

FOCUS

Law and Our Rights



The Progress of Nations

A Tale of Joy and Sorrow of Children

by Abul Hasnat Monjurul Kabir

The day will come when nations will be judged not by their military or economic strength, nor by the splendour of their capital cities and public buildings, but by the well being of their peoples: by their levels of health, nutrition and education, by their opportunities to earn a fair reward for their labours; by their ability to participate in the decisions that affect their lives; by the respect that is shown for their civil and political liberties; by the provision that is made for those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged; and by the protection that is afforded to the growing minds and bodies of their children.

THE Progress of Nations, 1997, the fifth like previous four issues charts the advances made since the 1990 World Summit for Children, at which governments pledged to take specific steps to improve the lives of their children. By now, it has become a universal and credible scorecard of the social health of nations, the nations of the world ranked according to their achievements in child health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and progress for women. The Progress of Nations, published annually by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) expresses its sacred dream in the following way: The day will come when nations will be judged not by their military or economic strength, nor by the splendour of their capital cities and public buildings, but by the well being of their peoples: by their levels of health, nutrition and education, by their opportunities to earn a fair reward for their labours; by their ability to participate in the decisions that affect their lives; by the respect that is shown for their civil and political liberties; by the provision that is made for those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged; and by the protection that is afforded to the growing minds and bodies of their children.

Each year, the report challenges — even provokes — countries to fulfil those promises and the 1997 edition is no exception. It reveals both sides of the stories — stories of joy and of sorrow. It also depicts information that is both good and bad e.g., mortality rates among children under 5 have declined impressively over the past 15 years — but HIV/AIDS is undermining that success in about 30 countries. A code is in place to protect breast-feeding from unethical infant formula marketing practices — but enforcement of the code is spotty. Safe water supplies have expanded dramatically in recent years — but access to sanitation is failing.

This year's edition takes a broad view assessing not only basic social conditions but also progress and disparity in areas that are more difficult to measure. Many of these have a pro-

found impact on children's lives — and ways of living.

The report discusses various key issues under seven broader perspectives: water and sanitation, nutrition, health, education, women, special protections and industrial countries.

Adequate sanitation is the foundation of development — but a decent toilet or latrine is an unknown luxury to half of the people on earth. The percentage of those with access to hygienic sanitation facilities has declined slightly over the 1990s, as construction has fallen behind population growth. The main result can be summed up in one deadly word: diarrhoea. It kills 2.2 million children a year and consumers precious funds in health care costs, preventing families and nations from climbing the ladder of development. Director of the Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi (Pakistan) which has brought modern sanitation to a squatter community of 1 million people, Akhtar Hamed Khan writes on this crucial issue. He was also the Director of the Pakistan Academy of Rural Development (presently BARD).

For babies every where, the benefits of breast-feeding are undisputed. But for babies in developing nations breast-feeding is imperative: their very survival depends on the immune — boosting properties of mother's milk. For them, infant formula is not just inferior, it can cause disease or even death.

Poor families often over-dilute costly formula with unclean water and mix it in unclean bottles, adding to the risk.

Yet, despite international pleas and a marketing code agreed to 16 years ago, manufacturers still market infant formula and other substitutes unethically around the globe. In the article "Putting babies before business," the Right Reverend Simon Barrington Ward highlights all these in detail. He was until recently Chair of the International and Development Affairs Committee of the Church of England's General Synod.

The world's children are benefiting from several decades of unprecedented health progress. Child-killing diseases are succumbing to vaccination campaigns and low-cost reme-

dies, reducing death rates and improving the quality of young lives. But in about 30 developing countries, HIV/AIDS is threatening and even reversing these strides. Meanwhile, in the industrialised countries, AIDS is starting to be called a manageable disease, as costly miracle drugs seemingly pull its victims back from the brink of death. Now the fight against AIDS faces new dangers: complacency in the industrialised countries and divisiveness between them and the developing nations. Dr. Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS focuses on the recent trend and issues of fighting against AIDS.

Harry Sawyer recently retired as Minister for Education of Ghana writes on quality education. Three years before the millennium, 140 million children are — still not in school, despite government pledges to achieve universal access to basic education by the year 2000. Many of the youngsters who are in school find themselves squeezed on to crowded benches in dilapidated classrooms, lacking even a slate, while a teacher drills lessons by rote. Over the past 20 years, while countries rushed to increase the number of schools and teachers, quality and relevance of education often took a back seat. But quantity is not an acceptable trade-off for quality.

Violence against women and girls is the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world today. Its forms are both subtle and blatant and its impact on development is profound. But it is so deeply embedded in cultures around the world that is almost invisible. Yet this brutality is not inevitable. Once recognised for what it is a construct of power and a means of maintaining the status quo it can be dismantled. And Charlotte Bunch, the Executive Director of the Centre for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University (US) analyses in-depth the issue of violence against women and girls.

Lisbet Palme, a psychologist specialising in children, and a member of the Swedish Child and Youth Advisory Committee writes on the children who come into conflict with the law.

Whether due to government paternalism or to simple disregard for their rights, juveniles who come into conflict with the law often face justice system that treat them capriciously and offer fewer protections than they offer adults. Children in many countries face the wrath of law for the 'crimes' of being poor, neglected or abused. Regardless of the reasserts for their offenders, young people are entitled to fair treatment at the hands of juvenile justice systems that are designed to aid youngsters return to productive society as quickly as possible.

Economic development has brought comfort and convenience to many people in the industrialised world, but in its wake are pollution, new health problems blighted urban landscapes and social isolation. Growing numbers of the dispossessed are also being left on the sidelines as the disparity between the rich and the poor widens. In thousands of communities are joining together with government agencies under the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities banner to improve the quality of life in their towns and cities. Leonard Duhl and Trevor Hanock, founders of the Healthy Cities/Healthy Communities Movement pinpoints the inter relation between healthy cities and healthy children as the former are the precondition for the latter.

In detailing a broad range of both achievements made and challenges remaining, the report on every country not just doful, the pledges explicit in the goals established at the summit but to maintain children at the very top of their national agenda.

No doubt this is a universal document on the real progress of nations depicting some of the major and remarkable successes and failures of the children of this world. The knowledge it uncovers is fundamental to solving problems, because information is the first ingredient needed by those with the will and the means to make change. And the Progress of Nations goes in-depth the issue of violence against women and girls.

The world's children are benefiting from several decades of unprecedented health progress. Child-killing diseases are succumbing to vaccination campaigns and low-cost reme-

A: No.
Q: You are giving evidence as taught by others.
A: Not true.

Following are the excerpts of the cross-examination of Havildar (retd) Mohammad Qudus Sikder by Fariduddin Ahmed, state defence for absconding accused Lt Col (retd) Rashed Chowdhury:

Q: How many promotions you got since 1973 till your retirement and how many during your stay in Pakistan?

A: I got two promotions in Pakistan and got since 1973 till my retirement.

Q: Where had you been during your two-month leave after you came back to the country?

A: At my village home.

Q: On which date and on what day you came to Ganobabu from Comilla in 1975?

A: I cannot recollect the date and the day.

Q: Before the incident how many days you performed your duty at Bangabandhu's house?

A: Seven days, but duty was on alternate day.

Q: How many policemen were on guard regularly in that house?

A: Five policemen. There were sentry posts in that house and five were for police and two for army.

Q: Were the commands of army and police different?

A: Yes, there were different commands.

Q: What are the Bangla words of 'duty' and 'guard'?

A: Responsibility and security or sentry (in Bangla kartala and pahar).

Q: What is the job of a sentry?

A: To challenge an intruder.

Q: Did you perform your duty properly on that day?

A: Yes, to the best of our capacity in the given situation.

Q: You were not at the place of occurrence and you didn't witness and know anything of the situation.

A: It is not true.

Q: Did you give any evidence to any case other than this?

A: Earlier, the state-appointed lawyers for the absconding ac-

sioned accused Lt Col (retd) Shariful Huq Dalim:

charge with ammunition on August 15, 1975 and made am-

bul.

A: It is not true.

Q: When the attackers were killing the President and his family members, you were on

move on the first and ground floor of that house and the at-

tackers did not obstruct your movement.

A: No.

Q: The attackers did not

snatch your arms.

A: True.

Q: One havilder took Russel

upstairs and after coming back

said all finished — did you

mention the name of that havilder in your statement?

A: I did not say because I

don't know the name of that havilder.

Q: Was his name Havilder

Quddus?

A: No.

Q: Did you meet Capt Bashar

after the President and his

family members were killed?

A: No, I didn't, because there

was one senior to me.

Q: You have said that Capt

Bazlul Huda ordered you to

guard the bodies of that house,

but Capt Huda was not your

company commander — isn't it?

A: Yes.

Q: As per army rule you were

not bound to carry out his or-

ders.

A: I was bound.

Q: Major Dalim did not visit

the regiment after his retire-

ment and did not go to Banga-

bandhu's house at Road-32 after

the August 15 killing.

A: It is not true.

Q: You followed the

regiment after that.

A: I had.

Q: How the communications

with the IO took place?

A: CID office sent one person

to me and being informed I went

there.

Q: You did not tell the IO that

Major Aziz Pasha was not

open to Bangabandhu's house or

the bedroom.

A: It is not true.

Q: You did not tell the IO that

Major Aziz Pasha shot Begum

Mujib by his stung taking her

(Begum Mujib) to the bedroom.

A: I told him.

Q: You also did not tell the IO

that he (Aziz Pasha) came down

after killing Sheikh Jamal and

Sheikh Kamal's wife.

A: I told him that he (Pasha)

came down killing all in that

room.

Q: Nor have you said that you

heard the sound of shots and

cries.

A: I have said.

Q: You neither have talked

nor seen or heard Major Aziz

Pasha and Major Farooque or

any other.

A: I have seen them talking.

Q: Major Aziz neither on Au-

gust 15 morning nor at any time

did come to Bangabandhu's

residence.

A: It is not true.

Q: Major Aziz Pasha did not

commit any crime as charged

by the prosecution.

A: It is not true.

Q: Your statement is correct.

A: Yes.

Advocate Abdus Sattar Dul-

lam, state defence for absconding accused Capt Nazmul Hossain Ansari, declined to cross-exam-

ine the witness saying that the

witness had not mentioned the

name of his client.

— UNB

Verbatim texts of further