

Law and Our Rights

ACTIVIST POWER: A New Dimension in Human Rights Enforcement Mechanism

by Abul Hasnat Monjurul Kabir

II THOUGH non government organisations or ■ NGOs have long been around, they now are emerging as a bold new force for change. Pressure groups are keeping governments on edge from Taipei to New Delhi. Whats more, they are being acceptedgrudgingly perhaps as essential for the regions development." Susan Berfield, Activist Power Hits Asia, Asia Week, De-

cember 6,1996. Life is suffering, the Buddha said, enunciating the first of his four Noble truths. In South Asia it is a reality that troubles us whichever street we live on. wherever we go. Homeless children imploring motorists at traffic lights for a few paise even as their tender lungs breathe in noxious fumes. The sick dying for want of medical care. The poor are deprived of their legal and fundamental rights as they can not seek justice from the judiciary due to huge expenses and for want of proper legal aid, the helpless people specially the destitute women are generally harassed by the law enforcing agencies. The opposition groups or activists of the government or party in power are often treated cruelly, ruthlessly. For millions in this region, the flame of hope is but a flicker.

As citizens of this country. there is much that each of us can do to prevent that flame from being snuffed out. Or to help it burn more brightly. Yet those of us who are better off

appear paralysed by the enormity of the problems confronting the region. We inure ourselves to the surrounding misery. It does twinge our conscience occasionally. But we sooth it by writing a cheaque to a local charity or throwing a few coins into battered tiffin carriers. Usually we do nothing more. Let someone else pick the dying off the roads Let orphans fend for themselves. Let the Government lock after the poor helpless people. After all aren't we paying our taxes?

Even if we did want to do something we ask ourselves where do I begin: can I really be of much help? In his poem "Road Not Taken" Robert Frost hints at the answer:

"Two roads diverged in a

wood, and I took the one less traveled And that has made all the

Since the end of the Second

difference.

World War and most especially since the end of the 1970s, there has been explosive emergence of local, national and international voluntary organisations working for the promotion and protection of human rights on every continent and almost every country in the world. Hundreds of such organisations now exist in the South Asian region. Infact things are changing dramatically. Various nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and groups of activists are now emerging as a bold new social force for change. Many

of the groups are increasingly keeping South Asian governments on edge. Their goals are often lofty. They want to reduce poverty, improve women's status and empower them, safeguard the environment, protect workers from abuse and consumers from fraud, expose corruption, bolster human rights and defend democracy. They work in Asia's villages and slums, they offer credit, vaccines, job training and legal aid. In some countries these non governmental organizations or NGOs provide services that governments do not. They wield banners when necessary and wheedle officials when possible. Atrocities caused by the law enforcing agencies, death in police custody, rape committed by law enforcers etc. sort of brutal violation of human rights now can not pass on without NGOs timely interven-

These NGOs, in all their diversity comprise a human rights movement that has taken us from a world in which governments are free to treat their citizens as brutally, callously or arbitrarily as they pleased to one in which politi-

cal authorities are now accountable to internationally defined standard of human rights. Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been the dynamo that has driven the struggle for self determination. the struggle for democratic pluralism, and the struggle for a more just economic order.

NGOs in the human rights arena perform a wide variety of functions. These will vary with the differing political, social, economic and cultural situations in which NGOs find themselves. The issues that absorb human rights NGOs in the developed western democracies and the strategies and tactics they will employ, will be very different from the issues of NGOs in situation of intense political repression, or of NGOs in Third World Countries facing such multiple crises as famine, ecological degradation, foreign debt, ethnic violence, lawlessness and corruption.

In a report by a non-governmental Advisory Group (Put Our World to Rights) published by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the functions of the NGOs regarding the protection promotion and en-

forcement of human rights are summarised under the follow-

ing nine heads: 1. Information Gathering. Evaluation and Dissemination (of Information).

2. Advocacy to stop Abuses and Secure Redress.

3. Legal aid, Scientific expertise and Humanitarian Assistance. 4. Lobbying National and In-

ternational Authorities. 5. Legislation to Incorporate or Develop Human Rights Standards.

6. Education, Conscientiza-

tion or Empowerment. 7. Building Solidarity among the different sections and classes.

8. Delivery of various social and technical services. 9. Keeping Open the political

system. Sadly there is still a tendency on the part of the governments of the South Asian countries to regard human rights NGOs with suspicion, to equate their criticism with treason or subversion. Thus human rights defenders in the forefront of the struggle are very much at risk in many areas of the world. The United

Nations Commission on Human Rights has established a Working Group on Defenders with a view to drafting a declaration for the better protection of human rights organisations

and advocates. Human Rights NGOs are now also playing crucial role in shaping and flourishing the concept of public interest law. Besides activism they go to court and take help of the formal justice system. No doubt the whole South Asia will be seeing more NGOs in the near future because they do make a difference and for that mil-

lions of Asians are thankful. The NGOs and activists took the path that many of us hesitate to take for want of time or caring. The road to change, as they found out is strewn with thorns. It is long and winding one, always uphill. But their journey has already made a re markable difference to the lives of the people they wanted to

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Madrasa And Some Strewn Thoughts

by Deena Munier

"The parents trust me with their children and my way of disciplining them; they pay Tk. 500-1,000 per month for that!" One of these children is the Principal's own son. If a father could do such horrible things to his own son, then what he can do to others is something not unimaginable.

HE moulana sahib of the madrasa is the Almighty's agent. send my son to study in his madrasa, so that he can learn Allah's scriptures and serve the moulana sahib as well. This will surely ensure entry to the heaven for me and my family." stated a mother of one of the madrasa-going child in one village in Sylhet. Many of her co-villagers share the same

Madrasa education as a parallel to formal education has become the most prioritized option in many areas of

Bangladesh. A predominantly

Muslim country. Bangladeshi

religiously as well as socially

conservative, parents prefer

sending their children to

madrasas than to schools. In a

recent community based study

carried out for UNDP in eighty

villages of seven districts, im-

portance and priority of reli-

gion in rural as well as urban

Many of the participants.

mainly the men, of this study emphasized though they do not ignore the need of formal education, but learning Allah's Kalam is more important. While prioritizing their problems, women ranked the problem of educating their children fourth, while the men ranked this sixth. While analyzing this problem they (both women and men) came up with causes like. number of school is insufficient, number of teachers and education materials are not enough, children are ridiculed for wearing torn clothes, not able to provide children with

1,000-3,000 per month) to the madrasas.

adequate food, etc.

While scoring the problems

children focused on the educa-

tion issue mainly. For many

education was the "only way to

reach our dreams." It was

viewed by many children as a

passport out of the deprivation

they are in. Some stigmatized

their parents for being unedu-

cated. It is very interesting to

notice the difference in priori-

tization of problems. Children

do feel the need for proper and formal education and parents

prefer madrasa. Besides the formal education has some hidden costs, such as, tuition fee (although education is supposed to be free up to primary level), examination fee, cost of books, uniforms etc as discovered through the study. Most of the parents are unable and find it unjustified to pay these costs

On the other hand, rural and most of the urban people are God-fearing and very conservative. Misinterpretation of the Holy Quran and convey of

wrong messages by many half-

literate moulanas do not help

the sturation! Therefore, the

very same parents who refuse to

pay the extra hidden costs to

education, exhaust all options

and try their utmost to come up

with the money to enroll their

have enough money to feed our

children, how could we even

think of providing them with

Their statement, "we do not

children into the madrasas.

education? They have to be alive in order to go to school", is contradicting the fact that they do pay high amounts of money (sometimes Tk. 1,000-3,000 per

Parents in rural areas have notions that their children will become small versions of Pirs with their madrasa background and will go straight to heaven, taking their parents along Heaven means eternal happiness, while life on this earth is only a matter of happiness for a certain period. Who is fool

month) to the madrasas.

enough to bother about twoday's happiness?

"We do not have enough money to feed our children, how could we even think of providing them with education? They have to be alive in order to go to school", is contradicting the fact that they do pay high amounts of money (sometimes Tk.

aberalisation. What po cur

So 'ne parents eagerly send

their children to madrasas. The

that their children at madrasas

are in good hands and therefore

there is no need for regular su-

rural parents are usually very busy with their strenuous and time-consuming jobs (sharecropping, daily labour, small shop keeping etc.) and hardly springs well-being. have time to keep contact with their children. They feel secure The government also supand comfortable with this idea

porting madrasa education by allocating 10% of the revenue budget of the Ministry of Edu-

1:00 Moov Usha Uthup Show

1:30 Vipul Ka Amar Prem 2:00

Money Game 2:30 Instinct Pu-

ruskeshtra 3:30 Zandu Balm

Dance Mania 4:00 Ajnabi 5:00

Meri Marzi 5:30 Yumkeenz Mast

Must Show 6:00 Dear EL 6:30

Snowchem Kal Bhi Aaj Bhi 7:00

Teri Bahi Chup Meri Bhi Chup

7:30 Abhinetri 7:50 Kinetic

Fride Haseen Pal 8:00 Boroplus

The Real Countdown 8:30

Prafful V3+ 9:00 Shatrani 9:30

Atco Ru Ba Ru 10:00 Stand By

10:10 Hollywood Se Bollywood 10:30 Navras 11:00 Manoran-

jan 11:30 Kinetic Pride Haseen

PTV

How far these children are safe in these "good hands" was discovered by journalists a few months back. First it was in Jessore — horrifying details of how children are punished for small mistakes were published in the dailies. Little time we had to get over this, suddenly another more scary investigation report on another madrasa in Chittagong and how the children are treated came out in a national daily.

There is no need to go into gory details of how the children were punished - we all have read the reports and seen the television news. How we felt is another issue all together. One of my relatives so called "educated" praised the system of controlling the "wild, uncouth creatures", since any other "less version of punishment" would fail to tame these creatures!

We should hold the parents responsible, not only the Principal who very boldly and with a straight face said in the TV camera that, "the parents trust me with their children and my way of disciplining them; they pay Tk. 500-1,000 per month for that!" One of these children is the Principal's own son. If a father could do such horrible things to his own son, then what he can do to others is something not unimaginable.

It makes one wonder how the parents of these ill-fated chils dren are feeling right now. Has anyone done any survey on that? It could be very interesting to know whether their "easy way to heaven" planning still gets priority over their off-



Chained without trial: The students of the Chittagong Madrasa

cation to madrasa development of which a part went into the introduction of science education in 200 madrasas during the 3rd and 4th Plans: The government without establishing any mechanism to create equivalence in the curricula, has equated the Dakhil degree with the SSC, the Alim with the HSC the Fazil with the B.A. and the Kamil with the M.A.

Hopefully the horrid facts of madrasa education would make the government and the parents think twice. The various Child Rights Organizations, we are sure, will take definite steps for

in-depth investigation and come up with concrete suggestion and strategies to stop such incidents from happening again in luture.

We urge the government to establish an effective system to monitor the thousands of madrasas in the country. From a survey of 300 randomly selected madrasas, from a list provided by the Madrasa Board found that a number of madrasas do not exist. In real ity facilities are poor, the attendance of both teachers and students is irregular, the actual contract hours Iteacher-student meeting time) are at least 50% less than reported. All these findings raised question, would government go on paying high amount of subsidies to these religious learning centres?

The children are our future All of its - the parents, the gov ernment, various Child Rights organizations, media, individ uals - are responsible to safeguard our future; so that, they flourish, bloom fully and be come physically, intellectually and mentally fit to serve the na

The writer is associated with the Ain-O-Salish Kendra.

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Sunday 12th January (All programmes are in local time. There may be changes in the programmes).

life was observed.

BTV

3:00 Opening Announcement Al-Quran Programme Summary 3:10 News in Bangla 3:15 Patriotic Songs 3:20 Recitation from the Bible 3:25 Retelecas of Drama 4:50 Marami 5:00 News in Bangla 5:25 Sports Programme 6:00pm Getimallya 6:35 Mayeder Jannyo 6:50 Open University 7:00 The News 7:25 Documentary on Freedom Fighting 8:00 News in Bangla 8:25 Women in Freedom Fighting 9:00 Film Series: Akbar The Great 10:00 News in English 10:25 Those Days of Freedom Fighting 10:30 Shono Ahaban 11:30 News in Bangla 11:35 Monday's programme 11:40 Close down

BBC

6:00am BBC World News 6:30 India Business Report 7:00 BBC World News 7:25 This Week 8:00 BBC World Headlines 8:30 India Business Report 9:00 BBC World News 10:00 BBC World Headlines 10:05 Horizon: Dodging Doomsday 11:00 BBC World News 11:25 India Business Report 12:00noon BBC World News 12:20 World Focus: Earth Report Debate -- Mapping the Millennium 1:00 BBC World News 1:20 This Week 2:00 BBC World Headlines 2:05 World Focus: Assignment 3:00 BBC World News 3:30 Time Out: The Clothes Show 4:00 **BBC** World News Headlines 4:05 World Focus: Everyman 5:00 BBC World News 5:20 Window On Europe 6:00pm BBC World Headlines 6:05 World Focus: Pole to Pole 7:00 BBC World Headlines 7:05 Breakfast with Frost 8:00 BBC World News 8:30 Time Out: The Travel Show 9:00 BBC World Headlines 9:05 Horizon --Dodging Doomsday 10:00 BBC World News 10:20 Earth Report 10:30 Time Out: Film '97 11:00 BBC World News 11:30 World Focus: Top Gear 12:00mn BBC World News 12:20 On the Record 1:00 BBC World News 1:20 Window On Europe 2:00 BBC World Headlines 2:05 World Focus: Sate of The World: A Nuclear Warning 3:00 BBC World News 3:30 Time Out: Tomorrow's World



Launchpad vj Sophlya on Channel (V), at 4:30 pm

4:00 BBC World Report Inc. World Business Report/24 Hours 5:00 BBC World Report Inc: World Business Report/24

CHANNEL V

6:00am Frame by Frame 7:00 Rewind VJ Sophiya 8:00 Frame By Frame 9:00 Big Bang Weekend VJ Alessandra 11:00 BPL Oye! 12:00 Sansui Mangta Hai 12:30 First Day First Show 1:00 Rewind VJ Sophiya 2:00 Speak Easy 2:30 Videocon Flashback 3:00 Asian Top 20 VJ Trey 5:00 The Vibe Weekend VJ Luke 6:00 The Vibe Weekend 7:00pm Fashion Police 7:30 Soul Curry 8:00 The Indian Top 10 9:00 Launch Pad VJ Samira 10:00 House Of Noise VJ Luke 11:00 Rewind VJ Sophiya 12:00mn Big Bang VJ Alessandra 1:00 The Ride 2:00 By Demand VJ Trey 3:00 Big Bang VJ Alessandra 4:30 Launch

pad VJ Sophiya 5:30 VJ

STAR PLUS

6:30 Voltron 7:00 Aerobics Oz Style 7:30 Alaap 8:30 Tara Rum Pum 9:30 Chandrakanta (Hindi Serial) 10:30 Tu Tu Main Main (Hindi Serial) 11:00 Kalaidoscope (Hindi Serial) 11:30 The Amul India Show 12:00noon The Road Show 12:30 India Business Week 1:30 Star Trek 2:30 Hindi Classic Film: Dehaj 6:00pm Batman 6:00 Charlies Angel 7:30 The Simpsons 8:00 The Adams Family 8:30 Hindi Serial: Life Line 9:30 Hindi Serial: Reporter 10:30 Star News Sunday 11:30 Dynasty 12:30 India Business Week 1:30 Amul India Show

2:00 BBC Documentary

"Around the World in 80 Days"

3:00 Movie Classic: Meet John

Doe 5:00 Backup

STARSPORTS

6:30am TBC 7:00 Asia Sport Show 7:30 Live NBA Game Of The Week Houston @ Chicago 10:00 World Wrestling Federation Blast Off 11:30 Live Chinese Taipei Badminton Open 1997 Final From Taipei 3:30 Asian Football Show 4:30 Canadian Professional Figure Skating Championships From Corel Centre, Ottawa, Canada 6:30 Greatest Grand Slam Matches Of 1996 Seles vs Testud, Seles vs Martinex, Seles vs Graf & Sampras vs Chang 8:30 NBA Game Of The Week Houston @ Chicago 10:30 Asia Sport Show 11:00 World Tour H/L 11:30 Live National Football League, 1996-1997 NFC Championship 3:00 ISF World Tour H/L 3:30 Greatest Grand Slam Matches Of 1996 Seles vs Testud, Seles vs Marinex, Seles

vs Graf & Sampras vs Chang

5:30 Sports India

STAR MOVIES

7:30am Classic: The Diary of Anne Frank 15 (Hindi Subtitles) 9:30 Adventure: Avalanche 12 (Hindi Subtitles) 11:30 Comedy: Cocoon 15 (Hindi Subtitles) 1:30 Adventure: Fantastic Voyage 12 (Hindi Subtitles) 3:30 Sunday Show Time: Pee-Wee's Playhouse (PG) 4:30 Sunday Show Time: Just For Laughs 15 5:30 Sunday Family Double Feature: Asterix vs Caesar PG (Hindi Subtitles) 7:30 Sunday Family Double Feature: Once Upon A Forest G 9:00 Film '97 9:30 Gold: That Night 11:30 True Story: The Chant Of Jimmy Blacksmith 18 (Arabic Subtitles) 1:30 Horror: Thirst 18 (Arabic Subtitles) 3:30 Film Club: Pump Up The Volume 18 (Arabic Subtitles 5:30 Romance: Night And The City 15 (Arabic Subtitles) ZEE TV

5:30am Surtal 6:00 The News

6:30 Jagran 7:00 Suno Bhai

Sadho 7:30 Maa 8:00 Mytho-

logical Hindi Film 10:30 Aap Ki

Adalat 11:00 Siyaram's Cine

Magic 11:30 Lakme Khoobsurat

12:00 Aur Ek Minute 12:30

Bournvita Quiz Contest 1:00

Haathi Cement Aashiana 1:30

Asian Sky Shop 2:00 Dream

Merchants 2:30 Hindi Feature

Film 5:00 Dhak Ghar Apna

Ghar 5:30 Ghoomta Aaina 6:00

Helpline 6:30 Adamiya Pradhan

Mantri 7:00 Index 7:30 Insight

8:00 Casper Kya Scene Hai

8:30 Suno Suno Tring Tring

9:00 Hi Zindagi Bye Zindagi

9:30 9 Malabar Hill 10:00 The

Zee Horror Snow 10:30 News

11:00 Suhana Safar 11:30

Philips Top Ten 12:30 Chahat

Aur Nafrat 1:00 Yeh Kahan Aa

Gaye Hum 1:30 Raahat 2:00

Apcolite Aap Ki Pasand 2:30

TMM 4:00 Dastan 4:30 Kodak

EL TV

00:30 Best Of The Best 1:30 Tarane 2:30 Hit Pairs 3:30 De-

votional 4:30 Ghungru 5:30

Best Of The Best 6:30 Tarane

7:30 Hit Pairs 8:30 Kandos Its

My Choice 9:00 Atco Ru-Ba-Ru

9:30 Fat Or Fit 10:00 Siyaram

Kamaal Kombination 10:30

Brigadier Balwant Bhawar

11:00 Sorry Meri Lorry 11:30

Liberty Public Demand 12:00

Number One 12:30 Chehre

Klick Klick 5:00 Jagran

Pal 11:40 Karz

8:00am Tilawat Aur Tar-

juma/Hamd/Naat 8:20 Cartoon 8:30 Khabrain 8:45 Fun Time 9:05 TV Encyclopedia 9:25 Khat Farmaish 9:40 Sports Clinic 10:05 PTV Gold 10:30 English Film: Darkwing Duck 10:55 Mast Mast Sanyo 11:00 Khabrain 11:10 Sports Hour 12:05pm Biscop 95/Qasmi Ha-

hani 12:55 Quran-e-Hakeem 1:02 Bismillah 1:15 Aaj Di Kahani 1:40 Aaj Di Shaam 2:00 Kinara Ep-63 (Drama Serial) 2:55 Ghost Writer 3:55 Karabar 4:15 Education 5:25 Riazi for 9th 5:55 Zameen Per Zindegi (Drama Serial) 6:25 Aiou Courses 7:00 English News 7:30 English Film : Star Trek Deep Space Nine 8:20 Hawwa Ki Naam 9:00 Break for Headlines News 9:20 Sur Tasver (Pakistani Film 1947-95) 10:00 Khabarnama & Commercial News 11:00 Pezwaan 11:35 Home Victime (New Serial) 12:35 Music Masters-Raag Rang 1:00 Khas Khas Khabrain

DD 7

9:00 Janmadin 9:05 Geetmalay 9:30 Movie Club Film 12:30 Surer Asar 1:00 Dhitang Dhitang Bole 1:30 Movie Club Film 3:30 Geet Sangeet 4:30 Bengali Feature Film 5:30 News 7:20 Binodon 7:30 Bangla Sambad 8:00 Shreoshi (Serial) 8:25 Geet Sangeet (Se iai) 9:30 Drama 10:00 Dance Prog 10:30 News/Bengali Sambad 11:00 Closed

SONY ET

8:30am Jai Bir Hanuman 9:30

Gaane Jaane Maane 10:00

Dekh Tamasa Dekh 10:30 Buddha 11:00 Taj Mahal Takita Dhin 12:00 BSA Star Ki Pasand 12:30 Pehli Mulakat 1:00 Good Shot 1:30 Pehchan 2:00 Yeh Sadi Nahi Ho Sakti 2:30 Ravan 3:30 Gaane Jaane Maane 4:00 O'Maria (Serial) 4:30 Nirlep Rasel Show 5:00 Boogle Wongie 5:'10 Cover Story - Hostel (Serial) 6:00 Jeevan Mirtyu (Serial) 7:00 Bindass Bol 8:00 Cine Classics -- Hindi Feature Film 11:00 The Young And The Restless 12:00 Ghaav 12:30 Aahaat (Serial) 1:00 Faslee (Serial) 1:30 Surf -- Wheel Of Fourtune 2:00 Premier

ZEE CINEMA

6:45 Songs 8:00 Gateway of

India (B/W) (Bharat Busthan Madnubala) 10:45 Chalo Cinema 11:15 Brahmachar (Shammi K. Rajeshwari) 2:00 Zandu Filmi Batein 2:30 Namak Haram (Amitabh B, Rajesh Khanna, Rekha) 5:15 Cinema Cinema 5:30 Hit Hai Fit Hai 6:00 Dil Ka Dcotor (Anupam Kher, Smita Jaykar) 8:45 Cinema Cinema 9:00 lkke Pe lkka 9:30 Raiu Ban Gaya Gentlemen (Sharuk K Juhi C) 12:15 Filler 12:30 Mohini (Madhu, Sadeh Berry) 3:15 Chalo Cinema 3:45 Do Shatru (Shatrugan Sinha, Shamila Tagore)

Garfield ®





MISSED DOES A TOE 40U TOO MISS A HANGNAIL?

by Jim Davis

James Bond IAN FLEMING'S

DRAWN BY JOHN MCLUSKY



