

Stop Child Trafficking

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has hinted that her government will not hesitate to go for stricter laws to curb trafficking in and repression of children. The Women and Children Oppression (special provision) Act, 1995 is already severe enough and hardly leaves much scope for making provision for more severe punishment. Perpetrators of, among other offences, women and children trafficking (section 8 and 12) are punishable with death sentences or life imprisonment. We have no doubt about the prime minister's intention to seriously deal with this odious trade. But she should be fully aware that the problem does not actually lie so much with laws as with its proper implementation.

In fact, some people are arguing that the Women and Children Oppression Act is too severe to have the desired effect, and also its excessive severity is proving somewhat counterproductive. We do not subscribe to this opinion yet, but we do recognise that the Cruelty to Women (deterrent punishment) Ordinance of 1983 provided for severe punishment for similar offences. However, in the absence of its application, the law did not have much of a deterrent effect. So, what we need is to: a) apply the law in earnest and; b) ensure that the police do their duty honestly and seriously. It is unthinkable that trafficking in children and women can go on without their knowledge. If both traffickers and erring members of law enforcing agency are given exemplary punishment even in a handful of cases, that will have tremendous impact on the deterrence of child trafficking.

Since trafficking in women and children is a cross-border affair, to arrest it there is a need for co-operation between countries — at least the regional ones. Children smuggled out of the country are used as cheap labourers, for organ transplant, prostitution etc. When they are used for the purpose of organ transplant, it is easily identifiable if the government of the receiving country/countries are serious. So here is an area — non-political and simply humanitarian — where Bangladesh, India and Pakistan can work together to root out an evil and inhuman practice.

Illegal Druggists

According to a report published in yesterday's issue of a leading Bengali daily, a huge number of illegal pharmacies are doing brisk business in greater Chittagong. Some three thousand unlicensed medical stores are operating in five districts of that region.

It would make any sentient citizen shudder to even imagine the manifold additional and avoidable health hazards the ailing population of those areas have been subjected to all this while. We do not know the extent of damage but surely there must have been some by this time because the druggists who could be unscrupulous enough to make money by hoodwinking the laws of the land in matters related to public health can be sufficiently inhuman at anytime to thrive on things that have the potential of augmenting sufferings instead of abating them.

Apart from this dangerous possibility the other matter of concern is the huge revenue the government is being deprived of due to these illegal traders. There is hardly any scope for rationalising this streak of economic truculence on the ground of the tax rates being exorbitant as they are in most cases. It is very reasonable in the context of the present market price.

It seems the chronic and common characteristic of most business to evade tax has led to the creation of this dangerous and abnormal situation. The report has it that although the Drug Administration Directorate (DAD), the government agency in this respect, sent repeated exhortations to procure legal papers through the Bangladesh Chemists and Druggists Association (BCD), these druggists preferred to pay no attention to them — a prolonged practice of flouting government laws, that has finally forced the DAD to take legal measures.

While welcoming this move, we would expect the DAD to evolve a mechanism through which illegal druggists are brought to the book more quickly. Besides, it should check the loopholes in its system and go for a stricter but simpler policy in issuing licences.

Cleaning Dhaka

It was good to see The Daily Star pioneered Save Dhaka, Clean Dhaka campaign get on the roll last Friday with hundreds of scouts lending their vigilance and inspiration to the cause of saving the city from the curse of garbage. But as a scout leader and teacher observed the success of all such campaigns was their sustainability. The present campaign should not be allowed to lose its edge in ceremonialism and symbolic significance. Although the Dhaka City Corporation had the scouts as bolstering agents with them on that day, they would do well on to remain focused on the truth that it is essentially their battle and the prospect of success rests heavily on their efficiency and complementary relationship with the city dwellers.

DCC's mode of daily cleaning operation is one area which calls for modernisation. Not only should they increase the number of sweepers, the DCC should do something about the manner the truck loads of garbage are transported to their destinations. The vehicles should be restructured or redesigned so that garbage while being whisked away do not get spilled and defeat the very purpose of removing them.

Then thoughts should be directed to the necessity of cleanliness of those who handle the filth — the sweepers in every sense of the word. Not only should they be provided with baskets good enough to hold the load of rubbish on their way to the vehicles but also gloves to keep them relatively clean from the muck.

But DCC's singular effort is far from being enough to give Dhaka even a touch of cleanliness. The city dwellers must learn to do their part of throwing the domestic garbage at the assigned places.

Building Construction and Failure

by Meer Mobashsher Ali

In a society responsibility is a function of legislation and laws. In this country there are no laws regarding building construction except Building Construction Act 1952 which is rudimentary and obsolete. There is no law saying that buildings beyond certain size are to be designed by Architects and structural designs are to be done by Engineers.

An under-construction seven-storey building in Kalabagan failed in the early hours of 16 September 1996 killing six workers who were sleeping in one of the floors. Being a professional I went to see the fallen building the next day. I was shocked to see the condition. In my professional life I have not come across any thing like this. I have seen building floors falling down, beams giving in, columns and walls cracking, foundations settling down, etc. But the whole building turning on one edge — and tumbling down flat like a tree is an unimaginable and unexpected phenomenon. This proves total lack of knowledge and utter negligence on the part of the people responsible for the construction.

The building had possibly been put up on filled ground over a pond or ditch about which the builder was unaware or unconcerned. The side of the building on the soft filled ground settled so much so that the building inclined on one edge and the columns on the other side tore off like paper. As a result, the whole building collapsed instantaneously without any warning, killing all inside the structure.

The Daily Star was outraged and wrote an editorial on the incident titled "RAJUK must explain". It demanded we want to see the system work — and work efficiently. The system can only work if there is one. Unfortunately in Bangladesh the system has not yet been established. How can a system work that has not been set up. In response to the editorial, RAJUK gave an explanation. It clearly mentioned: As far as

for this colossal failure of the building. As a matter of fact, except for the owner nobody is responsible. Responsibility means legal responsibility. In a society responsibility is a function of legislation and laws. In this country there are no laws regarding building construction except Building Construction Act 1952 which is rudimentary and obsolete. There is no law saying that buildings beyond certain size are to be designed by Architects and structural designs are to be done by Engineers.

As a matter of fact there is no regulation regarding who can call himself an Architect or Engineer because there is no registration board/council for Architects and Engineers. In this case the owner being a contractor was possible both architect and engineer. There is no law regulating the conduct and mode of operation of the consultants. For how long the consultant has the responsibility? If the building fails after one year of construction, to what extent the consultant is responsible? etc etc. An expatriate consultant once wanted to know from me for how long the consultant had to save the original drawings. In some countries consultants have to save the drawing for twelve years. We have no such law or regulations.

Subsoil condition is to be investigated before an engineer can properly design the building. Some owners go for subsoil investigation, some do not. For very small plots investigation are not always done. They look into the soil reports of surrounding plots and get an idea from that. In this case, possibly no subsoil investigation was

legislated. In Bangladesh there is no building code. RAJUK has a set of by-laws which are primarily set-back rules. This deserves appreciation that RAJUK on its own authority has

to compensate. Consultants, meaning professionals, are usually insured. So the bulk of the compensation came from the insurance company. In Bangladesh there is no provision for the insurance of professionals — Doctors, Engineers or Architects.

So far we have not established if anybody scrutinizes the structural design of a building. Usually the loan-giving agency scrutinizes reviews the plans and structural design. House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC) and banks usually make sure of the stability and soundness of the design before approving the loan. They have the most of loose, if the project does not materialise. For an HBFC loan structural drawings are to be submitted. In this case (Kalabagan) possibly no loan was taken.

Secretary, RAJUK, in his explanation concludes by saying, "RAJUK makes fervent appeal to the people to construct their building according to plan approved by RAJUK, using good and reliable building materials". This is very nice but technically good and reliable material does not mean anything. The materials are to be properly specified indicating their properties, quality, method of use and precautions to be taken. In the market, quality of materials are to be ensured by Bangladesh Standard Institution (BSI). With all construction drawings there has to be a set of specifications specially outlined for the building.

In Bangladesh there is no legislation of building code. RAJUK has a set of by-laws which are primarily set-back rules. This deserves appreciation that RAJUK on its own authority has

weight had been his lifelong

problem and now it nearly grounded him. He made no programme on stage and occasionally granted interviews to TV viewers. Thanks to his numerous cassettes the air waves of Turkey have been full of the velvety voice of Zeki Muren.

Zeki Muren burst on the Turkish stage in 1950 and has not looked back ever since. He has shaken the world of music and entertainment like no other artist of his time. His velvety voice, words dripping like



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

hooting and honking and firing in the air. An eerie calm descended throughout this vast metropolis.

The President of Turkey Suleyman Demirel as indeed all the leaders have rushed to offer condolences on the occasion of the passing away of this giant from the stage. Zeki Muren has left his considerable wealth to the 'cancer waif'.

There is a beautiful windmill in Bodrum, a favorite walk for Zeki Muren. In one interview he expressed a desire to be buried there. Bodrum had become his home after the stage. Bodrum received a microphone as gift, the microphone that he held in his hand for forty-five years. Dragging his corpulent body with difficulty on the stage, dressed as usual with all the finery for which he had become famous, Muren received the gift and

To the Editor

Flimsy polybag — and excuse

Sir, Your recent third editorial on the caprices of the flimsy but versatile plastic shopping bag known as polybag appears to be flimsy itself, comparing my experience of ten years stay in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. All along my family used similar type of bags for shopping, and for packing the daily garbage before dumping it into the garbage bin, which we had to install outside the gate as per government regulation. It was illegal to dump loose garbage anywhere else.

The authority never banned such bags, and we never heard or read of any complaint against it, as we read here. I do not know if the bags used were environment-friendly and recyclable. Our jute paper experiment appears to have fizzled out. Can't we manufacture thin, flimsy, and cheap jute bags to replace the present polybags? The R&D cost can be easily recovered as the consumption is huge; and the BCSIR do not need a dollar grant.

Our garbage culture is also not disciplined albeit we produce more garbage and throw it indiscriminately in more unauthorized places; including the open, transparent, but dense drains. Speaking development-wise, our drains cannot keep pace with our garbage development. The complaint of the DCC is to be taken with a grain of salt (without iodine), as any garbage, of any material, in sufficient volume, can choke our under-development drains, depending on the diameter of the latter.

Some research may be carried out on this allegation, and the legitimate place of polybags in our society may be re-established to the satisfaction of the millions of users who cannot afford it. The politicians appear to be more dispensable — how to dispose off political garbage!

A Z Dhaka

sonality like Mr Rashid Suhrawardy but I am unable to place him. His surname and claim of close connection with the Awami League may suggest some kind of relationship with Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy. However, the latter was married to a daughter of Sir Abdur Rahim who died before she gave birth to her first child she was expecting. Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy remained a widower for the rest of his life.

We would like to know who is Mr Rashid who claims the name of Suhrawardy and the background of his interest in Bangladesh politics.

Luful Quadir Dhaka

Telephone pangs

Sir, The '40' series telephone numbers i.e. connection numbers from 40-0000 to 40-9999 emanate from the Maghbarat Exchange. This exchange which gives access to these 10 thousand connections is a very old one, possibly the oldest among all the existing analogue exchanges.

Of late, 4000 connections (40-0000 to 40-3999) have been converted to digital with '911' series. The rest 6000 connections are still in the same old exchange. The subscribers with all '40' series connection are for long deprived of getting smooth service because of very old exchange.

Recently the situation has deteriorated further. Most of the telephone connections with number from 40-4000 to 40-9999 are not functioning properly. It is hard to find these connections in proper order. It has become a nightmare to one who happens to be a subscriber to one of these numbers.

I urge upon the BTTB to look into the matter seriously. I would request BTTB to convert these balance 6000 connections into digital with '911' series as was done with other 4000 connections or alternatively renovate/overhaul the old exchange thoroughly. BTTB, please clarify.

M R R Khan
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US and UN in Gulf and Middle East

Sir, Israel has desperately defied UN Security Council's resolution by re-opening the tunnel adjacent to the holy mosque. Defying the world body is a serious offence but where is the UN and its Security Council? Where is the United States? One cannot think of what would have been the reaction and action of the US and UN Security Council if this sort of offence were committed by Iraq. Only the other day, we silently observed how Iraq was attacked by the US even without any provocation. Mr Clinton kept his mouth shut when Israeli troops murdered so many Palestinians within mosque area. Nobody condemned Netanyahu for his barbarous act from the US.

It clearly indicates that the United Nations is only for US and its allies, not for the Third World. It is a point to be noted that if Mr Clinton had so much love for the Kurds, where was he before the Gulf war? What action was taken by the UN and US to safeguard the Kurdish community before the war?

It is clear that in the name of peace the US has made their presence solid and deep-rooted in Gulf area in order to control oil and rule over the Muslim

people of the region. The US has made their presence solid and deep-rooted in Gulf area in order to control oil and rule over the Muslim

Sir, I don't know what Sikandar Rana did really expect from the young women, if it is about the Islamic conception and prohibition on lipsticks or if it is the danger of lipsticks, which most women are unconsciously or even consciously consuming. I think, if lipsticks are used in a decent manner, it would certainly enhance one's beauty. It obviously adds new glamour to a girl, even if she has an ordinary face. This conception of a "new-glamour" is well-recognised all over the world and so the lipsticks are always in vogue for centure.

But, if a woman intentionally paints or dresses herself only for the purpose to attract the male, it is obviously disappointing. Because, it is for this reason Islam has made paintings of faces prohibited. And also the use of perfumes, roaming without cloaks and certain other things have been prohibited. However, nowadays, according to one's own convenience one can choose one's own way of living. But, one has to keep in mind that she or he should avoid which is considered as vulgar or obscene.

So, according to one's own suitable consideration a woman or a girl should dress herself, paint herself or use lipsticks. And if the lipsticks are proved not that dangerous by scientists and if they are free from any harmful animal fat — then, why worry for a little bit of lipsticks?

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DSE and the crowd

Sir, Good news. At the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), business is booming. Hundreds of young and old enthusiastic traders and share investors throng the roads of Motijheel Commercial Area near Modhuma Cinema Hall as the DSE authority fails to accommodate the people inside its office building. One cannot believe the unbelievable scene unless he or she himself/herself visits the site. The road is jammed and the traffic is disrupted. It appears as if a big public meeting is being held.

The great assembly of people is mounting day by day and one wonders how the authorities concerned are going to solve the problem of mammoth crowd in front of DSE building at Motijheel.

Do the Dhaka city Mayor, Metropolitan Police Commissioner or anybody else have any solution to this in their mind?

Where there is a will there is a way. Why don't we use the playground of Stadium No 2 in front of Gulistan Cinema Hall which always remains vacant in the morning hours and save the congestion at Motijheel C/A during peak hours?

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OPINION

We Wish They Really Mean Business

Through this write-up I take this opportunity to draw your (and your esteemed readers) attention to two problems which have a common simple solution.

Problem #1 : A person's wife is in expecting a child and she is in prolonged labour, but does not want to go through a caesarean operation. Problem #2 : A person is in a tight financial condition but has a rich old father who is not willing to hand over his (the son's) share of the property, the son does not dare to dirty his hands, but wishes the old man croaked. Well the solution is simple : Put them in an auto rickshaw and pay the driver. Twenty taka to drive from Rushmoni Clinic at Moghbazar across the Wireless Rail-gate, make a U-turn, and come back. One simple ride on this distance of about a kilometre will do the trick. In the first case, the mother will definitely give birth in the latter the old man is bound to have a heart attack. Such is the condition of this road (well if you can call it a 'road' any more)! You may call it a 'road' any more! You may call it a 'road' any more!

But have you seen this Mr Mayor? I believe not. Why should you? You do not live around here. Nor does any of our Ministers, MPs, or public leaders. No one living here invites any of these leaders into their homes to have a cup of tea either. Why? Because we, the scores of thousands of people who live here and have to use this road atleast twice a day to and from our work, are so fed up, so infuriated, so disgusted, so frustrated that, we do not wish that even our enemies have to pass through this ordeal, let alone our near and dear relatives. And inviting one of these leaders would only cost you your tea. Because all they will do is, thank you for the snacks (may be), tell you some nice words, sympathise with you, give a few sweet assurances, and stay clear off the whole issue.

I remember the beaming face of the local MP who had visited the area once before, and once immediately after the last election. That was the last that we had seen of him. And I believe, if he does come now, he would drive in a posh 4WD Pajero or Patrol and miss half the fun of the roller coaster ride. To these leaders I say, if you have the guts, come in an auto rickshaw, as we have to do in day and day out. I can tell you that you face would not wear that smile any longer.

Through this write-up I ask our Mayor to stop complaining about the past government, during which period, according to him, his hands were tied. Now that your party is in power, show us that you really care. To our public leaders I say, please show us that what you preach in the name of development, is actually true, and not merely big talk. Prove to us that when you begged forgiveness for your past misdeeds and broken promises, and now promised to make a better future for the people of this country, this time you really meant business in the truest sense, not you own business again.

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Fake modeling agency

Sir, Of late, "modeling" has come up as a super-drooper profession in our country. That's why some fake modeling agencies are taking that opportunity, and for this, they insert advertisements in the newspapers that they are the megapolitans in this regard.

Lots of boys and girls are interested in these and make contracts with those agencies without any hesitation.

But that mephistophelian take that opportunity with ulterior motives and demand a lot of money to make them superstars. They are trying to mislead these young people. This is unfortunate. The authority concerned should take up this matter seriously.

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