

OPINION

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Bangkok Post

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Dismantle sexist culture

The public is angry and rightly so. The rape and murder of a 13-year-old girl on a night train by a rail worker is not only shocking because of its brutality. It has shaken society to the core because it underscores the perpetual danger girls and women face from all forms of sexual violence — and the total breakdown in the system to provide safety or to punish perpetrators.

The horrific crime has triggered a furious online campaign to impose the death penalty for rapists. The petitioners think convicted rapists serve too short a time in prison thanks to the parole system. Many come out to attack women again and killing them will stop the problem, they believe.

Such demands may satisfy the campaigners' anger. But it will not solve the prevalent crime of rape and sexual violence. Actually, imposing the death penalty might have the opposite effect.

As Muslim rights activist Angkhana Neelapaijit pointed out, imposing the death sentence on rapists is already the norm in many Muslim countries. Yet rape remains prevalent because the patriarchal values that endorse sexual violence against women are simply more powerful than the written law.

Fixing deep-rooted sexist values takes a long time. But this does not mean things cannot be done to make society safer for girls and women.

Well-lit streets and parking lots, and special public transportation services for women to ensure safe trips home are the most basic measures to boost safety, yet they are still largely lacking in Thailand. Strictly screening security guards and patrolling high-risk crime areas can also increase safety for everyone.

Equally important, if not more so, is the support system for victims of sexual violence. These victims must have easy access to sensitive services at hospitals to get evidence of physical attacks and rape. They must also be provided with psychological therapy for the trauma, and legal support to ensure the perpetrators are punished.

The whole judicial procedure must also be revamped to be more sensitive to victims of rape and sexual violence. At present, the burden of proof is on the victims. Yet they face an uphill task to get justice done. From police stations to the courtroom, they must prove they did not "ask for it", and that it was not consensual sex.

More often than not, the courtroom testimonies are turned into "repeated rapes" by forcing the victims to recount what happened again and again, or by being portrayed as loose women to lessen their credibility. The sexist legal system is one major reason rapists run free, feel emboldened, and continue to be sexual predators.

Should anything in the rape law be amended, it is the three-month statute of limitations. Rapists usually choose victims who are weaker, socially and financially. They use their power and networks to threaten the victims not to press charges. When three months are over, they are free.

Another clause that should be removed is the one that frees rapists of the crime if marriage enters as a solution. This family face-saving measure means subjecting the victims to long-term rape.

The prison system must also set up effective rehabilitation. Without it, prisons only churn out more hardened criminals into society. For convicted rapists, they must be put under follow-up and monitoring systems to prevent repeat crimes.

All these measures are nearly non-existent, not because of a lack of budget or necessary laws. Rather, it is due to lack of understanding of how patriarchy works, how it condones men's sexual aggression, and how it systematically hurts half of the world's population. It is why we must dismantle sexist cultural values if we want society to be safe for our girls and women.

THE BANGKOK POST

Vol. LXVII No. 192

The Bangkok Post is edited by Pichai Chuensuksawadi for the Post Publishing Public Company Limited, Printer, Publisher and Owner.

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Here comes the Thai train!



Brics must forge 'Rio consensus'

FINANCE

KEVIN P GALLAGHER

Conveniently scheduled at the end of the World Cup, leaders of the Brics countries travel to Brazil this month for a meeting that presents them with truly historic opportunity. While in Brazil, the Brics nations hope to establish a new development bank and reserve currency pool arrangement.

This action could strike a true trifecta — recharge global economic governance and the prospects for development as well as pressure the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — to get back on the right track.

The two Bretton Woods institutions, both headquartered in Washington, with good reason originally put financial stability, employment and development as their core missions.

That focus, however, became derailed in the last quarter of the 20th century. During the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and the IMF pushed the "Washington Consensus", which offered countries financing but conditioned it on a doctrine of deregulation.

With the benefit of hindsight, the era of the Washington Consensus is seen as a painful one. It inflicted significant economic and political cost across the developing world.

What is more, the operations of the World

Bank and the IMF are perceived as rigged against emerging market and developing countries. The unwritten rule that the head of the IMF is always a European and the World Bank chief is to be an American is only a superficial but no less grating public expression of that.

Worse still is the fact that the voting structure of both institutions is skewed toward industrialised countries — and grants the United States veto power to boot.

It wasn't always that way. As Eric Helleiner shows in one of his two new books *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order*, China, Brazil, India and other countries wanted development goals to remain a core part of the Bretton Woods institutions.

Some of their proposals eventually made it into the policy mix of the World Bank and the IMF, including short-term financing, capital controls and policy space for industrial policy.

When these institutions failed to predict the global financial crisis of 2008, however, the Brics and other emerging market and

developing countries said enough is enough. First, they tried to work inside the system by proposing reforms that would grant them more say in voting procedures.

However, the US Congress has failed to approve the small stepwise reforms of that process — even though the United States would have maintained its veto power.

Brics and other emerging market nations also joined the G20 in hopes that it would be a more pluralistic venue for global cooperation.

The G20 did hold a landmark 2009 meeting where a new vision was articulated for global economic governance, but none of the promises — especially the coordination of macroeconomic stimuli to recover from the crisis and comprehensive reform to prevent the next one — were realised.

Now the Brics are taking matters into their own hands. Their governments have been diligently putting together two new institutions that hold great promise — a new development bank and a new reserve pooling arrangement.

The development bank would provide financing to Brics and other emerging market and

developing countries for infrastructure, industrialisation and productive development. The reserve pool would allow Brics and other nations to draw on pooled reserves in the event of balance of payments crises or threats to their currencies.

When these institutions are launched in Rio this month, Brics could and should forge a "Rio Consensus" — provided they do not make the same mistakes of other, mostly Western-inspired "models" in the past. The key is to make it a model for global economic governance in the 21st century.

The key elements of Rio Consensus are a definite step in that direction. At its core is a commitment to financial stability and productive development in a manner that is inclusive, honors human rights and is environmentally sustainable.

Organisations carrying out such a mission should also have a more equitable organisational structure with open and transparent rules. This crucially includes the mechanism for picking leaders and a more equal voting system for existing and new members.

Not only will such a framework and structure enable more appropriate finance for development and stability, it can also serve as a moral model of reform that can someday be achieved in the two Washington-based institutions themselves. This will give Brics more leverage — and an opt-out if the industrialised countries stay set in their ways. ©THE GLOBALIST

Kevin P Gallagher is a professor of international relations at Boston University and a contributing editor to The Globalist, where this article initially appeared.

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The World Bank and the IMF are perceived as rigged against emerging market and developing countries.

PostBag

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InQuote



Resignation represents a sense of responsibility.

PERMANENT SECRETARY FOR TRANSPORT SOITHIP TRAISUTH, ON MOUNTING PRESSURE FOR SRT GOVERNOR PRAPAT CHONGSANGUAN TO RESIGN OVER THE RAPE-MURDER CASE INVOLVING A 13-YEAR-OLD GIRL

10,000 or so employees?

Mr Prapat, who was also previously governor and responsible for the initial system of the MRTA's underground railway, is to my knowledge one of the best and most able Thai administrators I have known, and a very caring person indeed.

Jack's call for Khun Prapat to resign is a case of someone jumping on the bandwagon without being in possession of all the facts of the yet unproven case against one of the SRT's many employees.

MARTIN R

Don't coddle rapists

All rape victims should report the crimes. The reporting process should be as hassle-free and brief as possible. The police reports should be filled by women officers, not men. I'd like to suggest there be no social repercussions or bias against girls and women who are raped, but I know most people think too primitively for that to apply.

If rape victims file a complaint, rapists are more likely to be found, then convicted and put away for many years in prisons.

If victims don't complain, rapists will keep raping. It's as simple as that. If a monk hears about a rape, he is duty-bound to report it to authorities. Same for a business executive or military brass or a common

citizen. In other words, anyone who knows about a rape is duty-bound to report it. Any one who suppresses a report, or discourages a rape victim from reporting, is an accomplice to the crime.

Additionally, cops and courts are duty-bound follow up such matters to the full extent of the law, even if the victim drops the matter.

Anything less is coddling the rapist, and enabling him to continue to rape.

KEN ALBERTSEN

SRT must act now

I was appalled to read of the rape-murder on a Bangkok-bound train, a heinous crime. It has, not surprisingly, caused a frenzied reaction from people on social networks calling for the death penalty.

They have said little about how to prevent this from happening again.

While it is too late to reverse the series of events that lead to this shocking crime, the SRT must act decisively.

As a regular user of overnight trains, I am astonished at the regularity at which employees either appear drunk, or drink while on duty.

In addition, background checks made on employees who staff these trains must be thorough.

Even if hiring is outsourced, it is the duty of the SRT to ensure their personnel are trustworthy before they begin employment to guarantee the safety of passengers and their property.

This in turn will lead to greater professionalism and show the SRT is serious about improving its services and reputation, but more importantly, will hopefully never allow a tragedy like this to be repeated.

OVERNIGHT SLEEPER

Prapat is a scapegoat

Re: "Weed out Prapat" (PostBag, July 10).

Jack Gileads calls for SRT governor Prapat Chongsanguan to resign and be prosecuted "for not telling the truth." How on earth is the governor able to know the background and personal circumstances of one of the SRT's

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