

## Rape of Humanity

Death of Seema in jail custody has once again given us the horrific reminder how unsafe and vulnerable we all are in the 'safe' hands of police, the so-called guardians of law on whom lies the sacred task of punishing the bad and protecting the good.

The young, female factory worker who first drew public notice after the newspapers glaringly depicted the shameful story of her rape in the custody by the personnel of a police station in Raozan, died under mysterious circumstances giving rise to very authentic suspicion of a huge attempt within the local administration of the law enforcing agency to bury the issue that has caused great and general public indignation.

We are afraid death of Seema, its timing and the speed with which the body was cremated (even though Seema had converted to Islam) forces us to suspect foul play of a very serious nature. The report of the enquiry committee which refers to the bleeding nose and loose teeth of a dead Seema strengthens our suspicion that the victim was subjected to extra ordinary physical torture.

We commend PM's decision for quick inquiry into this affair, and urge her to respond to the demand for setting up an high powered judicial probe body. We also think that the practice of "safe" custody of innocent victims of crime should immediately be changed.

The sheer enormity of crime in the case of Seema's death can be viewed from two angles. While some members of the police violated the sanctity of the police custody — a place deemed as a sanctuary for the harassed or the oppressed by the civilised imagination, their peers in all probability used their power and position to silence the scope of protest or any prayer for justice. What has happened is not only the ultimate insult of humanity by desecrating a human body but also a clear attempt to hoodwink law and that too by whom? The law enforcers. People's faith in the institution of police is now at stake. More than anybody else, it is the police who should distance themselves from the perpetrators of this heinous crimes and take all measure to punish them, and correct the system. Since the PM has already given her directives, the home minister should take immediate steps to punish the culprits.

## Hospitals or Death Traps

On the Eid day and the two following days Health Minister Salauddin Yusuf went round several hospitals in and around the city. What he saw for himself was that his hospitals hardly offer any service. For on the Eid night he found the corridors of PG's ninth floor jet-black dark. Next day, he found only one doctor in the whole of the Cancer Hospital at Mahakali. The same day at the Leprosy Hospital he found not even a nurse, not to speak of a doctor. And most of its wards were completely dark. The gigantic Chest Diseases Hospital also did not have enough attending medical staff. And on February 11 he found at the Government Employees Hospital at Phulbaria, luckily must be, one nurse and no doctor or any other employee. And the Azimpur Maternity, perhaps the biggest in the country, was in the charge of a health visitor when the minister went there.

Two days after the Eid, a staffer of this newspaper also happened to savour the nauseating and unsavoury reality of the biggest of government hospitals. Without an idea of what his experience was only an indication of, the minister's unpleasant impression would not complete even a part of the picture of government hospitals.

The Daily Star story in effect said the DMCH is a place not to fight death but hasten the impoverished and hapless patient come to their charge — to death and deliberately too. One hopes this is not all that the DMCH does. If the health ministry really means business, then it should take a few existing hospitals — like DMCH, Mitford and a selective few in other cities — and make them work well. A dramatic improvement in DMCH will go a long way in convincing us that the government is serious about improving health services. Please demonstrate that government means business.

## Ibsen Seminar

The ten-day seminar on Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian trail-blazer in the world of modern drama is beginning in the city from today. Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT) has arranged the assembly of Ibsen scholars in association with the Norwegian embassy in Dhaka.

As a playwright Ibsen dwelt on evils of the nineteenth century Europe like subjection of women, hypocrisy, hereditary disease, seamy politics and corrupt journalism and his fearless criticism of them which created quite a bit of furore and uproar in his time is far from having lost relevance in today's Bangladesh.

Absurdists and paranoid worshippers of the cult of novelty may fall short of proper appreciation of Ibsen but the fact of the matter is that the plays of this Scandinavian guru of dramatic art mark the culmination of bourgeois drama-drama that deals with problems and conditions of the middle class. Ibsen then stays with us not only because he, through his realistic, nevertheless highly symbolic plays, tore the mask of hypocrisy from marriage, respectability, the rule of the 'compact majority' but also because he was an artist who managed to create, at his best, works of poetry which under the mask of their sardonic humour express his dream of humanity reborn by intelligence and self-sacrifice.

Apart from a tribute to one of the greatest playwrights of all time and a delving into the relevance of his works in our time, this seminar also proves Dhaka's growing emergence as a city abounding in activities that speak of the aesthetic and intellectual propensity of a nation. Dhaka is no longer a backwater of intellectual and cultural exercise. While wishing success to the organisers we welcome this delectable change in Dhaka's face.

# Glory of Birth, Nightmare of Death

Available statistics on maternal mortality rate is a pointer to the nightmare noted above. It is 28 in industrial countries compared to 600 per 100,000 live births in South Asia: 850 in Bangladesh, 1500 in Nepal and 1600 in Bhutan.

**M**ORE often than not, children are considered as the future citizens and leaders of a country. The connotations of affixes are, possibly, that the health and wealth of such a country are closely linked to that of its child inhabitants. If the relationship is taken for granted then, sadly speaking, the future of South Asian nations are threatened by the inhuman conditions in which their children appear to survive. Let us look at some of the gloomy statistics on child survival in South Asia used by Dr Mahbubul Huq, the eminent economist of Pakistan, in his forthcoming book, "Human Development in South Asia".

At the outset, one needs to recognize the hard reality that the most deprived region in the world is South Asia and the scale of human deprivation here nothing but colossal and catastrophic. The worst victims of poverty in this region are mostly children and women — the weakest and the most vulnerable segment of the society. A child born in South Asia is said to be subject of constant denial, deprivation and destitution. In the absence of trained nurses during deliveries of children, 70 per cent child bearing mothers face premature deaths leaving their beloved children motherless just at the time they [children] step into this world. Far too often the miracle of birth turns into nightmare of deaths.

Available statistics on maternal mortality rate is a pointer to the nightmare noted above. It is 28 in industrial countries compared to 600 per 100,000 live births in South Asia: 850 in Bangladesh, 1500 in Nepal and 1600 in Bhutan. Obviously, the frightening figures appear as "sad commentary on the status of women in these societies and on the prospects of confronting child

death at birth".

Leaving aside the monumental problems at the time of birth, the survival and development of children in this part of the globe tend to epitome epidemic episodes. For example, half of the world's 83 million malnourished children, reportedly, can be observed in only three countries — India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The infant mortality rate is still 82 per 1000 live births. This compares with 63 in all other developing countries (excluding South Asia). More worrisome, 85 million children of South

especially of the poorer segment, and (d) making available educational facilities to them. To make education the arbiter of growth and human development, political commitments should be marshalled immediately.

Another worrying and horrifying dimension of child survival in South Asia is the issue of child labour. An estimated 134 million children are employed — in inhuman condition and on paltry wage — as labour. India tops the table containing the largest number of child labour in the world. Bangladesh

is the growing sexual exploitation of children for profit. A survey of six urban cities in India (1991) showed that 15 per cent of the sex workers found to be children at the time of their entry into this filthy business. Over five per cent of the sex workers in India are reported to be from Bangladesh and Nepal. About 7000 new children are being trafficked into India each year — these exploited children have to face both the physical dangers of violence and torture and the medical dangers of contracting HIV or AIDS.

While children are so plunged, some of the South Asian governments are trying to tighten their belts in terms of devising stricter child labour rules and regulations. These do not seem to be that much of a sort of required rules and regulations. What is, in fact, lacking in these societies is strict adherence to the rules and proper implementation of the rules. If such vices grow unabated, the potentials of these innocent children could be plundered and the nations could be robbed of the opportunities of a pleasant society. No doubt poverty is a strong contributory factor to it but it is just one of the many reasons which push children onto the rocky roads, others being, economic disparities, lack of education, irresponsible male sex behaviour, gender discrimination and harmful traditional practices etc. Civil societies, NGOs and governments need to arouse public sentiment against child abuses and force the society to care for them. As the poet once said: "Ghumey Achhe Shishur Pita Shah Shishuder Antare" (fathers of the child is sleeping in the heart of the child). Let's awake the children and their parents. And it is not by taking mere resolutions but by marshalling effective implementations so that the nightmare of deaths could be turned into glory of births.

The most daunting and disturbing problem in South Asia is reported to hold 8-12 million child labour followed by Pakistan 3.3 million. In the Punjab province of Pakistan, parents receive an average of Pakistani Rs. 5000 (approx \$145) for five years of child labour. That is, the wage rate comes to eight cents a day. In South Asia, children have to work for 15 hours a day on many occasions. Along with the paltry wage, follow frequent rape and beatings. Once bonded they are, allegedly, traded like livestock and sometimes, shipped to distant countries.

Of the total child labour, 70 per cent are engaged in agriculture and the rest in hazardous industries. The agricultural labours are "mainly victims of an entrenched system of bonded labour where whole families are enslaved in order to pay off debts."

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## Govt Employees' Image is Way Down

The system of noting by various grades of people is a system which has been done away with in other countries. Normally, there should be one note in the file and that by the officer who can take some action on it. Previous notings are a hindrance because they pin you down to some unfortunate precedent.

**I**n initial days of space technology, when Sputnik was a failure, it was compared with a civil servant. People would say that you cannot make him work, nor can you fire him. I am reminded of that because there is once again a spurt in meetings and statements on how to make government servants work.

Prime Minister Devi Gowda told the state chief secretaries the other day at Delhi that they should help build an efficient, open, accountable, clean and dynamic administration. The Department of Administrative Reforms has followed up the speech with a paper has circulated to elicit opinion. Three questions have been posed: (1) how to ensure a responsive administration; (2) how to clean up the civil services; and (3) how to make civil services more committed to the constitution. These are important points. But the most important one, which has not been raised, is the strength of bureaucracy.

There are too many hands. Cut to half, if not to size, they will perform better. The same exercise is covered by a clerk to a secretary through notes. The file stops at every table, created to justify work. If the numbers are reduced, papers will move faster.

How to decrease the strength? It will have to be done in stages. Let there be a freeze on recruitment. The retirement age should be reduced to 50 and the present crop at that age be pensioned off. At 50, an employee has still energy to start afresh. He or she should be given full pension. In fact, the rule that entitles the IAS hands to draw full pension after having put in 20 years should be applicable to all public servants.

The government has economy drives off and on. They are a farce. Some unfilled vacancies are shown as the number of employees reduced. All stays on paper. Civil servants have developed a vested interest in a large bureaucracy because it offers higher positions or jobs with perks. All attempts to cut the bureaucracy are defeated by the bureaucracy.

I had a personal experience about it when I was India's High Commissioner in London (1990). There were 250 Indian

employees. Some among them admitted that they did not have enough work. The Supply Mission, for instance, was there from the day the high commission opened. I suggested it be closed as the initial flood of purchases had become a trickle.

Practically every ministry has a niche in the high commission where its senior officers, by turn, get lost to enjoy a cushy tenure. An employee from India is given, apart from his salary, a foreign allowance, furnished accommodation, medical benefits and free passage for his wife and dependent every two years. Some officers are entitled to a washing allowance as well, a perk from the days of Raj.

They have little idealism left

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldeep Nayar writes from New Delhi

My proposal, forwarded to New Delhi, was to reduce the staff to 180, axing nearly 70 posts. It would have meant a saving of £1 million (Rs 5 crore) annually. But I faced opposition from practically every tier of the bureaucracy. The Expenditure Secretary in the finance ministry, Geethakrishnan, was in London at that time. I discussed the proposal in detail with him. He wanted his No 2, Gopal Tandon, to visit London to examine the proposal further, the justification for which I could not understand.

The way the proposal was stalled for seven months, till I left, is a good example of how determined bureaucrats can defeat all efforts to economize. My appeals even to the prime minister and finance and foreign ministers were to no avail. I am convinced that one of the major reasons the Indian government cannot cut its expenditure is that the bureaucracy has come to like and enjoy in a large apparatus.

It is ironical that the same bureaucracy carried out the whims of Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay, during the emergency. Desire for self-preservation, as admitted by a number of public servants before an inquiry commission, was the sole moti-

vation for their behaviour. Fear turned them into willing tools of tyranny. Is there no other way they can work?

I believe one officer heading the supplies department left ultimately. But he felt so bitter that he said whatever he could against me before the one-judge commission, appointed to look into the circumstances leading to the death of Chief Justice Sabyasachi Mukherjee at London. This official is, however, a typical example of bureaucrats who never take blame on themselves and find some scapegoats for their acts of omission and commission. Most civil servants are careerists, nay opportunists, now.

Nehru discussed Appleby's conclusions in his cabinet and followed up with a note to the Home Ministry: "We... have worked too much in the rut and carried on old traditions which have little significance today. If we are to work for a welfare state, the whole of our administrative service has to function somewhat differently and, indeed, has to think differently... I think that one of the major issues that we should face, and face soon, is a reorganisation of our administrative structure."

It was not done soon. Shastri attended to the problem after 12 years of Nehru's note by appointing the Administrative Reforms Commission to suggest how the government could function quickly, efficiently and economically. But Shastri's main purpose was to mollify Morarji Desai, who was standing in the wings for a chance to take over the stage. By making him chairman of that reforms commission, Shastri killed two birds with one stone. But the reports of the commission have only accumulated dust on the shelves of the home ministry.

In fact, we are in such a critical time that a reorientation, retraining of our entire civil service has become necessary.

The world over, in the management of administration, they are retraining everybody, because the society has become more technological. If you have got a job, the only way you can maintain is not to sit at the desk and doing the job in the old way you have been doing it, but to learn new jobs and new ways of doing them.

And it is important that the image of civil servant is improved because it has had a battering in the recent years. At present, he is imagined as a person who is least helpful to the public. He draws his salary without putting in work for even two hours a day and he is, as usually alleged, willing to be purchased at a pittance. A recent public opinion poll held in the UK showed that only 29 per cent of citizens have trust in civil service. In India, it is far less. No government can afford to live with that kind of impression about civil service.

## To the Editor...

### Updated road and city maps

Sir. The city maps and the national road maps have to be updated every second year for general public use. The official versions may be made available to the publishers in the private sector regularly. All of the maps sold in the market are several years out of date.

The survey of Bangladesh should show some interest in market orientation. Service to the publishers is fast using computer technology for updating.

AZ  
Dhaka

### ABCs

Sir, The Association of Bangladesh Commonwealth Scholars (ABCs) is a unique forum of the commonwealth

scholars. The ABCs has now more than 500 life members who are serving in different educational, research, management, industrial and non-governmental organisations of the country.

Recently, in a message from the Commonwealth Secretariat addressed to the ABCs President, Mr M Faizullah, the in-charge of the Asian Desk on behalf of the Secretary General has welcomed the formation of the association. The ABCs in its recently-held annual general meeting has adopted the resolution to give ABCs an institutional shape for promoting educational and cultural understanding among the scholars of the commonwealth countries.

Any scholar who has availed of any training in the commonwealth countries under the sponsorship of the Commonwealth, British Council or any other agency

under the commonwealth family can become member of the ABCs.

At present, the ABCs is preparing a directory of its members. So I would like to request all the members to send their bio-data to ABCs Secretary, Mr Md Shahidullah, Secretary, University Grants Commission, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka-1207.

### Gauge, or gauze?

Sir, A few days ago the DS has front-paged the photograph of the use of "gauge mask" in the streets of Dhaka.

Although pictorially the

message is clear, yet linguistic interpretation is rather confusing. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, the meaning of "gauge" is: standard measure especially of capacity or content, fineness of textile, diameter of bullet, or thickness of sheet metal; instrument for measuring or marking parallel lines, capacity, extent, criterion, test, etc.

The appropriate word should have been "gauze" which means thin transparent fabric of silk, cotton, wire etc.

I believe it should have been "gauze mask" and not "gauge mask".

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### Beggars and destitutes

Sir, Public thoroughfares are already overcrowded in

## Dhaka Day by Day Toys at Astronomical Prices

by Fayza Haq

THIS ONE WILL COST YOU ALL THAT YOU HAVE...



pect from cheap Chinese make!

A single mother of two boys living in Purana Paltan says, "I spent my entire saving of six months on getting equipment for cricket and tennis for my sons. A good cricket bat is no less than Tk 2,000 and getting them dressed in white for the game costs more. It is not easy to bring up children these days. They don't play with old milk tins converted into drums any more. When other children have expensive toys it is only natural that they too should crave for the same."

The other day I went to a four-year-old's birthday party at Kathal Bagar and found the living room covered with battery operated toys. None of the toys were for less than Tk 500. With twenty pieces on the floor imagine the money being spent — and two of the dolls were huge porcelain ones. There were buckets of leggo, circles of speeding trains, jumping and skipping bears, boxes of beauty sets and kitchen comestibles, crockery, furniture and untold wealth in toys, including walkie-talkie dolls.

I know of a young woman, on Indira Road, who spends her half month's salary for toys for her two nieces. Every time Seema comes home, the children cry out "Phupi, what have you brought us?" When she goes abroad for seminars and workshops more than half her luggage consists of teddy-bears, polywogs, cabbage-patch dolls and what have you in range of toys.