

## 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 skyeys 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

Grand corruptions are generally done by "top brasses" in administration and political spectrum 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...

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 *fait accompli* since this bubonic 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 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. Thick 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 tarry 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 ranked 15th within a score of 7.79 just below Israel (7.71). Nigeria lay at the bottom of the table (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, consultants' fees and various bulk government purchases (e.g. pharmaceuticals, cement, 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 clog. The executives even do not know whether commission is duly passed on to by 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 administrative 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 mind. But 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 Sammilita 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

by police. The International Labour Organisation talks about the workers rights, but do not question why the garment workers are not able to move around safely.

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 mastans 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.

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 Sammilita Nari Samaj, is going ahead with their work. It will continue to fight on the issues of combating violence against women. There is no alternative to our own struggles to achieve our rights!!

## 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

## 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 raise eyebrows and question, but judge for yourself.

We are an emotional race, at times it can be synonymous to being toward you know.

We keep on living in the past, stubbornly refusing to face the present; the deterioration to be exact. Tillotama Dhaka as it was called, comparing it to a beauty spot on a lady's face, is now a scum 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 poles, the power people, sewerage, WASH and everything that is of importance to whomever. 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 broken there, and all because there is no space on the premises of the construction site, which already is the parking space of the landlord's first apartment.

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 not to mention why, 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 Razzan Power Plant inoperable. The gas extracted in the Bakhrabad gas field, which supplied the gas for Razzan is corrupted by sands, resulting in a production shortfall. The solution to gas crisis in Chit

tagong is the Ashuganj Bakhrabad (AB) pipeline project. But the works of AB pipeline project are not expected to be completed before June. In addition to its completion, repair and refurbishment of eight power plants are also expected to get completed by December. This means that we can add another 500 to 600 mega watt of power production to the present capacity. Yet the PDB officials are cynic about full supply, pointing out that another 100 mega watt deficit remains to be met in any case. Because the power distribution system is not upgraded. Strangely, when the scenario is so bleak, the donors are again pressing the government to raise power-gas tariff and make the public suffer. WASH reports also mentioned profusely while trying to kill mosquitoes (the Hanif ones). Raising tariff would only confirm the status of those elements in the DESA and PDB who consume Tk 250 crores annually by unscrupulous means in the name of system loss.

The city's Storm Sewerage system is faulty, and can explode anytime, for instance like it did in Segunbagicha last month because of insufficient ventilation. Engineers said, the gas accumulating in the defective system becomes lethal, wherever there are weak points, this gas tend 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 enforcing agents in their disguise) so 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.

## Rights, Not Privileges

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we asked Dr Hameeda Hossain about issues affecting Bangladeshi women, and the changes they should be seeking in their lives... An interview by Gemini Wahhaj

YOU still have to struggle, but apart from a few of you, most don't seem to be concerned. It seems strange because you'll be affected by what happens. You have more choices, but many women are not stepping out of the conventional choices, as much as one would like them to.

I work with a Human Rights Organisation because I believe it may be an important tool of change. The kind of work we do at Ain-o-Shalish Kandra — we deal with women who have little choice so that they continue accepting various degrees of violence. We work mainly with poor women in the slums. I find that the levels of acceptance and tolerance are high. Partly because of how we're socialised, and also because of economic dependency and fear. This is also true in middle classes, where you derive your status from your marriage. If married, you are asked out and recognised. The moment your husband dies, you lost that status.

Professional recognition is important (for women), as is solidarity amongst women. We're able to talk about women's rights in the collective sense, but when [we want to] talk about our personal lives, even women activists get upset, as in Taslima Nasreen's case. Many are afraid because they say that she writes scandalous things, but they forget that it is about freedom of speech. When women activists say, "Amra Andolon Korbao", it's almost impersonal. A lot of women are active outside, but inside, their lives are trapped in conformity.

We need to build a confidence in ourselves. That is what men have — a lot of over-confidence. You find that in all areas, women can do better in work and education and everything else, but in a self-abnegating way.

We need to give each other more support than we do. Reach out to other women. Friendships and camaraderie will help a lot more than public

rallies. A lot of women don't come together [for a cause], they say it is none of their business, but it is their business. When the *fatawa* business started, most women's organisations didn't come in at first because they said it's just some village women, but later they saw the threat.

Actually, it's the women who have changed a lot, but men haven't. If anything, they seem to have become even more assertive about their privileges. If you're in a position of privilege, you don't want to change your position. If I'm going to be working and not serving a meal to my husband, he'll be upset. Secondly, they've also been socialised to believe that the status of things is so.

One last thought, one also has to be responsible for change. It's not a movement of protest, it's a movement where you want to be something yourself. When we speak about justice and equality, we mean equal rights, not privileges.

empowerment.

The ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action show us what we must do to provide people with the means to gain control over decisions which significantly affect their lives. They call for an environment in which both women and men can make informed and free decisions for themselves. This entails changing attitudes and overcoming prejudice. It means creating a climate in which the birth of a girl child is just as valued as the birth of a boy. It means speaking out about harmful traditional practices, violence and the denial of opportunities for girls and women. It means expanding access to education and health care, including reproductive and sexual health services and information, for both women and men. It means enrolling more girls in school and enabling them to complete their education; and to increase literacy among adult women as a means of breaking the cycle of low status and poverty. It means expanding economic opportunities for women. Both documents call for the removal of legal and cultural barriers to women's full and equal participation in society including at all levels of decision-making. It means encouraging men to support women's advancement and to take greater responsibility for 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. Countries as diverse as Brazil, Burkina Faso, Iran, Thailand and Vietnam, are incorporating the innovative approach to reproductive health and rights and gender equality. India has outlawed sex-selective abortion. Egypt, Ghana,

Uganda and other countries are increasing efforts to stop female genital mutilation.

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.

In order for women to become full-fledged participants in all essential aspects of life, especially in the political and decision-making areas, they must form alliances. We must insure that women are included as peacemakers in resolving political conflicts. We must insure that women, who form the bulk of refugee populations, have access to reproductive health information and services.