

Look at These Signs

According to news reports Thailand has already imposed severe restrictions on visa for us. Singapore and Hong Kong are seriously considering these moves. Another report says that New Zealand is considering expelling our citizens because of a immigration scam. Already Bangladeshis face entry restrictions in many countries of the world. While the rest of the world is moving towards easing of travel restrictions and in many cases doing away with visa requirements altogether we are facing a reverse trend. All this is indicative of a general perception that there are lot of economic migrants from Bangladesh. This is true for most of the developing countries. It is also true that such migrations have been going on for many years now. So, what has changed to necessitate imposition of such drastic restrictions for Bangladesh?

The honest answer is that such migration has acquired unmanageable proportions now, and more and more countries are closing their doors on us. While whatever we may say about our own growth the international community is yet to see definite evidence of the change, and as such they are reacting with restrictions on our travellers.

Message here is very clear. We must establish a track record of striking performance in the economic field. Till the world sees actions in place of words, of which we have too much, nobody will be willing to take us seriously. While we welcome the Silver Jubilee celebrations of our independence, we must remember that the ultimate and real — and perhaps the only — celebration of our independence can be economic growth of our country. The fact that more and more countries are imposing visa and travel restrictions on us is indicative of the lessening confidence of the international community whether our travellers are genuine. It not only strikes at the very root of our national pride but also adds tremendous inconvenience to our business travellers. Please read the signs that are becoming increasingly clearer: without economic growth there is no place for us in the comity of nations. Economic growth should be the strongest message during our Silver Jubilee celebrations.

This BTV We Don't Want

We did not expect a miracle or an overnight result but we did hope for a welcome and felt change. After all, it was a tall order having to salvage a deliberately sunken part of history at first and then pave the way for the desired role of the electronic mass media as cherished in the culture of democracy. The job was always easier said than done because it required the courage to rise above petty party sentiment and a steadfast commitment to people's aspirations.

We pinned our hopes substantially on the party presently in power because it really did not need to abuse the electronic mass media for propaganda as did its predecessors in the last 21 years. There was no express need for Awami League to allow TV and radio to continue with their hated legacy of being government's propaganda tools. Besides, autonomy of the electronic media was one of its major commitments prior to the June 12 elections. In fact, it dates back to the days of united movement for democracy during the nine-year rule of general Ershad. But it went unheeded in the five years of BNP's mandated stay at the helm. Now that Awami League, a party with a vastly different political philosophy and historical background — is in power, hopes of autonomy for TV and radio seem as remote as they were in the past.

At least, the signals we have been getting of late do force us into new spells of hopelessness. According to a fairly harped recent news item of Ittefaq, the leading Bengali daily, TV programmes are now being controlled from the office of the Information Minister. This is something shockingly new suggesting let alone autonomy, TV and radio are struggling to cling to what little right they had previously. It is sliding from bad to worse.

Autonomy in the electronic media is sought not only because it will give a more complete and truer picture of country's political scenario but also because it will promote professionalism. And professionalism is a hugely connotative word which brings along with it quality, accountability and many other things.

The government has formed a committee for recommendations regarding the autonomy of the mass electronic media. We do not know how far it has progressed in its attempt to prepare the ground for self rule of TV and radio. But the latest revelation coming on top of a disappointingly longish spell of government propaganda on TV and radio brews new doubts about the future of autonomy. We want a release from this vicious cycle.

Shooting House Rent

The house rent index of the metropolis according to a report published in last Thursday's The Daily Star, has scaled up by 17.86 percent. This no doubt is a statistics indicative of the factors leading to Dhaka's dubious distinction as a city of unjustifiably high living cost and the predicament of its dwellers with limited income.

All that have shot up with mushroom effect in the name of apartment culture are skyey spaces only for the affluent section of the society. Livable dwelling places for middle class proper is still a slogan for the real estate developers as well as the government.

This acute housing crisis of the middle class has given the city house owners a free hand to mark up rent if not at will definitely at any mentionable excuse.

The absence of an active tenants' forum has made matters worse. Let alone the suffering owing to the phenomenon of the unabated and often inconsiderate increase in the rent, tenants in Dhaka city compared to that of a neighbouring city like Calcutta, is awfully unequipped and unorganised to force a balance of sort. The general impression is that tenants in this country are pretty much ignorant about their legal reach and right. The recent emergence of the states from a tenants' forum is a sure sign of growing awareness in this respect.

Grand Corruption, Petty Corruption

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PERVASIVE presence of corrupt practices on economic decision making and democratic activities are well-known to all of us and aptly documented in many professional papers. Each and every country of the world is allegedly, afflicted with the virus of corruption although the degree of corruption could differentiate societies into high or low perspective. However, people in general, specially in developing countries, seem to relate corruption to *fair accomplishment* since this bunion plague pervades every nook and corner of their societies. Recent surge in interest among academics about the socio-economics and politics of corruption appears to consider corruption as a subject of important critical questions all over the world and to that effect anti-corruption devices such as anti-corruption code or anti-bribery provisions are now very much in evidence in some countries.

George Mody Stuart, a graduate of Cambridge University who has served as chief executive of several multinational agro industrial firms, recently wrote an article entitled, "The costs of grand corruption" in *Economic Reform Today* (1996). The author deliberated discussions on many facets of corruption and possibly drew the observations from his personal account of experiences as chief executive. Let us pick up a few of them for the readers.

To set the ball rolling, one needs to define corruption. According to the *Encyclopedia of the social sciences*, "corruption is the misuses of public power for private profit." So defined, corruption excludes any bribed transactions taking place in the private sector. In terms of the degree of corruption, one can distinguish between "grand" and "petty" corruptions. Grand corruptions are generally done by "top brasses" in administration and political spectrum (e.g. heads of state, ministers, secretaries) who possess the power to

manipulate decisions and thus eke out big bucks from the bucket.

Petty corruptions are the domain of petty officials and political activists like customs clerk, immigration and police officials etc. Their brand of corruption is not that grand nevertheless seem enough to sponsor the activities that their fixed salaries fail to justify. While grand corruption takes place once in a while, petty corruptions are almost a day-to-day matter and have very little to do with decision making.

Petty corruptions, allegedly, damage quality of life of the

size of the business, the urgency for movements of files or persons, the tendency of people to by-pass rules etc. Judged from these view points, immigration officials, policemen, petty officials in different ministries and local level touts and *dalals* could impose an unofficial tax on the recipient.

Besides the amount of money, there is another difference between grand and petty corruptions. Petty corruption usually takes place almost face to face and *under the table*. The famous mathematical principle — Euclidean Principle: shortest possible direct contact between

that counts most. Thus corruptions help replace right persons and right goods by the bad ones. The distortions could lead to serious misallocation and misuse of scarce resources. Third, religious faith on bribery culture might vitiate the whole society and impose heavy costs in terms of social and ethical values.

How do we measure the levels of corruptions? In fact it is a very tardy task to attempt at such a venture — and designate the levels of corruption. Even then Transparency International (TI) — the Berlin-based non-profit coalition against corruption in business — coined a useful Corruption Index (CPI) covering 54 countries. The methodology was very simple: randomly drawn businessmen in different countries were asked to record their "perception" about corruption in respective countries. The CPI ranged from 10 to zero: 10 for no-corruption and zero for a society where bribery and extortions dominate every economic transaction.

According to the CPI, New Zealand topped the league table (least corrupt) among the 54 countries with a score of 9.43. It was closely followed by some Scandinavian countries (like Denmark, Sweden) with an average score of 9 plus. USA remained 15th with a score of 7.79 just below Israel (7.71). Nigeria lay at the bottom of the CPI (the most corrupt country) with a score of 0.69. Bangladesh's place is 51st with a score of 2.29 and stays just ahead of Pakistan (1.0) and below India (2.63) and China (2.43). The study observed that the "top half of the list are countries with well-established and strong democratic institutions. The reverse holds true for those nations that fall in the bottom half. This reminds of the famous observation by Edmund Burke, "Among a people generally corrupt, liberty cannot long exist." Long lived democracy, short lived corruption?

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



most common citizens of a country, but grand corruptions tend to hit at the very fabric of a society by destroying a nation. The major determinants of grand corruption are: (a) the size of the project or transaction (say, a rural road connection project would be less attractive to top brasses but a highway could lure them to tinker with decision making. Similarly a glass factory vs a fertilizer factory or a fish plant vs a power plant); (b) the immediacy of rewards and (c) complications and technological depth of the project. On the basis of these determinants, the most fertile areas of grand corruptions are, for example, military supplies, aircraft, ship and telecommunication equipment; dams, harbours, bridges, highways; licence for extraction industries, consultant's fees and various bulk government purchases (e.g. pharmaceuticals, chemicals, fertilizers etc.).

On the other hand, the major determinants of petty corruptions are as I suppose, small

two points by a straight line — seems to work here. Both the payer and the payee of bribe need not have to see eye to eye nor need they be on phone line. On many occasions, sales directors do not travel with dollars in their suitcases to meet the exigencies rather the local agent acts as the essential cog. The executives even do not know whether their commission is duly passed on to the agent or he omits that.

What are the impacts of corruption? The economic impacts can be evaluated through the uses of lessons from "shifting" and "incidence" of taxes as we learnt from public finance. A 10 per cent bribe for the import of, say, sugar is just a 10 per cent tax imposed on sugar. The briber shifts the costs on to the consumers and the incidence falls on them (in fact he could shift more than what he paid as bribe). Second, corruption under the aegis of bribe simply connotes that it is the quantity of bribe and not the quality or efficiency of the businessman

International Women's Day

The 'Girl Child' and the Garment Worker are in Danger!

by Farida Akhter

IT is quite painful for many of us as activists in the women's movement to see the violence against very young girls by the members of the law enforcing agencies. Indeed, I am referring to Yasmeen and Seema who were raped and then killed by the police. This is not the end of the story. Once the women's movement demanded trial against the rapists, we have started seeing the different faces of the legal and administration system of the country. We have also found that the law to protect the women against violence is full of loopholes by which the accused (especially if they are from the administration and are white-collared) can get away scot-free. So the need for law reform has been felt and is presently being worked on by the lawyers. In jail, there was a system of safe custody. It turned out that "it was not at all safe" rather it has already led to violence, humiliation and even death of the person seeking safety of life!

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, these issues are in our minds. But then what? We do not yet know what is going to happen as regards the judgment of the Yasmeen case. Although the rape and murder of Yasmeen has been clearly witnessed, yet the accused seem to be very strong and even now declare themselves as "innocent". Will Yasmeen get justice from the court? We are waiting for the verdict.

There is no doubt of the fact that the garment worker in Chittagong, Seema was raped in the thana by the police (October, 1996). On February 7, she died while she was in the so-called

safe custody of Chittagong Jail. Her body was cremated immediately by the jail authority before anybody could even know of her death. For the jail authority, the legal procedures were not so important at that time. It was more important that she was a Hindu; therefore, once she was dead she had to be cremated. The Samilita Nari Samaj, women lawyers' associations and human rights organisations alleged that Seema has actually been killed. The Forensic Department of the Chittagong Medical College Hospital took too long to finally declare that Seema had died of "typhoid". That was the cause of her death. So the killer was a bacteria and not the administration. I wonder, if it is possible to prove that Seema was raped by a bacteria, too! Then every problem would be solved.

In Yasmeen's case, an attempt was made to prove that she was "insane", therefore, she had jumped out of the police van. But how she got on the van, has nothing to do with her insanity. Now, when the case is in the court, we find that the driver of the police van, Amrita Lal has been claimed to be insane. So the bacteria and insanity are the two major problems in relation to violence against women in this country.

On the International Women's Day, my point is somewhat addressed to our friends in the international community who have expressed much solidarity through the Beijing process. It seems, UNICEF talks so much about the girl child, but remains quiet when a girl child is raped while she was in the so-called

ers, the main exponent for the existence of the garment industry are violated — what is the response from the international community? I have not seen any response from any international quarter in this regard.

While I am raising questions about the role of the international community, I actually would like to assert clearly, that the women's movement in Bangladesh is growing stronger with broad-based alliances and it is broadening the analysis of violence against women. An independent and autonomous women's forum, such as Samilita Nari Samaj, is going ahead with their work. The reverse holds true for those nations that fall in the bottom half. This reminds of the famous observation by Edmund Burke, "Among a people generally corrupt, liberty cannot long exist." Long lived democracy, short lived corruption?

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The women's movement is very busy in monitoring one single case of Yasmeen or Seema as it has become a symbol of the violence as if we do not have any other issues to talk about. The independent women's movement grew almost spontaneously. Any particular issue affecting women has to become the starting point. And of course, violence, in the form of rape, killing, trafficking, etc., are all very active against women. Most women are poor, they have to earn an income. Therefore, they are on the street. But once they are on the street, they face all sorts of attacks on their body and dignity. The garment industry is claimed to be liberating for women as it is the single largest sector to provide job opportunities for them. But the garment girls are being raped by mafias as well as by the police. Recently, in a protest rally the garment workers demanded to the government, "If you cannot ensure our safety on the street, you cannot save this lucrative export-earning industry". Does anybody listen to them? When we hear the garment factory workers demanding to get their rightful payments, the international business community blames the workers and say they are chaotic, and therefore, the country is not suitable for investment. But when the work-

ers, the main exponent for the existence of the garment industry are violated — what is the response from the international community? I have not seen any response from any international quarter in this regard.

The power sector is in ruins. Load shedding is a common phenomenon even in winter. Strange it may be but there are reasons and genuine problems with it. Bangladesh power sector which is mostly dependent on gas, has an installed capacity of 2,900 mega watts of power. But it only produces around 1,700 mega watts against a demand of 2,000 MW or more. The difference cannot be met because of varied reasons. Such as the (as forecast) gas crisis in Chittagong that has left the 210 mega watt Raigan Power Plant inoperable. The gas extracted in the Bakhrabad gas field, which supplied the gas for Raigan is corrupted by sands, resulting in a production shortfall. The solution to gas crisis in Chittagong is the accumulation in the defective system becomes lethal; wherever there are weak points, this gas tends to burst out. Newspaper reports also mentioned that Dhaka city sewerage system has no ventilation network in the existing infrastructure; which leaves its people living (happily) on a stinking bomb that might blast any moment.

Complaints against the city's authority could go on if the mosquitoes, the muggers, the criminals, the rapists (real and so-called) law enforcement agents in their disguise are on and so forth are to be specified.

This list of perplexity will continue for infinite lengths but for the citizens hopefully pondering on the deterioration of their once beloved, beautiful city and devising some way to act before it is too late.

Eliminate Discriminations against Women

Statement of Dr Nafis Sadik, Executive Director, UNFPA on the occasion of International Women's Day 1997

INTERNATIONAL Women's Day 1997 also marks the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Since its inception, the Commission has been the champion of women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social and educational spheres. The Commission's tireless work was in large part responsible for the International Women's Year in 1975 and world conferences on women, including the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. UNFPA salutes the Commission for its 50 years as an advocate for equality between women and men.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, the Fund would also like to commend the countless groups, governmental and non-governmental, at the community, district, national, regional and international levels, which are working to advance the status of women and to promote gender equality.

What gives impetus to their actions and has augmented the global consensus on women are the recommendations of recent international conferences including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 and the Beijing Women's Conference. The commitments adopted at those international gatherings called for empowering individuals, and in particular, empowering and educating women, safeguarding their reproductive and sexual health, and enabling couples and individuals to make free and informed choices about childbearing. It is now recognized worldwide that while both women and men have the right to reproductive health, for women, in particular, reproductive rights are the basis of their own reproductive behaviour.

The enthusiasm with which all countries are adopting the ICPD approach gives us every reason to believe that we will succeed.

Dhaka Day by Day

Living in Past Does not Help

by Raffat Binte Rashid



Dhaka is an ugly city, and its residents, even worse. Don't even eyebrows and question, but judge for yourself. We are an emotional race, at times it can be synonymous to being coward you know. We keep on living in the past, stubbornly refusing to face the present; the deterioration to be exact. Tiltotama Dhaka as it was called, comparing it to a beauty spot on a lady's face, is now a scorn to loveliness. Let's go methodically around its infrastructure (whatever is left of it) to wake you up to reality.

Roads, as you know are every citizen's father's property including the government people as well, are mainly used as a digging site for the telephone people, the power people, sewerage, WASA and everything that is of importance to whomsoever. Besides, they are also used as a dumping ground, not only of garbage, that's usual, but of construction materials by landlords. Their truck has to be parked in the middle of a road, their cement bags has to be stored there, their bricks has to be broken there; and all because there is no space on the premises of the construction site, which already is the parking space of the landlords' first apartment.

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Complaints against the city's authority could go on if the mosquitoes, the muggers, the criminals, the rapists (real and so-called) law enforcement agents in their disguise are on and so forth are to be specified. This list of perplexity will continue for infinite lengths but for the citizens hopefully pondering on the deterioration of their once beloved, beautiful city and devising some way to act before it is too late.

In a large number of countries, national population and development groups have been formed so that the goals adopted at Cairo and Beijing are translated into action which transforms individual lives at home. With the same aim, partnerships among governments, NGOs and the civil society have been and are being forged. But much remains to be done to remove all discriminatory practices which inhibit women's advancement. We must make everyone realize that women's rights are human rights. We must insist that the governments of the 155 countries that signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women act upon its provisions. And, we must convince the governments that have not signed to ratify and implement this key Convention.