

Security for Women

Violence against women has not lessened since Yasmin was raped and killed in police custody some two and a half months ago in Dinajpur. On the contrary, it is on the rise giving hoots to national and international consternation over the Yasmin outrage. Teenager Marzina of Chuadanga has since fallen victim to a sex orgy by some railway policemen. Then, Dilara of Beanibazar, Sylhet, gets beaten blue by 101 whiplashes sentenced by a diabolical three-member *salish* committee on her refusal to marry a crony of the village influentials. And to remind us of the mutilation and wailing of not a few minor girls, preyed upon by motley sexual perverts, the latest story says that Fatema, the 10-year-old daughter of a day labourer in Cox's Bazar was whisked off to a hillside and gang-raped.

Between the incidents what we have is the appearance of lawmen and protectors in the diametrically opposite role of violators of sacred trusts and the proof of a failure to curb brutalisation of girls in the society at large.

Against this backdrop, and for very justified reasons, we believe, the *Sammilita Nari Samaj* voiced on Monday their markedly strident protests against mounting violence on women, epitomised by the Yasmin episode and even otherwise evidenced thereafter. We express our solidarity with the concerns voiced about repression on women and lend our unreserved support to their cause. Needless to say, irresolution of a case as gravely outrageous as the Yasmin one can send a very wrong signal to potential offenders of the same ilk, let alone criminal elements in general.

We repeat our call for bringing about the much-needed police reforms in consultation with women's rights activists across the national spectrum. Among other things, let us have more women in the police force to effect a behavioural change in police dealings with the public specially with the women.

If we want more and more women on the work-place then we must be prepared to throw around them impregnable rings of security and protection.

Text Book Crisis

Earlier school students from class VI to IX were made to suffer at the beginning of their new academic year. Now the college students of class XI are facing the same crisis of text books. All because there is none to give a serious thought to a matter of such vital importance. Long before the academic year begins anywhere in the world, all preparations are made to supply new books to the market. This is to ensure that students get their books on time. The concerned authorities have shown a lax attitude to the whole process of selecting, publishing and marketing books.

The price, however, is being paid by the students — in both cash and kind. Reports have it that text books of the higher secondary class are selling at prices 50 to 100 per cent higher than the prices originally fixed by the board. This is because those books are in short supply.

According to the chairman of the Higher Secondary Certificate Board, it is the responsibility of some designated publishers to print and market the books. Before the publishers were given the charge, they surely had to sign a contract under which they must have been required to deliver the books within a stipulated time. Have they failed to do that?

One reason given for the delay in printing books is the short supply of paper in the market. Scarcity of paper had hit the printing of school books earlier. That should have offered a good lesson for bracing up to meet the crisis this time around. But it seems we refuse to learn and are happy to create chaos from which some people reap rich but illegal dividends. A thorough investigation into the matter is urgently needed to determine who is at fault and where things went wrong. And this should be the last time that students of any class suffered due to delayed publication of text books.

Better Deal for Chittagong

Our only port city, Chittagong is heating up — politically speaking. The mayor of that city's corporation has appealed to popular passion for development of both the city and the district. An ultimatum has also been given to the government to meet the 28-point charter of demands. With his political leanings the mayor certainly runs the risk of being branded as a man who advances the opposition cause and strikes an awkward blow to the government in time of its crisis and before the general election.

However, this would be only too simplistic an explanation to the problems facing Chittagong. Most of the demands put forward have genuine merit and deserved to be met long before and without asking for it. Failure to address such problems gives rise to regionalism and leads everyone onto a confrontational course. This is not conducive to healthy politics or to desirable development of the country as a whole. The mayor of Chittagong has led a crusade but by issuing an ultimatum he seems to have gone overboard.

True, the Chittagonians have every right to pursue objectives they consider will do good to them but before issuing an ultimatum there was a need for them to try other means to get their demands met like representations, dialogue and negotiations. We are not aware if the mayor has done so. If he has, he surely failed to inform the nation. At any rate, we ask for restraint and a negotiated solution to the problems.

Poverty Alleviation and Economic Growth

The development of an intensive irrigated agriculture with triple cropping and emphasis on high value horticulture crops, combined with the suggested priorities for non-crop subsector of agriculture possess the biggest potential to achieve the desirable breakthrough in poverty alleviation

IN Bangladesh, the extent of poverty is simply mind boggling. At the end of each day, 40 per cent of the population fail to secure the minimum calorie needs. As a result, both the body and brain shrink in size. On the other hand, as much as 75 per cent of the population is short of a nourishing diet, lacking in essential protein, minerals and vitamins. This is the agonizing and brutal depth of poverty. Except for the very few at the margin, practically, we all are a nation of malnourished, poverty-stricken people.

A recent UN report on poverty begins with the sentence that over a billion poor of the world receive a daily income of less than one US dollar. The average per capita income in Bangladesh is less than 60 cents a day and if we wish to raise it to one US dollar a day, we must achieve the growth rate of over 8 per cent per annum and sustain it over the next ten years. Even then, we will remain poor and over 8 per cent sustainable growth rate is a difficult, if not an impossible, proposition. So are we going to remain perpetually poor and prove it to be the bottom-less basket case?

In all probability, our per capita income will remain less than a dollar a day by the year 2005. However, poverty should be substantially alleviated, if we reorient our policies, plans and programmes and aim them at two specific directions: (i) those which simultaneously enable economic growth through increase in production on the one hand and poverty alleviation on the other; and, (ii) a second set of measures focused exclusively on reducing poverty. Economic growth implies increase in production. A 10 per cent growth of the economy in a given year would imply that the total value of all goods and services

produced in the country has gone up by 10 per cent without involving any price increase. However, such double-digit growth rate would not automatically reduce poverty. It is the quality of economic growth and the composition of goods and services produced, that determine the extent of poverty alleviation through generation of employment and improved income distribution.

If the increase in GDP is largely due to the opening of a huge fertilizer factory and new natural gas production, then its immediate impact in terms of employment is minimum and hence the growth would hardly bring about any poverty alleviation. On the other hand, if the growth is largely due to increase in agricultural production, then the landless through increased wage income would gain and the impact of economic growth on poverty alleviation would be much more. Thus new road building programmes for Dhaka city or additional Bitan aircraft or expanded government housing would have very little impact in terms of reducing poverty while the same investment directly for the purpose of increasing agricultural output might not only increase output and therefore promote economic growth, but the employment and income effect would percolate down to the rural poor as well.

A reappraisal of the total public investment package from the point of view of its impact on employment in general and income or welfare of the poorest 40 per cent of the population in particular, is urgently required. For example, in rural

Bangladesh, the priority must obviously be on—

- Irrigation-drainage rather than rural road building washed away every summer;
- Rural aquaculture instead of trawler fishing in the Bay of Bengal;
- Small-scale rural poultry enterprises and not large-scale poultry industries in peri-urban areas;
- Cooperative dairy development following MILKVITA model replacing big scale cattle loans to large operators; and,
- Social agro-forestry and small holders forestry as the

substitute of the traditional government owned plantations. The development of an intensive irrigated agriculture with triple cropping and emphasis on high value horticulture crops, combined with the suggested priorities for non-crop subsector of agriculture possess the biggest potential to achieve the desirable breakthrough in poverty alleviation within the next five years.



Window on Asia

Shahed Latif

try. The labour-intensive manufacturing for export is not the domain of public investment and government should only act as the facilitator through policy prescriptions rather than large public investment.

A major reorientation of public investment policies are also required in the field of education and health. The emphasis should be on primary education, skill training and on-formal functional literacy programmes so that a 90 per cent literacy rate is achieved within a ten-year period. At present, higher education absorbs a large part of the education budget. It should be altered while instituting a large scholarship fund and student loan programme for poor, well-deserving students. The massive allocation of funds for universities and colleges

cannot be justified in the light of a true poverty focused development plan and the institutions of higher learning should realize the cost of education from the beneficiaries. Similarly in the health sector, the major allocation should be devoted to primary health and reproductive health care programmes; while hospital based treatment facilities should largely belong to the private sector, suitably supported by health insurance funds and selective subsidy from the government.

The second set of measures directly relevant to poverty alleviation includes Grameen Bank type credit distribution, nutrition intervention, food subsidy, mother and child health care projects etc. Here, the primary intention is not enhanced production but redistribution of existing assets or improved health and enhanced work capacity with visible impact on poverty alleviation — although immediate gains in terms of production increase may or may not be there.

The immensity of the nutrition problem is all too well known. At the same time, it is hardly realized that a large part of the problem is due to lack of proper nutrition knowledge. For example, iodized salt can eliminate the problem of goiter or adequate consumption of green vegetables easily available in the villages can remove the problem of vitamin A deficiency, responsible for causing blindness. Similarly, knowledge of simple primary health care measures like drinking boiled or purified water, personal hygiene or proper sanitation are fairly

inexpensive and within the reach of the poorest, provided proper extension works are carried out. The case of breast feeding and child care can also be disseminated at a very little cost. These are the activities which can give fairly high returns in terms of better health and are within the available means of the government.

Basically, income, health and education are the three areas of priority for any poverty alleviation programme. In the context of Bangladesh, it should be focused on the following specific programme areas:

- Investment to expand as rapidly as possible intensive irrigated agriculture followed by intensive rural aquaculture, poultry and dairy;
- Efforts to increase labour intensive manufacturing through small scale enterprise development;
- A well organised programme of rural industrialization with particular attention to rural artisans (weavers) and agro-processing;
- Primary and rural non-formal education as opposed to university education; and
- Primary health care including reproductive health services as opposed to curative health programmes.

In the year 2005, our per capita income may be less than a dollar a day. Nonetheless, it would still be possible to bring the entire population to a level of satisfactory nourishment. It is feasible that within the next ten years, all the citizens will be above the poverty line. No doubt, the majority would still be poor but not absolutely poor and the vast majority would be literate and in reasonable good health. Given the magnitude and intensity of poverty in only 56,000 square miles of territory, certainly it would be a mind boggling achievement.

The Disconcerting Signals and the Intelligentsia

by A Q Rasulpuri

The immediate agenda for the intelligentsia should be to make efforts to break the stalemate, make the Jatiya Sangsad effective by creating a national pressure on the concerned parties

PERHAPS every citizen of the country is concerned of the problems the nation is facing today. But few indulge in in-depth thoughts emanating from a measure of ingenuity and patriotism towards their solution. It is due to the indifference, unimaginativeness or lack of insight on the part of the intelligentsia who are supposed to be the conscience keeper of the nation? The reason is any body's guess. But it is maintained that generally the educated class or the intelligentsia secluded them, so to say, from the unabated problems deepening every day. Have they resigned to the situation and become fatalistic though fatalism has no place in mundane affairs, much less in our religion?

In the post-liberation period the emergence of various fora of intelligentsia enkindled some hope in the mind of the nation in as much as they were expected to work as a beacon light in the most important zones of the problem-ridden nation. Are they fulfilling that role? Perhaps not totally. Many

thought that these fora would contribute significantly in influencing the national affairs. Be that as it may, we should consider these fora as really a people's welfare fora — a cradle of free thoughts and ideas dedicated to the cause of the people, also as a vehicle for social and international mobilisation for the uplift and solution of national problems. We know they are led and guided by talents and personalities of national and international fame. If they desire they can show the nation a brighter path and help it come out of dangers lurking before it today.

How should we prioritise national problems endangering us sooner than imagined? The institutionalisation of democracy and the present stalemate causing immense loss and suffering to the nation, Farakka and transboundary river problem, the population explosion, natural disasters, the poverty alleviation, the educational problem, the value-erosion problem, the law and order problem, the supremacy of black money, the accountability and transparency problem have

belegged the nation and need prioritisation in solving them. It seems that all of them are interlinked and mutually reinforcing each other. The fora should address themselves seriously to solve these problems with the assistance of renowned experts, professionals, thinkers etc. In the process they should use the media off and on for national and international mobilisation in their favour. The fora can form, if necessary, sub-committees for each problem at professional and expert level and try to seek out a solution for each of the crucial problems the nation is presently facing. The nation seems to have reached the precipice and the intelligentsia should exert themselves wholeheartedly for survival honourably.

The present Jatiya Sangsad built upon toll and

teas as well as free, fair and impartial election was considered to be the means for institutionalisation of democracy and hub for discussion and solution of national problems. The opposition parties, however, from the very beginning have accused the ruling party of making the Jatiya Sangsad ineffective.

The treasury bench also brought the same accusation against the opposition. Perhaps the feeling of the masses is that the Jatiya Sangsad neither in the past nor in the present could rise to the level of expectation the nation had from it. Though the nation perhaps could not get the expected benefit from this Sangsad yet the educated section of the society is not raising its voice in this respect as desired. The concept of institutionalisation of democracy and in-

stitution of democratic culture in the polity seems to be thrown into the wind.

The Farakka Barrage is proving to be a death-trap for the nation. The Prime Minister raised the issue in the UN General Assembly and sought cooperation and good-will of the neighbouring country for the solution of this long-drawn humanitarian problem.

But the opposition parties dubbed it as a political gimmick. The intelligentsia should now rise to the occasion in one voice and create ground-work internationally for honourable settlement of water-sharing issue among the riparian countries under the aegis of regional and international bodies. The recent devastating flood should be the sharp eye opener. The intelligentsia should hold more national debates as to the solution of Farakka problem and the construction of the proposed barrage down

the Hardinge Bridge for storage of water and solution of water problem all over the country. The environmental degradation and desertification process which the Farakka has imposed on the country, should attract the nationalist forces for its solution.

People may think that the educated class is not worth its salt and they are not living up to the expectation the nation has reposed on them. The immediate agenda for the intelligentsia should be to make efforts to break the stalemate, make the Jatiya Sangsad effective by creating a national pressure on the concerned parties and build up an atmosphere where other crucial national problems can be debated for solution. Or, at least force a national consensus as to the modality of holding next Jatiya Sangsad elections in an atmosphere of peace.

To the Editor...

Our politicians and political parties

Sir, More than two decades have passed since our country achieved its independence. However, watching the country's development, nobody would realise why our freedom fighters sacrificed their lives. One of the main causes for this stagnation of progress is the absence of patriotic spirit among our political parties — parties whose leaders are more interested in rapid increase of their wealth, power and fame, as it is apparent.

In a poor country like ours we need hardworking and honest leaders who would really care for the people and the economy of the nation. Instead, we have the ill luck of having leaders who are only competent in calling hartals, demonstrations and terrorizing the public.

It seems once a party comes to power, the opposition parties would form alliance to oust the government. Once their task is finished, election will commence, a new party will come to power and the process of ousting is again repeated. The lust for power and perhaps also wealth is more than their love for country.

These political parties call hartals whenever they desire, regardless of the difficulties caused to the common people. Later on, they call these hartals a success. The leaders fail to understand that the public remain at home simply because they do not want

to get beaten up or stripped off their clothes by the hartal callers.

The time has come for us to get rid of this type of politicking in our country and start afresh for everything. Although we have lost precious time, we have a future to look at. A future where our country would be recognized as a leading nation. A country where the future of the students is not destroyed by hartals and infighting. I just wish sanity prevails on our political leaders for the uplift of the country.

Tamsid Farhat
Dhaka

Noise pollution

Sir, The officials working in the Motijheel Commercial Area are under constant threat of noise pollution. Apart from the noise of moving cars, trucks and buses, their hoarse honking is directly affecting the brain nerves. One cannot work in such an environment. It is only the officials who work in closed airconditioned rooms may avert this type of noise pollution.

But the officials who are working outside the airconditioned rooms simply withstand victims to this sound hazard. Constant exposure to this type of undesirable high pitch sounds may impair one's listening power. Such sound is always having negative effect on our brains. The heart-patients are the worst sufferers. The environmental pollution department is only looking into industrial pollution. We have not heard any-

thing about the control of noise in the city. Will the authority think over it and take some measures to save the hazard of noise pollution.

Mahbul Haque Chowdhury
Sonali Bank, Dhaka

Border connection

Sir, The beginning of border trade between Bangladesh and Myanmar opens up a corridor of cooperation which can work as a bridge in between SAARC and ASEAN states as well.

The continuing business relation with this nearest neighbour can be regarded as a formal recognition to her undemocratic government that has been defying the global respect for adult franchise.

Businesswise, "democratic" Bangladesh can make profits out of the economic deals more than merely gesturing diplomatic etiquette.

Their friendly ties, however, can be tightened with frequent cultural exchanges coupled with thematic tourism while exploring all other types of markets plus setting up joint venture plants.

Similar border trades at different convenient points with the other adjacent neighbour will also help promote international understanding.

Expectedly the positive outcome will depend largely on the amiable attitude toward completely curbing smuggling by surface.

Now that the channel of interaction has been made for each other, such a mutually should facilitate the process of rehabilitating the (Rohingya) refugees faster back on their home soil.

M Rahman
Zila School Road, My-mensingh

"Postscript"

Sir, I have read the *Postscript* published in your esteemed daily on 6th October under the caption 'Brave New World of Neo-Politics' by Neeman A Sobhan.

I was immensely amused by Ms. Sobhan's style of depicting the trend of the political scene in our country, as sad as it may be, and as devastatingly it is moving into a sheer unmanageable pit. It is indeed unbelievable how the one of our two 'godmothers' as Ms. Sobhan called them holds forth relentlessly "the right to vote — and food" (for good measure!), while the other, queenly and unbending, is "protecting democracy" even when we are quite obviously going down the drain.

If and when it actually comes to voting, I will be at a total loss for whom to vote. For Sheikh Hasina? No, thank you. For Khaleda Zia? Not really. For Ershad? You kidding? For Jamaat-e-Islami? How could I! So? I suppose I will have to stay at home and put my precious Identity Card into my document file. Who knows, maybe I will need it one day.

L Rafique
Khulna

Art
Buchwald's
COLUMN

Anybody Home?

I always know that the Ackmans have had a domestic spat when I walk into their house and they are sitting with their backs to each other, staring at the walls.

They both work and their income is just about equal. But according to Elaine Ackman, their domestic responsibilities are not.

Elaine explained, "If, in the eyes of the law, we are the same, when it comes to house repairs, why do I have to stay at home and wait for the repairman and he doesn't?"

Barry said, "Everyone has the answer to that. Women know how to talk to repairman and men don't. Besides, people at work will excuse a woman being late because of a household problem but my boss would never approve of me telling him that I had to wait for the plumber."

Elaine protested, "My job is just as important as yours." Ackman said, "You know that and I know that, but the people at my firm, where I happen to be vice president, never bought it."

Elaine asked, "When one of the kids gets sick why does the female in the family always get elected to stay home?" "It's a practical reason," Barry said. "A man is not trained to take care of a sick child, while illness is right up a working woman's alley. I believe in sharing all the domestic chores, but I can only do so much to keep this family afloat."

I could see Elaine was getting more and more annoyed. She turned to me, "It's not just sitting at home waiting for someone to install a new telephone line. It's the message that Barry is sending with it."

"Indirectly, he's saying that his job has priority over my job, his title is more important than mine and, while he has no objection to what I contribute to the pot, I'm still expected to be the keeper of the gate."

"Elaine has a point," I told Barry. "Maybe you should alternate your appointments with the workmen."

I could tell that Ackman did not consider my suggestion helpful. "Even though I don't have time to devote to these situations doesn't mean that I don't care. I can see a worst-case scenario where Elaine has the flu, the furnace man is coming, the kids have the day off from school and a fraternity brother is stopping in Richmond on his way to Florida. Then I'd be more than happy to stay home, though heaven knows what good it would do."

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