

We Remember Yasmeen

by Shaheen Anam

Yasmeen's case has motivated women's groups and lawyers to examine our legal system and make recommendations for law reform.

WOMEN all over Bangladesh observed the second Death Anniversary of Yasmeen, the 14-year-old girl who was picked up by police at Dash Mile, Dinaipur on the night of August 24, 1995. She was raped and thrown out of the police van to die. What follows is a shameful episode of police cover-ups, lies, tampering with evidence and police repression (death of 7 people while protesting Yasmeen's death). The day has been declared as 'Women's Repression Resistance Day'.

Widespread condemnation followed this grotesque spectacle of police brutality. People's faith in police, the so-called guardians of law was badly shaken as the women's community took to the streets in protest. Demands were made for a quick trial and exemplary punishment. However, much to our regret the trial has been anything but swift. We now await its outcome and can only hope that Yasmeen will finally get justice. The case of Yasmeen has now become a symbol. Its outcome will determine if every person is indeed equal in the eyes of the law, even a poor, 14-year-old domestic worker like Yasmeen.

In monitoring the case, we discovered much to our dismay the loopholes existing in our legal system. These loopholes are obstacles to the speedy dispensation of cases of violence against women and ones that prevent the legal system to function properly. Yasmeen's case has motivated women's groups and lawyers to examine our legal system and make recommendations for law reform. There are in fact many provisions which contradict rights given in our constitution while some laws are outdated and need revision and reformula-

tion. Yasmeen's death, however sad, brutal and savage has inspired women's groups to consolidate their resources and work unitedly to protest violence against women. Because of consistent pressure and monitoring the violence issue is much more focused on national media, for and seminars. The press has done a tremendous job in bringing to public attention the violence women face in our society. Some organisations have taken up research and documentation of cases of violence while others are providing legal services. Although all the efforts combined may seem like a drop in the ocean today, it has future implications for a concerted movement towards building a violence-free society.

While the above is true, we read and hear everyday about more and more cases of violence. The Daily *Jonokantha* reported a few days back that there has been 1,300 rape cases in the last one year. These are only the reported cases. No one knows what the actual figures must be like in a society where the victim is made to feel much more guilty and ashamed than the culprit. A more dangerous and sinister trend is now observed whereby rape victims are murdered to destroy primary evidence.

We protest in the most strongest terms the inaction of the authorities in dealing with most cases of violence. Our demand for speedy dispensation of cases and extending exemplary punishment to those found guilty has fallen on deaf ears. All the promises and assurances of punishing the culprits seem to be only empty words. The authorities have totally

failed to ensure the minimum security for our womenfolk. Female children and adolescent girls are regularly falling prey to every kind of sexual perversions and savagery. Women from the poorer sections of the society are made to pay a heavier burden. In their heroic struggle to survive they continue to become victims of all kinds of violence such as rape, murder, assault, acid-throwing, trafficking, including police brutality.

Women are no longer willing to suffer in silence. There is more articulation of protest than ever before. However, women will have to become much more active and alert if they are serious about making a dent in this vicious cycle of violence. Women will have to go beyond just protesting and making statements and go into influencing policy decisions. Along with acting as a pressure group through street activism, a thought has to be given to service delivery. Providing services to victims of violence such as shelters, safe houses, rehabilitation, legal services etc, should become a part of the movement against violence. Most importantly, more and more women should become a part of the movement. Women will have to realise that this fight is for our survival, it has to be fought by us and won by us.

We remember Yasmeen with feelings of immense sorrow. A mere child of 14 should not have died in the way she did. No civilised society should tolerate such cruelty. However, we also remember Yasmeen with pride and reverence. It was her death that galvanised women to once again take a stand against violence. A stand from which women of Bangladesh will no longer go back.

Growth Centers Get a Boost

The work occurred in the lean period when the farmers were passing idle days and were faced with food shortage. The first phase of the European Union (EU) assisted food-for-work project to improve important road links between two villages, was completed. The 11.58 kilometer long earthen road under Tarash and Katagari under Tarash thana of Rajshahi now enables local farmers and traders to carry their merchandise from one place to another without depending on the third man.

To start with, the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) first picked up the two villages earmarked by the Planning Commission (PC) as Growth Centers (GC). The project is known as Integrated Food Assisted Development Project of IFAD/EP Sub-project-2.

A GC is a village with significant agricultural importance and enjoys a trade potential. The PC identified 2,100 such centers in the country and plans are underway to improve them all.

Said the assistant engineer of the LGED, "Before, this road was in a very bad shape and fit for only bullock carts to ply on. In dry season the farmers can use rickshaws and even mechanised carriers on this road."

At the site, the earthen road had become muddy due to persistent rain. But local people

The Food-for-Work Approach

by Morshed Ali Khan back from Rajshahi

were happy. Rashid Mia, a farmer from Katagari said the villagers knew that the mud would dry up within a month and allow them to carry their merchandise to Tarash and get a better profit.

The LGED engineer pointed out that eventually the road would be made metallic. "We raised the road by a few feet to bring it to the level of the highways and the whole stretch has been built as per engineering requirement," he said explaining that the road was now 24 feet wide and had slope on either side to prevent any erosion.

"In the process the local land owners volunteered to give their land for the project and we are planning to involve them in other profit making activities by the roadside," the engineer said.

Under the Tarash thana there are four GCs. Another such project was to improve the 13.27 kilometer road linking Mahadevpur with Chattria near the Atrai river.

The local people claimed that one fourth of the country's *atap* rice was produced in the area. "We are really happy to see this road getting better," said Matbar Ali of Mahadevpur. "Now we don't have to depend on the brokers to sell our products."

Shukumar Chandra Kar, Executive Engineer of the LGED said a total of 132.28 metric tonnes of wheat was allocated for the project of which 111.29 metric tonnes was spent to complete the earth work.

Assisting the Poorest of the Poor

The Thana Livestock Officer, Dr Shahidul Islam was addressing a class of about forty women packed in a room at the Karajgram Primary School under Raninagar thana. The day's lesson was on rearing poultry and nutrition.

The women, all showing signs of malnutrition and poverty, sat down quietly and listened to Islam. They were attending the class under IFAD/EP Sub-project-1.

The women were holders of card issued by the Union Parishad Chairmen which proved that they were destitute. This vulnerable status enabled them to enroll in the project. Every month each one of them is entitled to 30 kg of wheat.

Bina Bala Desha, 50, a beneficiary said she had come to attend the class for wheat. Bina, a widow has three sons and a daughter. One of her sons, barely four years old, never returned home after he went to the roadside grocery for buying something for the family few

months ago. "I make my living by begging from door to door," she said.

Most women attending the class showed visible signs of eye problem with their pupils slowly turning white. A participant said she was having difficulty in seeing and this problem had grown over the last one year.

The Sub-project-1 is mainly run jointly by the Directorate of Women's Affairs and an NGO. The NGO, responsible for the training, motivating and growing awareness among participants, was selected through a selection process and competition.

The Chief Technical Adviser



For destitutes IFAD/EP Sub-project-1 is a ray of hope

Accentuating the Positive to Eliminate the Negative

Poverty should be made a thing of the past, like slavery, colonialism and nuclear war, says the United Nations Development Programme's latest Human Development Report. But whatever the future holds, Gemini News Service applauds the great advances that have already been made. Daniel Nelson writes from London

Good news countries

Largest reductions in poverty*	
China	79%
Tunisia	79%
South Korea	78%
Malaysia	77%
Indonesia	75%
Singapore	68%

Largest reductions in adult literacy	
South Korea	83%
Lebanon	75%
Jordan	75%
Thailand	70%
Philippines	68%
Kenya	68%

Largest reductions in under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	
Oman	91%
South Korea	87%
Chile	86%
Saudi Arabia	82%
Cuba	81%
Barbados	81%

*Most figures cover a 25-year period

*Based on national poverty definitions

people living below the national poverty level in 20 years, and Thailand, for almost eradicating malnutrition in only nine years.

Well done Trinidad and Tobago — closely followed by Cuba, Chile, Singapore and Costa Rica — for performing so well in the United Nations Development Programme's new human poverty index. UNDP says human poverty (measured by longevity, education and access to public and private resources, such as health care) now affects less than 10 per cent of these countries' populations.

Success knows no ideology. Poverty defined by the traditional measure — income — has been reduced by Sri Lanka and Jamaica as well as by

China. The UNDP's latest *Human Development Report* says both Costa Rica and Vietnam have translated the benefits of economic growth into improvements in people's lives.

Bouquets for Burkina Faso, the Cambodia, Senegal and Zimbabwe for cutting child deaths by up to half in 15 years. More bouquets to the Arab states for doubling the number of people with access to safe water in the same time span, despite severe economic cutbacks, and for achieving the fastest decline in adult illiteracy of any region of the world.

And a special round of applause for Oman for "some of the most rapid advances in human development ever recorded."

All societies treat men better than women, but some developing countries out-perform much richer industrialised countries in gender equality in political, economic and professional activities. Barbados is ahead of Belgium and Italy in the UNDP gender rankings, and the Bahamas leads Britain. France lags behind Surinam, Colombia and Botswana, while Japan is behind China, Guatemala and Mexico.

About three-quarters of the poor in developing countries depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, so growth in small-holder productivity in Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan has played a major role in poverty reduction.

Even in the midst of crisis,

there is good news — like the progress in tackling AIDS by Uganda and Thailand.

Overall, says UNDP, "few people realise the great advances already made. In the past 50 years poverty has fallen more than in the previous 500."

In little more than a generation, child death rates in developing countries have been more than halved, malnutrition rates have declined by more than a third, the proportion of children out of primary school has fallen from more than a half to less than a quarter, and the share of rural families without access to safe water has fallen from nine-tenths to about a quarter.

By 1995, about 60 developing countries had reached the 2000 target for immunising 90 per cent of their people.

Iodine deficiency, the biggest cause of preventable mental incapacity, is on the retreat. About 1.5 billion more people had access to iodised salt in 1995 than in 1990. Polio has been eradicated in 110 countries.

Africa has made enormous gains since the end of colonialism. Life expectancy in 1995 was 10 years longer than in 1960. Half a century ago, African women were unlikely to have attended school; by 1995, almost half of all adult females were estimated to be literate. The current annual 12 per cent expansion of tertiary education for African girls is unmatched anywhere else.

Almost every other indicator, from paved roads to daily newspaper readership, from the number of agricultural scientists (a six-fold increase in 30 years) to widespread access to safe water, has also shown a significant upward rise.

DANIEL NELSON is Editor of Gemini News Service.

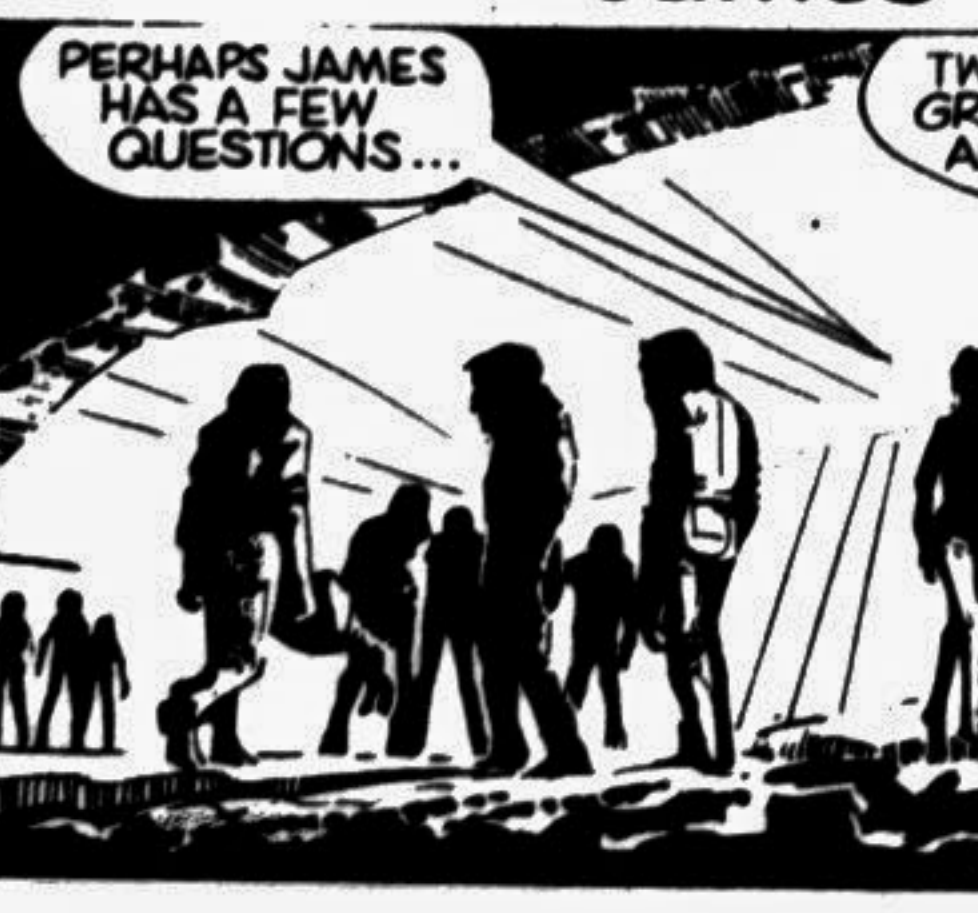
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Govt has adopted supportive policies towards role of NGOs: Kibria

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria yesterday said the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has adopted supportive policies towards the constructive role of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), reports BSS.

He said the NGOs here play constructive, catalytic and supportive role for government endeavours in eradication of poverty, illiteracy, empowerment of women and other development efforts.

The finance minister was addressing the certificate giving ceremony of the first post-graduate diploma course on "NGO leadership and management" under global partnership programme in the auditorium of BRAC Centre for Development Management at Mohakhali in the city.

The course was jointly organised by the Organisation of Rural Activities for Progress (ORAP), Zenzile College of Zimbabwe, World Learning's School for International Training (SIT) of Vermont, USA, and Centre for Development Management of BRAC.

Nineteen NGO executives including three women and one officer from NGO Affairs Bureau, participated in the course.

The function was also addressed by Jeff Unsicker of SIT, Thandiwe Cornelia Nkomo of ORAP, Dr Golam Samdani Fakir of BRAC, Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, Chairperson of Global Partnership and Executive Director of BRAC FH Abed.

6.7 lakh imparted education by Proshika since '90

Over 6.7 lakh people have been imparted education in three different categories under Proshika's Universal Education Programme (UEP) since 1990, according to a press release, reports BSS.

Proshika, a leading non-governmental organisation, which undertook the programme as its endeavour to supplement the government thrust for eradicating illiteracy, achieved remarkable success in the 1996-97 period, during which it provided education facilities to over one lakh twenty-one thousand people across the country.

Proshika, under its adult literacy centre, village study circle, children's schooling and non-formal primary education programme (NFPE), has fixed its target to educate at least 10 lakh people of the country by June 1998. Besides, under post literacy programme, it organised over 2000 "patachakra" (study circles) which were designed to increase and maintain the habit of reading and writing of the neo-literates.

In the last fiscal year (1996-

97), the organisation, under its adult literacy programme, set up 3377 centres where 70,577 persons including 29,716 males and 40,861 females were imparted education. Earlier, nearly three lakh people were educated at 14,700 such centres.

During the year under review, 45,641 children, including 22,563 boys and 23,078 girls, were enrolled in primary schools under its children's schooling programmes.

Proshika, during the 1996-97 period, imparted education to 65,926 persons under its non-formal primary education programme, in addition to 61,996 persons who were given education earlier under this category.

The press release, while highlighting the salient features of Proshika's universal education programme, said literacy skills, among other things, would assist the poor to participate effectively at all levels of society and, thus help them to become potent contributors to the process of building a just, productive and equitable social system.



Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (JAGPA) brought out a procession demanding the release of its leader Shafiqul Alam Pradhan and BNP leader Anwar Zahid in the city yesterday.

Fax thru' Internet at a cheaper rate

By Shehab Ahmed

Internet users in Bangladesh are being offered a new service to send their facsimile messages at a cheaper rate.

An enterprising Bangladeshi youngman has established a company offering the service from last week. Sadat Akbar of the In-touch Communication said he opened the service in a joint venture with a Singapore-based company, Asiatic Venture. "We are the first company in Bangladesh to offer this service for people to send their international facsimile communication through the Internet."

He is using the Vast belonging to one of the Internet service providers company based in Dhaka. Since opening the service he has received an encouraging response, Sadat said.

For Tk 1,000, a customer can open an account. The customer can use his fax machine by making a local call to access the company's server with his pass code and account number. "When about 75 per cent of the deposit is exhausted, we advise the customer to replenish his account," he said.

He said that his company is offering 60 per cent lower rate than the state monopoly BTTC charges for sending fax on IDD lines.

Moudud leaves for US

Moudud Ahmed, former vice president and a member of the BNP standing committee, left Dhaka for Washington yesterday to join as visiting professor at George Washington University, reports UNB.

He will teach two graduate courses on international affairs focusing on South Asia in the fall semester 1997, beginning from Sept 2, according to a press release.

Attack on Press Club Resignation of management body demanded

A protest rally of journalists yesterday strongly condemned the attack on the National Press Club and manhandling of journalists by BNP activists, and unprovoked police action in which photo-journalist Habibur Rahman was critically injured during hartal hours Sunday, reports BSS.

Held at the National Press Club under the aegis of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), the rally also condemned the failure of the Press Club management to maintain the sanctity of the club premises and protect the rights and dignity of the club members. The rally demanded resignation of the management committee unless they condemned the attack on the Press Club by the outsiders and ensured the safety and security of the club members.

Bitterly criticising the attack on a seminar of lawyers at the Press Club auditorium and disruption of a women's rally in front of the club by the hartal supporters, the rally urged all to refrain from such undemocratic and autocratic behaviour.

The rally noted with deep concern and indignation that the pro-hartal activists in an unprecedented move took shelter inside the club building.

BFUJ president Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury presided over the meeting while DUJ general secretary Azizul Islam Bhuiyan conducted the rally, which was addressed by senior journalists and union leaders including ABM Musa, Habibur Rahman, Milan, Golam Sarwar, Abul Kalam Azad, Shafiqur Rahman, Altaf Mahmud, Kartik Chatterji, Akhter Ahmed Khan, Zakaria Kaja, Saiful Alam and Yusuf Pasha.

Acupuncture centre opens in city

A Chinese Acupuncture and Medical Centre was opened in the city Sunday to make the thousand-year-old classical treatment available to the people, reports UNB.

The centre will provide training to local doctors and render service to mainly various pain-stricken patients through its clinic.

Cultural Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka Lin Zua Sen inaugurated the Acupuncture and Medical Centre at Ga-183/1, School Road, Mohakhali. Former Secretary Hashinur Rahman and First Secretary (Political) Shi Jing Wu attended the function.

Acupuncturists — Dr Saroj Kumar Gharami and Dr Jahangir Alam — will give service on acupuncture, physiotherapy, medical surgery, OBS and gynecology from 4 pm to 6 pm.

It is a practical clinic of Chinese Acupuncture Training Centre, headed by noted Col (Retd) Dr M Abdus Samad who had been trained up on acupuncture under a WHO-scholarship in China.

Death anniversary

The 26th death anniversary of noted freedom fighter Shahid Zakir Hussain and the fifth anniversary of death of his father Abdul Karim will simultaneously be observed in the city today. In this connection, a *milad mahfil* and *Qurankhwanah* have been arranged at 12/1 A. Motijheel C/A at 1:30 pm.

Shahid Zakir Hussain died in Comilla by the side of the Saldah River in a face to face fight against the Pakistani army.

Ershad leaves for Rangpur tomorrow

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad MP leaves capital on a four-day visit to his constituency in northern Rangpur district, reports UNB.

On his way to Rangpur by road, Ershad will address a number of roadside gatherings at Nagarbari, Kashinathpur, Shahjadpur, Bera, Ullapara, Chandaikone, Sherpur and Mokamtola.

He will also offer *fateha* at the *mazar* of a Muslim saint at Mahastangarh in Bogra and hold a meeting with the party leaders of the district.

The former President will address a public meeting at Pirgachha on Thursday and at Badarganj on Friday. He will meet the elite of Rangpur on the same day at Hotel Tolotoma.

Ershad will return to the capital on Saturday.

Anti-Islamic forces more active now, says ZP chairman

By Staff Correspondent

Zaker Party (ZP) chairman Peerzada Alhaj Mostafa Ameer Faisal has said anti-Islamic forces are more active now in the country than ever before.

He was addressing the adjourned meeting of the party's standing committee held at the party central office at Banani yesterday, a party press release said.

He said the recent attack on Biswa Zaker Manjil was part of the anti-Islamic activities. He regretted that the government, despite repeated appeals by different quarters, did not arrest the attackers yet.

In a separate statement Faisal also condemned the arrest of JAGPA President Shafiqul Alam Pradhan and demanded his immediate release.

BNP leaders condemn 'police attacks on peaceful processions'

BNP standing committee members, vice presidents, joint secretary generals and its city convenor have felicitated the people for observing an all-out hartal on Sunday, reports UNB.

In a joint meeting yesterday, the senior BNP leaders condemned the "police attacks on peaceful processions and rallies at different places" during the hartal hours.

The meeting, presided over by party senior vice president Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, also condemned the incident in which photojournalist Habibur Rahman Habib was seriously injured.

It demanded unconditional release of all the party leaders and workers, including Anwar Zahid, Habibur Rahman Mandal, commissioner Chowdhury Alam and Maqbul Ahmed Akand and Jagpa president Shafiqul Alam Pradhan.

The BNP leaders reiterated the demand to withdraw the increased prices of petroleum products.

They also discussed the party's next course of action and the nature of future movement.

Prof Roushan Ara honoured

Writer and columnist, Prof Roushan Ara Hoque, has been conferred with an honorary appointment to the research board of advisors of the American Biographical Institute Inc, USA, says a press release.

Prof Hoque will participate in the Institute's research activities.