

DEVELOPMENT

The Food-for-Work Approach

by Morshed Ali Khan back from Rajshahi

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, Dinajpur 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 Resistance Day'.

Widespread condemnation followed this grotesque spectre 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 There are in fact many provisions which contradict rights given in our constitution while some laws are outdated and needs revision and reformula-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, fora 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 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 onto 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 between Tarash and Katagari under Tarash thana of Rajshahi now enables local farmers and traders to carry their own 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 IFADEP 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 bull 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

L

ETS hear it for developing countries with successes to celebrate — for those countries which, despite media emphasis on wars and catastrophes, have been singled out for praise in a new United Nations report.

Step forward, please, China, for halving the proportion of

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 Chatta near the Arai 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 Karagram 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 IFADEP 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 enrol 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 destitute IFADEP 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*		Largest reductions in adult literacy		Largest reductions in under-5 mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	
China	79%	South Korea	83%	Oman	91%
Tunisia	79%	Lebanon	75%	South Korea	87%
South Korea	78%	Jordan	75%	Chile	86%
Malaysia	77%	Thailand	70%	Saudi Arabia	82%
Indonesia	75%	Singapore	68%	Cuba	81%
				Barbados	81%

*Most figures cover a 25-year period

Based on national poverty definitions



SOURCE: UNDP

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 Cambia, 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 smallholder productivity in Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan has played a major role in poverty reduction.

Even in the midst of crisis,

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.

Metropolitan

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 young man 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 Vsat 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 BTB 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 at 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 ABDM Musa, Habibur Rahman Milan, Golam Sarwar, Abul Kalam Azad, Shafiqur Rahman, Altaf Mahmud, Kartik Chatterjee, Akther Ahmed Khan, Zakaria Kajal, Saiful Alam and Yusuf Pasha.

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

Late Abdul Karim Khan was a founder-member of the Broth-

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 Zia 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 Saro Kumar Garami and Dr Jahanpur Alam — will give service on acupuncture, physiotherapy, medical surgery, OBs and gynaecology 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.

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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, Chandakone, Sherpur and Mokomota.

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.