

Human Rights

Increased Concern Marks 1994

by Lamis Hossain

by the dubious claim of customary practice.

Children

Children are possibly the most neglected citizens of this country. Unicef reports that by international standards, only seven per cent of Bangladesh's children can be called nutritionally normal. Furthermore, seven out of ten people are affected by some degree of iodine deficiency which can lead to mental retardation and lower IQ levels.

Children continue to be economically active despite existing laws prohibiting child labour. A UCEP (Under Privileged Children's Education Programme) official said in September that children are found in at least 121 different occupations. Child garment workers have received the most attention in the last two years due to the impending threat of the Harkin's Bill in the U.S. The Bill has been heavily criticised for its simplistic and coercive approach to a complicated social problem.

However, initial alarmist reactions have proved unfounded. 1994 has shown that the problem of child labour is not insurmountable as long as inflexible measures are exchanged for a greater understanding of the prevailing economic conditions. As far as the garments sector is concerned, it seems that 12-14 year olds will be allowed to do light work if they receive two hours schooling.

Child trafficking is also a growing area for concern. The Home Minister told the house that a total of 671 women and children have been rescued from traffickers from 1991 till October 1994. However, when questioned by Farida Hasan MP, the Minister said he did not know anything about the Bangladesh children being smuggled out to be used as camel jockeys (Daily Star 28/11/94). There is, obviously a need for greater awareness of the problem before the necessary regulatory legislation can be passed.

Women working with NGOs have also been targeted for attack. For example, Farida Begum and her husband were to be beaten 101 times because she worked with BRAC, according to a fatwa issued by an imam (Janakantha 28 March 1994). In another development unique to this year, fatwas were issued in Feni and Noakhali districts in March 1994 directing women to stay indoors and refrain from un-Islamic activities like voting.

The lack of any condemnation of these activities by the government or other political parties is worrying. Political silence, ineffectiveness of police action in enforcing the law has not only allowed several maulvis and madrasah imams to escape justice, but for a recurrence of fatwa incidents across the country," ASK believes. "The whole issue of rule of law has been side stepped

number of deaths in prison and police custody has increased to 38. This is the highest in three years. In 1993, a total of 18 persons died of unnatural death in police custody and prisons. Only two months ago, a case was filed against the Mirpur OC and others for the death in custody of Sanaulah a young man. This trend is completely unacceptable in a democratic state as it demonstrates scant respect for human rights in the police force.

The only consolation is the introduction of seven days training on the role of the police in preserving human rights by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police for the first time ever. Organisations like the CCHRB started giving classes this September.

Law and Order

A look at the headlines will tell any citizen that law and order is in a dismal state. According to data compiled by the CCHRB for their year end report, there have been 1350 incidents of dacoity in the last three months alone. At this rate, the number of incidents a year would amount to at least 5,000. Last year there were 2,160 cases recorded for 12 months.

There have also been five deaths on campus recorded in the last three months alone. Although the total number of deaths in 1994 may prove to be lower than the 40 casualties last year, violence on campus has not decreased.

Freedom of expression had an exceptionally trying time this year. Taslima Nasreen, the feminist writer left the country to escape threats on her life. Charges against her for "hurting the religious feelings of Muslims" have not been dropped and the hearing has been set for January 3. Four editors of the Janakantha were also charged in June under 295A of the Penal Code for hurting the religious feelings of Muslims. Apart from these, there have been a number of attacks on journalists and newspaper offices this year.

Minorities

According to the CCHRB, the maltreatment of religious minorities continued in 1994 as a fall out from the Babri Mosque destruction in

HUMAN RIGHTS Day was observed in 35 districts in Bangladesh this year. A hundred socio-cultural functions, rallies and processions and discussion programmes took place not just on December 10 itself, but over a period of ten days. Human Rights Day posters were spotted outside Dhaka for the first time.

All this would have been unthinkable two years ago. During the last few years, human rights is being increasingly discussed among educated urban circles and some political organisations. But do these outward manifestations indicate an improvement in the human rights situation in 1994? Has a triumph for democracy brought about a victory for human rights in Bangladesh?

Optimistic observations are qualified by exceptions. Ain O Salish Kendra, a human rights and legal aid centre, comments, "There is today a greater concern about individual and collective rights within a democratic society; nevertheless an erosion in the rule of law as well as a growing culture of intolerance has contributed to an escalation in violence."

The Coordinating Council of Human Rights (CCHRB), an umbrella organisation of different human rights groups, points out that without achieving the five basic rights of shelter, education, food, clothing and health, one cannot even begin to speak of an improvement in human rights. "Human rights has not improved on the macro-level," the CCHRB believes. "Even in a democracy, there is no improvement in these five areas."

The apathy of both government and opposition parties, rather than their interference causes more damage. "The perpetrators of violence appear to have gained greater immunity," ASK believes. "First many of them are assured of political or official protection and second, they take advantage of public apathy or powerlessness; the law enforcing agencies have also encouraged such violations by their reluctance to act according to the rules."

As if these were not enough, a widening social rift between liberals and the religious right has had serious repercussions for human rights in 1994. A comprehensive review of the human rights situation in 1994 is not possible here, but a few areas

have been chosen for a closer look.

Women

Amnesty International reports that fundamental rights of women have been repeatedly violated by Muslim clerics and Islamist groups in Bangladesh over the past few months (October 1994 report).

Salish verdicts and fatwas remain a serious cause for concern. Salish or village arbitration councils, continue to try people applying a form of Sharia law in contravention of civil law. In addition, the CCHRB has documented over 50 cases of fatwa in this year alone.

Only two weeks ago, according to the CCHRB, Reza Akhtar Reena, a young unmarried girl of Hasanpur village committed suicide in Fulaganj thana, district of Feni. The Chairman of Anandapur Union who investigated the girl's case, concluded that she was not pregnant. Despite this finding the village headman insisted that she was pregnant and ordered 101 lashings to be administered. He also said that the family would no longer be ostracised if he and others were invited for dinner. However, unable to bear the shame of her situation, Reena ended her life on December 16, Victory Day. The perpetrator of such incidents have only been brought to justice in one case.

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LOOKING BACK AT WORLD EVENTS

Continued from page 10

A dominant figure in Asia for nearly 50 years died suddenly on July 8 - Kim Il Sung, the "Great Leader" of North Korea. He was 82 and was said to have had a heart attack. His death came during a renewed international showdown over North Korea's refusal to allow inspection of two nuclear sites.

Earlier, while the US was lobbying the UN to support sanctions, former US president Jimmy Carter sanctions threat and new talks with the US, the North would suspend its nuclear programme and the Presidents of North and South Korea would hold a summit in Panmunjom. Three weeks later Kim was dead.

Two million people were said to have lined the streets for the funeral, but no foreigners were asked to it. Nor was the succession made clear. Kim's son, Kim Jong Il, was almost invisible in the weeks after the funeral, but he did appear to be the man in charge. Meantime, the heat went out of the nuclear crisis.

In 1994 Asia remained an area of relative peace and stability, much of it moving on the fast track of economic development. Vietnam was joining the so-called tiger economies as new oil and gas discoveries were made there.

Uneasiness about the role of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia grew when talks held with the government in June ended in deadlock. The Khmer Rouge wanted to discuss power-sharing before declaring a ceasefire. Its officials in Phnom Penh were expelled and violence in the country grew once more. In July the Khmer Rouge was outlawed and two days later it formed a 'provisional government' headquartered in the north.

A meeting in Jakarta of the newly-formed Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), potentially the world's biggest economic bloc, was marred by renewed unrest in East Timor and demonstrations by Timorese in Jakarta.

The meeting was attended by President Clinton and this time by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia, who had boycotted APEC's first meeting in Seattle in 1989. Mahathir retained his independent stance by repeating his fears that APEC would lead to US domination of the region. He preferred a purely Asian organisation.

The focus in Southeast Asia remained on Hong Kong as the countdown to the handover of the British colony to China fell below 1,000 days. The running quarrel between the British and Chinese caused by

Governor Chris Patten's democratic reforms continued. Patten went ahead with elections to the low-level district boards in September and the largest pro-democracy group wins the most seats.

The Chinese said they would abolish the reforms in 1997 and set up a new legislature. Much depended on what would happen in China when Deng Xiaoping, now reported to be extremely frail, left the scene.

The most striking political phenomenon in South Asia was the dominance of women at the top. Already Bangladesh had a woman Prime Minister and a woman opposition leader and Pakistan had a woman Prime Minister. Now Sri Lanka also had a woman President and a woman Prime Minister. It happened when Chandrika Kumaratunga, daughter of the world's first woman prime minister, Sirima Bandaranaike, won a general election and then a presidential election.

When Kumaratunga won the first poll in August she immediately began talks with the Tamil Tigers to end the 11-year civil war. But talks came to an end at least temporarily, with an attack on a Sri Lankan warship three weeks later and then the assassination, by a female suicide bomber, of Gamini Dissanayake, the main opposition candidate.

'The amount of information being hurled at us was already more than anyone could absorb, or even wanted... People were being distracted to distraction'

His widow stood in his place in the presidential election and lost to Kumaratunga, who then proceeded to appoint her own mother as Prime minister.

Democracy in Bangladesh did not fare well either. All 156 opposition MPs boycotted parliament and demands for new elections led to unrest on the streets. Personal hostility between Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina stoked up the crisis and in mid-year the Commonwealth

was asked to mediate. Secretary-General Chief Emeke Anyaoku appointed former Australian governor-general Sir Ninian Stephens to conduct talks, but after some weeks he could make no headway and left.

The world got its first elected communist government under a constitutional monarch in November when Man Mohan Adhikari became Prime Minister of Nepal after two weeks of negotiation failed to secure a coalition.

In September, an outbreak of pneumonic plague in Surat, India, made headlines round the world. Airline banned flights and in some countries visitors from India were checked at airports. It was an overblown event, stirred overseas by emotive media use of the word plague.

For Surat the outbreak was serious, with many deaths and thousands of people leaving the city in fear. But the authorities soon got the situation in hand. The subject disappeared from the headlines as fast as it had appeared and the world moved on to other things.

This year population problems took centre stage again. The UN staged a third global conference on the subject in Cairo in September. A 113-page action programme aimed at keeping world population below 7.5 billion by 2015. It is now 5.67 billion and if the plan failed a 12.5 billion population was projected by 2050. Some Arab countries boycotted the 182-nation conference, which was preceded by months of criticism from the Pope, who said the proposals sanctioned abortion.

Global warming was still an arguable phenomenon, but in many areas weather seemed to become increasingly unseasonable, with an unprecedented drought hitting the Australian breadbasket, floods devastating northern Italy, the warmest autumn in Britain since records began in the 17th Century. In New Britain, Papua New Guinea, two volcanoes turned Rabaul into a deserted port and ships were locked into harbour waters that had turned into pumice stone.

The South Pacific Forum, which groups many island countries with Australia and New Zealand, gave priority at their annual meeting to the dangers facing some of the world's last rainforests in their region. Prime Minister Paul Keating of Australia, as host, took the leaders off into retreat in the Australian bush near Brisbane and discussed round a campfire a last-ditch campaign to save the trees. One Pacific country deeply

affected by deforestation is Papua New Guinea, where Sir Julius Chan came back for a second time as Prime Minister just after the meeting. One of his first acts was to negotiate a ceasefire in the six-year secessionist war on Bougainville.

Latin America maintained the trend of recent years towards better democracy. Elections held in Panama and El Salvador, both till recently troubled areas, passed off relatively uneventfully under the eyes of thousands of foreign observers. A new president Eduardo Frei, took over in Chile, and promptly said he would not ask the former dictator, general Augusto Pinochet, to resign as Commander in Chief in Brazil sociologist Fernando Cardoso succeeded President Itamar Franco in a peaceful election nine years after the end of military dictatorship.

The year began in Mexico with a rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas. Armed Indian groups took control of four towns and demanded social and economic reform. After a month's unrest and some bloodshed the government agreed to many items, in their long list of demands. In March Luis Donaldo Colosio the presidential candidate of the ruling party, was assassinated - the first such events since 1928.

Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon became the new candidate and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) continued its 65-year run in power. Its majority was the lowest ever and the opposition candidate claimed eight million voters had been left off the electoral role and alleged many irregularities.

On September 19 American troops landed in Haiti. Washington called it a 28-nation international force authorised by a UN resolution, but in reality all but a handful of the personnel involved were American. President Clinton had hesitated for weeks to take action and at the last minute sent former president Carter to persuade the UN to give up power to father Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

In the end the Americans took over Haiti almost without bloodshed and Aristide was restored.

The US had other backyard trouble. After the first anti-government riots in Cuba for 35 years President Fidel Castro lifted restrictions in August on people leaving the country. By the end of the month 20,000 had sailed for the US. Many more followed and soon there were 21,000 in the US base at Guantanamo alone. Cuban and US negotiators agreed on measures to stem the flood. If Haiti had seemed a suc-

December 1992. "All throughout 1994, a lot of Hindu property has been looted. In one year we have made up for the lack of incidents in previous years," the organisation informs. These incidents are hardly picked up by the press. However, CCHRB takes pain to add that most of the cases are usually financially motivated, rather than anything else. Ethnic and religious minorities are regarded as weak underdogs and therefore easy prey.

A Silver Lining? A review of 1994 is apt to prove a depressing experience, but is there a silver lining to it all? Perhaps the most encouraging trend of 1994 is democracy from the grassroots. There has been a rising consciousness of political rights among the people even in the villages. "It is really sensational to see women vote and discuss candidates and issues, instead of just following their husbands," Father Timm observes.

A black law has also been put to bed this year. The government decided not to extend the term of the Anti-Terrorism Act. Until September 1994, some 1,394 cases were filed and some 3,358 accused were arrested.

Conclusion

Human rights violations occur more readily where people are ignorant about their rights. It is therefore imperative to make human rights education compulsory in schools.

The lack of access to legal remedies for the vast majority of the population and delay in justice further aggravate the situation. The Law Secretary admitted that there are 3 lakh cases pending in different courts and 11,000 pending in the Supreme Court alone.

Bangladesh is not among the major human rights violators in the world. Poverty, rather than deliberate repression, is usually the main reason for our short comings. Most of the organisations say that they are not pessimistic and that there is still reason to be hopeful. "If human rights continues in this spirit of increasing awareness of issues, then in another five years, we may be able to pressure the government into incorporating human rights into the curriculum," the CCHRB believes. That would make compiling the human rights review for year 2000 a merrier task.

With due acknowledgment to ASK, CCHRB, and Amnesty International, Dhaka

cess for Clinton, he got few cheers from the American people who gave him the thumbs down in the US mid-term elections in November. He lost control of the House of Representatives as well as the Senate and his survival into a second term in 1996 was now in doubt.

It was not too difficult to understand why he was so intensely disliked by the Washington establishment, but why he was unpopular with the people was less obvious, although persistent scandal stories about his private life and dealings when he was governor of Arkansas hardly helped.

Clinton recognised President Hafez Asad of Syria as the key Arab player in the region and in 1994 the two men met twice - in Geneva in January and later in the year in Damascus.

On May 4 Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin signed an agreement in Cairo giving Palestinians self-rule in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. On July 1 Arafat stepped on Palestinian land for the first time for 25 years. Amid much controversy in Norway, the Nobel Peace Prize went this year to Arafat and Rabin.

In September, Kuwait came back into the headlines when Saddam Hussein moved troops to its border. Clinton deployed US forces and Saddam backed down. Within weeks Saddam recognised the sovereignty of Kuwait for the first time.

The new mood of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East was reinforced in November when 5,000 people watched in the desert the signing of a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel. It was the end of 46 years of hostility.

A two-month civil war in Yemen broke out when the south tried to secede only four years after unification as a single state. The northern forces of President Ali Abdullah Saleh crushed the southern Democratic Republic of Yemen, whose leaders fled abroad, leaving Aden devastated. Saleh promised to respect democracy and free speech in the unified state.

Two sea disasters in 1994 had contrasting outcomes. In the Baltic Sea a car ferry bound for Sweden from Estonia sank in September with the loss of 900 people, renewing doubts about the safety of these roll-on-roll-off ships. In November the Italian cruise liner Achille Lauro caught fire and sank off Somalia. All but three of 1,000 people aboard survived.

Halfway through the last decade of the century the peace of development in the field of information technology had become dizzy.

Art and Gallery Activities in 1994

By Akku Chowdhury

ART and artist of Bangladesh have always played a distinct role in creating opinions and elevating social environment. They in general play a very important role in raising socio-political consciousness of the people. During the 50's, 60's and 70's in our struggle against Pakistan for our national identity and economic emancipation the contribution of the artists have been tremendous.

Until recently, 'art' has been a very isolated and coveted object. One had to search for it and artists had to peddle their own wares. In Bangladesh, collectors of art have so far been limited to a small circle of urban elites, few middle class art lovers can afford to spend the price tag that a painting or sculpture carries. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of art galleries in Dhaka in the recent years indicates that art now attracts a wider circle of people. It is true that the major collectors are still those people with money to spare. Even then art lovers with limited resources

are also venturing into the market. With the growing number of galleries, (commercial) and frequent exhibitions, the people in general are having an opportunity to see, enjoy and appreciate art.

For the propagation of art, galleries play a most important role. They are the medium of communication between the artist and the people and buyers. In 1988 La Galerie opened its door in an effort to make art more accessible to the public and therefore raise the awareness of the artist's interpretation of the world. Although there were few other galleries and art shops, there was not any concerted effort by any of them to organize art shows in a professional way. But then from 1992 eight more came into being. Unfortunately two had to shut their doors. Anyway it is a very good sign to see that there are so many galleries which have opened their doors and most of them are very active by or-

ganizing regular exhibits and sale of art works. Following is a short round up of the most active galleries in Dhaka city.

In 1994, La Galerie held 31 exhibitions of well known and not so well known artist. At that time it also celebrated the 100th exhibit since its inception.

Gallery Tone which opened in 1993, celebrated its one year in June '94. In 1994 Tone had 22 exhibitions where artists, young and veterans, were well represented.

Divine Art Gallery which is situated in the Hotel Sonargaon with its limited wall space had seven exhibitions of the more popular artists in 1994.

Jojon, which opened in 1993, has been promoting art through exhibitions and discussions. In 1994, it held 24 exhibitions promoting mainly young artists.

Shilpaganj by far the largest gallery with the largest wall space has held an annual exhibition by all major artist. It has on display works by 150 artists at all time for sale.

Drisk on the other hand with an ideal location has been very shy about its gallery activity. Besides the World press show held with much fanfare in 1994, it had only 5 exhibitions. Of them 3 were photographs, two paintings and one sculpture. Three were local and three foreign.

Even ten years ago it was unthinkable of such active art movement and vibrant at market as one notices now. Although we are still at the embryonic stage compared to international level, it is hoped the gallery owners will continue to be patient and keep faith in their business which has a great impact in rising our socio-cultural awareness.



A fund-raising group exhibition held at La Galerie.

Viewing Video

1994: Business as Usual with Moviemakers

NINETEEN ninetyfour was business as usual at Hollywood, or was it?

Disclosure and Oliver Stone's Natural Born Killers took the cake for different reasons. In Disclosure, Demi Moore tries to seduce Michael Douglas in this corporate thriller. Natural Born Killers follows the exploits of two serial killers across America. Critics argue that Stone tried to cash in on the sensational O J Simpson murder case to glorify killers.

The first half of the year had some pretty interesting and diverse films. The biggest was undoubtedly Speed. A fast-moving action/thriller that took place mostly on a bus. If that wasn't enough to wet our appetite it was followed by Blown Away and The Specialist.

Jack Nicholson was having a

go at being a Wolf. And Robin Williams was a woman in Mrs Doubtfire.

There was no disputing the fact in naming The Mask the hi-tech film-of-the-year. Even Time Cop does not come close even with Jean-Claude Van Damme.

If Nicholson and Williams were having a swell time, traditional crowd-pullers - Arnold Schwarzenegger, Bruce Willis and Macaulay Culkin were banking on True Lies, Colour of Night and Getting Even With Dad respectively.

Of the three, only True Lies came out unscathed. But it did prove Schwarzenegger is no comedian and his best bet is to stay with action roles.

Even when he was a pregnant genetic engineer in Junior he showed signs of de-



iciency. Luckily, Danny DeVito and Emma Thompson save the day.

Yes, it was another eventful year in Tinseltown. But even with all its ups and downs the show as they say must go on.

The films I have chosen have been selected at random and the order in which they are provided need not be treated as a ranking.

BEST OF 1994

- | NAME | TYPE |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Disclosure | (Thriller) |
| 2. Speed | (Act/Thriller) |
| 3. Baby's Day Out | (Comedy) |
| 4. Fugitive | (Thriller) |
| 5. True Lies | (Action) |
| 6. Junior | (Comedy) |
| 7. Miracle On 34th Street | (Comedy) |
| 8. The Lion King | (Cartoon) |
| 9. Clear and Present Danger | (Act/Thriller) |
| 10. The Specialist | (Action) |
| 11. The Mask | (Comedy) |
| 12. Wolf | (Thriller) |
| 13. Striking Distance | (Action) |
| 14. I Love Trouble | (Com/Thriller) |
| 15. The Client | (Thriller) |
| 16. Mrs Doubtfire | (Comedy) |
| 17. Schindler's List | (Drama) |
| 18. Philadelphia | (Drama) |
| 19. In the Name Of the Father | (Drama) |
| 20. Maverick | (Com/Western) |
| 21. Greedy | (Comedy) |
| 22. Serial Mom | (Comedy) |
| 23. The Crow | (Action) |
| 24. Four Weddings and A Funeral | (Comedy) |
| 25. Interview With The Vampire | (Drama) |
- Source: Film Fair Video and other clubs



Increasingly, it seemed that in the richer countries everyone was becoming so mesmerised by the means of delivery they could lose interest in the quality of what their own cleverness was producing.

The great Western artists who died in 1994 reminded us of what already seemed a gentler, less complicated age. Jean Louis Barrault, the marginal French mime; Eugene Ionescu, the Romanian surrealist playwright of Rhinoceros fame; Burt Lancaster, one of the intelligent greats of the cinema; Mai Zetterling, graceful, expressive Swedish actress and film director; John Curry, one of the finest Olympic skaters; Derek Jarman, the extraordinary film talent that blossomed even as he was dying of Aids; Merlina Mercouri, the star of Never on Sunday who campaigned as Greek Minister of Culture for the re-

turn of the Elgin Marbles. In 1994, with the onset of the information superhighway, people began to raise huge questions about the future of our cultural heritage. Would, for example, people read from the printed page any more? Would books exist in 50 years time?

The answer looked like Yes. After all, the theatre had survived the cinema. The cinema has survived television. Film was now making something of a recovery. This was the year of box office hits like Four Weddings and a Funeral, Forrest Gump and The Lion King.

Nevertheless, television had turned most people into watchers rather than doers. As more and more people sat working at their computers and faxes at home the community of office of factory life began to disappear.

And while all this was happening in the wealthier world, in whole areas elsewhere nothing had changed. For the poor and simple villager there was no superhighway. The bitter civil wars and the suffering went on. There were still two worlds, and perhaps an even wider divide.

Yet the reconciliation in South Africa had brought great hope and expectation far beyond its boundaries. It had sent a message of hope to tens of millions more around the world that peoples of different creeds, colours and races could heal their divisions. The impossible could happen.

Archbishop Tutu had summed it up in three letters. WOW

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