, and indeed, the cell tower companies about who is right and who is not. The end result of this tussle is that the subscribers to the two largest mobile telephone companies are suffering call drops, poor network quality and subpar internet bandwidth. They are paying for services that are not being delivered. How long must customers continue to lose money on mobile telephone services because the other parties cannot work out their differences? Who will look after the consumers' interest?

Passing away of Sadeque Hossain Khoka

A great loss for BNP

THE death of Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Bir Protik, former BNP vice-chairman and mayor of Dhaka, is a great loss, particularly for BNP. He was suffering from kidney cancer since 2014 and was undergoing treatment at a US hospital where he passed away on November 4. We express our deep condolences to his family and hope they find the strength to bear the irreparable loss.

Khoka was a valiant freedom fighter and a politician. His political career started during his student life, being elected a member of East Pakistan Chhatria Union Dhaka chapter in 1966. He also participated in the anti-Ayub movement and joined the Liberation War as a guerrilla freedom fighter and was awarded the Bir Pratik for his gallantry.

A two-term cabinet minister, Khoka's leadership role had been of utmost importance for BNP. He earned the trust of his party through his commitment and ability to mobilise people. He will be remembered for his role in defusing tensions that were created in Old Dhaka following the demolition of Babri Mosque in India in 1992.

Khoka had earned his position in people's mind not only as a political leader but also as a city mayor. He was elected the mayor of undivided Dhaka City Corporation in 2002, and held the post for nearly nine years until the corporation split into two. He played an important role in naming the Dhaka streets after our veteran and martyred freedom fighters. We hope he will be accorded the honours due to a deceased freedom fighter.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Freedom of speech, are you there?

In a recent issue of *The Daily Star*, there was a report titled "Speak up for the right to speak" which seemed rather interesting to me. In it, according to rights activists, the lack of freedom of speech turns a human life into that of an animal.

This country that we have gained after so much struggle and oppression at the cost of many lives, was surely not meant for us to live in like animals. But sadly, animals can voice out their pain or suffering, while we remain blind, deaf and mute.

Any sort of protest against any wrongdoing, somehow or the other, tends to entail negative repercussions. And that is what has suppressed the voice of the masses.

Thankfully, selective newspapers and other outlets allow us to convey our messages, but that too seems gravely at risk. It worries me that if whatever remaining rights we have are also taken away, will we ever get them back?

Nur Jahan, *Chattogram*



ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

enjoying unprecedented levels of peace, security, and prosperity, while others are failing to move out of a chronic cycle of conflict and violence. At present, more than half of the food-insecure people live in countries with ongoing violence, and more than three-quarters of the world's chronically malnourished children live in conflict-affected regions. Projections by the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others estimate that by 2030, between 50 percent and 64 percent of the global poor will live in countries affected by fragility, conflicts, and high levels of violence.

According to the latest data from the United Nations, since 2010, state-based conflict has increased by 60 percent and armed conflict within countries has increased by 125 percent. Globally, every minute, 25 people are forced to flee their home because of war, conflict and persecution. Those displaced are forced to seek safety in neighbouring countries where they live in makeshift camps in horrible conditions, often struggling to meet basic needs like health, education and access to food, housing, water and sanitation, to name a few. Upon their arrival to a new country, they also face social discrimination and exclusion, lack of participation in economic, political decision-making that reduce the overall quality of a person's life, and thus they get caught in a poverty trap.

Today, more than 10 percent of the world's population live in extreme poverty. Of them, 413 million live in sub-Saharan Africa, and 18.6 million live in the Middle East and North Africa. Globally, more than 736 million people live below the international poverty line, surviving on less than USD 1.90 a day. Poverty reduction has been central to our development policy for decades, but these intensifying wars, armed conflicts and violence are delaying the process

To end poverty, we need peace and justice first

while destroying agricultural infrastructure and other national resources in some of the world's poorest nations, pushing millions into poverty. Social scientists and economists argue that once a country experiences conflict, it faces a reversal of economic development, because when a war or armed conflict begins, its consequences extend far beyond human casualties. You have loss of properties, livestock and agricultural commodities, destruction of infrastructure, etc. According to the World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2017 report, the estimated economic cost of armed conflict, war and violence is USD 14.76 trillion, equivalent to 12.4 percent of the global GDP.

challenges, Bangladesh and India were fairly stable and peaceful for the past few decades which, in turn, produced impressive economic growth that helped to reduce the level of poverty. Between 2000 and 2016, Bangladesh has lifted about 8 million people out of poverty, while 271 million people in India moved out of poverty between 2005 and 2016. These numbers underscore the importance of peace.

War and armed conflict are definitely not the single cause or consequence of poverty, however. Things like greed, corruption, unequal distribution of resources, unfair trade, criminal and political violence can too drive and perpetuate poverty. As Nobel Peace Prize

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the world already produces more than one and a half times enough food to feed everyone on the planet. That's enough to feed 10 billion people, the population peak we expect by 2050. So the question is, if there is no food shortage or famine, no one's survival depends on someone else's death, then what are we fighting for? The answer was given by many but the one I like most was by Mahatma Gandhi, who said, "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed." Today, only a handful of economic and political elites are setting the rules of the world. According to an Oxfam report, the world's 26 richest people now hold the same wealth as the poorest half of the global population. The world's billionaires are growing USD 2.5 billion richer every day, while the poorest half of the population are seeing their net worth dwindle. "The billionaire boom is not a sign of a thriving economy but a symptom of a failing economic system," said Winnie Byanyima, executive director of Oxfam International.

Let's recall that world leaders have committed to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Only 11 years are now left, so if we are serious about achieving this goal, we need to treat the root causes of the problem—not just the symptoms. Based on the above analysis, we can draw a conclusion that poverty or hunger is not a natural phenomenon. It is a man-made tragedy. According to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), world military expenditures rose to USD 1.8 trillion in 2018, representing an increase of 2.6 percent from 2017. While millions of dollars are devoted to killing people, there is much less money spent to keep people alive. Therefore, if we really want to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty from the world, we must stop war and oppression now, and ensure peace. Peace and upholding of human rights are prerequisites for prosperity and the fulfilment of people's aspirations. So, to end poverty by 2030, the focus must be on global peace.

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PHOTO: REUTERS/BRENDAN MCDERMID

It is widely known that without a peaceful and inclusive environment, development isn't sustainable. Different research findings have revealed that over the past decade, countries that improved in peace had GDP growth rates almost seven times higher than that of countries that saw a decline in peace. Take Sri Lanka, a country that emerged from a 26-year-old civil war in 2009. Today, it has become one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In the last 10 years, Sri Lanka has halved its poverty gap from 15.2 percent to 7.6 percent and doubled its per capita income. Similarly, despite some

Laureate Tawakkol Karman has put it: "Peace does not mean just to stop wars, but also to stop oppression and injustice." Peace within one country is no less important than peace between countries. Today, we are witnessing great oppression by many governments of the world. While the primary task of the leaders is to ensure the economic and social well-being of citizens, sadly, some are oppressing their own people. These so-called leaders are deliberately depriving the citizens of basic rights and freedoms which are essential for the success of any anti-poverty strategy. Now, here is an interesting fact.

Just being brilliant is not enough

ABDUL MATIN

IN general, the top meritorious students of our country study science in higher secondary school after passing the secondary school final examination. Among them, the top ones normally study engineering or architecture at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet). Buet can thus legitimately claim to possess the highest concentration of the most brilliant students of the country. Naturally, our expectations about Buet are very high. Buet has indeed produced some top-grade engineers and architects who have excelled in their profession both at home and abroad. How does this success stand in the backdrop of a recent incident at Buet that is being widely discussed in the media?

I am, of course, referring to the brutal killing of Abrar Fahad, a second-year student of Electrical and Electronic Engineering Department at Buet by his fellow students. This incident has shocked the conscience of the people both within and outside Bangladesh. Being members of the Buet Alumni Association, we are at a loss to understand how such an incident could occur at an institution where we once studied more than five decades ago? What went wrong at Buet where a group of about 18 senior students could beat a fellow junior student to death? The environment at Buet and the attitude of the students must have changed drastically over the years. To explain the difference, I would like to go back to my student life at Ahsanullah Engineering College (AEC) during 1957-1961. It may be recalled that the AEC was upgraded to Buet in 1962, a year after my graduation.

During our time, there was no students' organisation at AEC with affiliation to any political party. Discipline was so strict that there was not a single strike at AEC when we studied there. We never abstained from a single lecture and never agitated for changing the date of any examination. It should be noted that all semester final examinations were completed mostly in a week's time and it was normal to hold two examinations in a single day.

We had regular elections to the college union and also to the residential hall unions where two panels used to contest without any interference from any political party. All elections were conducted peacefully and in a friendly manner. There are instances when two contestants for the same post canvassed together while visiting the rooms of the students.

The term "ragging", as it means now in this part of the world, was unknown to us. We were never treated badly by our senior students. As a matter of fact, they treated us with kindness and affection. We also respected our seniors like our elder brothers. There was never any instance

of any junior student being bullied or subjected to any mental or physical torture by any senior student. It was unimaginable at that time. As I read in newspapers, it has now become a common practice in most institutions of higher education. There has been very little effort on the part of the concerned authorities to stop this menace. It has reached a stage that incidents of ragging are not even reported to the authorities for fear of reprisals. As a result, we hardly have any statistics on ragging in Bangladesh and there is no legislation to curb ragging in educational institutions. In neighbouring India, following a Supreme Court Order, a National Anti-Ragging Helpline was created to help victims report cases of ragging to the head of the institution and also to the local police. As per Indian University Grants Commission

During the beating, some of the culprits went to the canteen for dinner and came back to resume the beating. Finally, Abrar died due to excessive internal bleeding. Nobody gave him a glass of water even though he cried for it before passing away.

I wonder how so many "brilliant" students could collectively commit such a heinous crime and none among them uttered a single warning saying that they were not doing the right thing! Where was their conscience? Did they all lose all human values, if they had any, at the same time? What did they learn from their parents and teachers? Are they getting the right kind of education? If they did, could they commit such a crime collectively?

All parents, teachers, members of the civic society and policy planners must put their heads together to find out what went

can't keep such crimes under control. What is the solution then?

To curb such crimes, ethics and morals should be taught as a compulsory subject at all levels in our education system. Parents and teachers must set examples for their children and students while teaching ethics to them. Parents who are reputed to be corrupt or involved in crimes cannot expect their children to be honest and clean since children normally try to copy their parents. Students should be encouraged to be involved in different humanitarian and social activities like teaching street children, collecting and distributing clothes to poor children, participation in cleanliness and tree plantation activities in their locality, creation of awareness about the importance of personal hygiene,



In memory of Abrar Fahad, Buet students hold a candlelit vigil at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall.

PHOTO: TWITTER

regulations, it is mandatory for a college to register a First Information Report with the police against the culprits if any violence, physical abuse, sexual harassment, or confinement, etc., takes place with any fresher. It is time to introduce a similar helpline with appropriate regulations in Bangladesh.

What has happened at Buet recently is not just ragging. This is cold-blooded murder not by one or two students, but by a group of students consisting of not less than 18 participants, though all of them didn't take part in the beating. Some of them beat him mercilessly with a skipping rope and a cricket stump. They didn't stop beating even when Abrar started to throw up and felt very bad. When Abrar's condition deteriorated severely, they thought he was feigning.

wrong in our education system. I think we all put the wrong priorities in educating our children. While sending our kids to school, we all expect to see their names at the top of the class merit list. This is where the parents and teachers put their utmost emphasis. Do we ever tell them to become good human beings first? This is our mistake. Being a brilliant student is not enough unless one becomes a good human being first.

It is time now to redesign our education system putting the highest priority on inculcating human values first. Topping the merit list should be of secondary importance. This will cure us from many diseases which have practically paralysed our society. Murder, rape, corruption, addiction to drugs, etc., have become daily affairs now. Law enforcing agencies alone

sanitation, etc. Simultaneously, they should be encouraged to take active part in sports, literary and cultural activities to divert their minds from unsocial activities. All such extra-curricular activities plus good personal manners and behaviour of students should be regularly monitored and graded like their performances in different subjects.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, realised the importance of creating "golden people" (*shonar mamush*) to build "golden Bangla" (*shonar Bangla*). Obviously, the golden person must possess the best of human qualities, not just a brilliant academic record.

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