

## RAJUK Owes an Answer

Were it not for the fortuitous occasion of a woman's early rising for prayer and her ability to react noisily in panic, newspaper readers yesterday morning would have certainly been in for a horrifying account of death — death not coming through the uncharted path of accidents but disaster that were planted and reared by man's greed, irresponsibility and the minimum care for others' lives.

There was no information of any tremor in Bangladesh in the small hours of Tuesday. Then why did the four-storeyed building in Narayanganj that had been a dwelling place for some 30 people caved in unexpectedly? It was, as the local municipality engineer reportedly confirmed, gross violation of the basic building norms at the time of construction what made the cookie crumble. What makes a cold sweat run down the spine is that there are quite a few ramshackle constructions like the one at Baburail around. These travesty of dwelling places or death traps are neither too few nor remotely erected to catch notice. Some of them stand very disturbingly and perilously right before our eyes. The irony of it all is that these stages of potential tragedies which have no business to be there in the first place are there. Unless demolished they will all crumble in time, sooner or later.

How do these ramshackle buildings are erected? Isn't it RAJUK's responsibility to make sure that all buildings are raised with the minimum observation of norms as regards sustainability? If that is so how these house of deaths sprout?

The fact is there are certain rules as far as construction in the urban area is concerned but they are apparently being violated and violated quite regularly. This murderous criminal practice is going on because of the unholy nexus between the builders whose lone concern is to make as much profit as possible by renting out the house with the minimum investment for building purpose and a section of corrupt RAJUK employees who let go these plans unchallenged for bribes. This quiet cycle of corruption which has been going on for a long time is likely to increase in a country like Bangladesh where urbanisation is fast spreading and where a steady flow of investment is going to real estate sector.

## Stop This Persecution

This is inconceivable. This is the setting of some hell. A blind oldie running an asylum for mental cases. The man doesn't know a whit of medicine and the 17 inmates, three of them female, are all in chains. The man is a cheat and given wholly over to lust. He has been running the asylum for 17 years very profitably indeed. He charges 3000 Taka a month to keep a patient and spends hardly even one-tenth of that on food and other needs of the charge. The asylum could be called either a torture chamber or forced labour camp or both.

The odd thing has been there at Demra, doing its criminal business within the knowledge of all living around it, for 17 years. The 70-year old owner and self-appointed doctor to the men and women put under his charge has been doing his diabolical business by dint of clamping a kind of terror on the surrounds of the asylum. Demra police is blamed to have protected him by letting him an undisturbed life. And he is believed to have a band of paid mastans.

This cannot wholly explain the impunity with which he continued with his business. And this he could carry on till his death had not two of his own sons rebelled and went to Advocate Salma Ali of the National Women Lawyers' Association. The lesson of this madhouse run by a criminal is that society has ceased to be society and that government as yet has not reached even to recesses right under its seat. What crucial thing remains to be explained is who are the people who put those inmates there? A plain answer can be, criminals. It is indeed possible that some criminality is involved in throwing one's own people into that dungeon from where rarely one ever had come out unless through the door of death.

Our people have no idea what to do with a disturbed child. Where to go, where to keep it. For the tens of millions of our impoverished and ignorant masses who rush in a stampede to get a *pant-poda* by a havildar, it is not unnatural to fall for such asylums. The attitude to those members of a family who had stunted mental growth or other such mental problem or deficiency, on the part of the family and the society at large has not undergone any change in the past so many centuries. This allows criminals like Dr Quddus to fill the void and make quite a living.

He must pay for his crime. But something must be done to stop persecution of the mental patients.

## BDR Too!

Raping women in their helplessness was something we knew as a serious behavioural aberration of police until yesterday. Gone are those days it seems. Members of Bangladesh Rifles who are far less visible compared to their ubiquitous brethren in khaki and blue simply because their exclusive task is guarding the borders are no less lethal when it comes to unleashing their libidinal perversion on the poor, helpless females. The gangraping incident of a young housewife in a BDR bunker at Hilli in Dinajpur as reported in a leading vernacular daily last Tuesday forms a pathetic commentary on the role of the law enforcing agency in exacerbating repression on women. The beastly orgy of carnal lust in which the BDR members indulged with the helpless body of Fatema after a futile search on suspicion of her as a smuggler strikes us as a passage from the numerous anecdotes of barbaric molestation of helpless women by gangs of perpetrators and brutes.

But now what? Men in uniform raping a woman supposed to be safe in their custody! What is the difference between them and ordinary criminals? This particular incident proves how pervasive the process of bestialisation of the society has been. It is all the more monstrous when it involves the defenders of the law.

The sector commander of BDR has reportedly admitted involvement of the BDR personnel in the incident. We demand the authorities brook no slackness in pursuing the case and give exemplary punishment to the culprits. Enough is enough. It is about time we at least rid law enforcers from being involved in cases of repression on women.

# Environment : The Deadweight Damage

Bangladesh seems to be quite poised with consciousness about the damages caused by pollution. We should now move to the calculus of the damage.

**A**LMOST the entire leather industry of Bangladesh — an important segment of our exports — lies in Hazaribagh. Of the 200 producers of finished leather and leather goods, nearly 149 tanneries are located in this area of only 25 hectares. Daily discharge of wastes from these tanneries is reported to be about 18000 litres liquid, 115 tonnes solid during peak time and 75 tonnes during off-peak time. Liquid wastes are dumped into the river Buriganga while part of these remain trapped inside the Dhaka Flood Control Embankment.

There are many studies, in circulation, to tell the stories of Hazaribagh tanneries — especially of their impact on environment, in and around the locality. But none of the studies so far seems to have attempted to monetise the costs of environmental degradation caused by tanning industry in Hazaribagh. Monetisation of environmental hazards are necessary to show, first, that all that glitters economically may not be gold environmentally; second, to help policy makers to initiate economic proposals so that a scheme of market-based incentives could be orchestrated to pounce upon pollution.

Drs Enamul Haque, M. Faisal of North-South University, as well as this writer, embarked upon monetisation of environmental costs in Hazaribagh. The study was sponsored by the Asian Development Bank under its Asia-Pacific Regional Environmental Economics Training (APREETA) project. Due to time and fund constraints, we decided to look at only three as-

pects: human health, land value and rental loss of houses. Human health impact is probabilistic as death or increased probability of death, illness including skin diseases, fevers, headaches, respiratory diseases etc. The impacts of disposals and the consequent odour in the area also adversely affects the land and house values which need to be duly reckoned with. A comparison is made between Hazaribagh (target area) and Mohammadpur-Rayer Bazar (control areas) while both of these areas display similarities in terms of relevant socio-economic variables. For example, average income per annum in both the areas ranged between US \$900 — US \$1500. Number of average earning member per household is 1.44 and 1.54 respectively. Average household size is 6.11 and 6.16 respectively. The study was carried out in May 1997 with 112 randomly selected households in control sites.

It has been observed that, on average, the incidence of illness among the people living in Hazaribagh is 16 per cent higher than people living in adjacent control areas of Mohammadpur and Rayer Bazar. In the month preceding the survey, people of Hazaribagh had 15 per cent more cases of diarrhoea, 10 per cent higher cases of fever, 21 per cent higher cases of jaundice, 17 per cent higher cases of kidney related diseases and 31 per cent higher cases of skin diseases. Incidentally, these are also the cases of skin-diseases

mostly related to tanneries-led pollution. The loss of income due to illness in Hazaribagh was estimated to be Tk 10,211 compared to Tk 8,428 (21 per cent lower) in control areas. It was also found that people of control areas used allopathic and homeopathic medicines in 95 per cent cases while the share is 85 per cent in target area. Further, people of target area (Hazaribagh) used a combination of various traditional healing like mixing allopathic

sickness among the people of Hazaribagh area. This was attributed to the pollution caused by tanneries. Second, to measure their willingness to accept (WTA), the cost of treatment was calculated using national health cost average. Third, the amount of lost income was also added to the cost of treatment to estimate the WTA measure of human health impact from the pollution. Calculated thus, the cost of human health impact from tanneries varies from

Hazaribagh costs 3.78 lakh compound to Tk 4.39 lakh in Mohammadpur-Rayer Bazar. The difference is 61,000 Taka per *katha*. But this differs substantially in terms of prices in case of land on the main road side: Tk 5.30 lakh vs 6.40 lakh/katha. Commercial site land price also varies substantially: Tk 4.63 lakh vs Tk 6.22 lakh. Astonishingly, the loss in value of land due to degradation of environment in Hazaribagh and surrounding area — as observed by regression — is US\$77,584 per acre for high land and US\$ 60,234 per acre for low land. Rent per house in Hazaribagh is lower than in Mohammadpur-Rayer Bazar area. The difference is Tk 295 per month for all houses.

Total cost of pollution from tanneries in Dhaka city is estimated in terms of three losses: a) human health losses implying cost of treatment and for-gone income, b) loss of property values and c) loss of rental income due to pollution. It appears that the total loss exceeds

Tk 2951 million. This is a huge cost compared to the relocation cost of the tanneries from its present site to outside Dhaka.

Except for losses in terms of land owned by the tanneries, most of the losses are external to the industry and no charge has ever been levied on the tanneries. In fact, people are paying a heavy price for the profits of the tanneries. People suffer for others' survival. In terms of annuity, accrued loss varies from Tk 59 crore to 85 crore at the lowest and from 107 crore to 179 crore at the highest. These estimates are made for 50 years and 30 years lifetime of the industries.

The case study developed by us is not beyond question either in terms of methodology or in terms of the output we delivered. What we actually haunted for is not a qualitative judgement on the environmental issue but a quantitative answer so that future policy actions could follow properly. Bangladesh seems to be quite poised with consciousness about the damages caused by pollution. We should now move to the calculus of the damage.

**Beneath the Surface**  
by Abdul Bayes

with ayurvedic or voodoo healing, homeopathic with other practices etc. than the people of control area (Mohammadpur-Rayer Bazar) did. This implies, perhaps, that the people of the target area have more complex nature of illness than their neighbouring counterparts so much so that impatience leads them to seek varietal solutions to their health related problems. It also shows a more chronic nature of illness in Hazaribagh.

The cost of human health impact was assessed in several steps. First, the incidence of diseases was used to measure the degree of additional cases of

US\$26 to US\$150 per annum per person. The estimate is based on the estimate of population in the locality. The current estimated density of population in Hazaribagh area is 1247 per hectare.

Price of land per *katha* (720 sq ft = 1 *katha*) was the dependent variable whose variation we attempted to measure between the two sites. We used hedonic price estimation. Information on 420 plots of land which were either sold or ready for sale were collected from target (201) and control (219) areas. Prices were in terms of lakh Taka (1 lakh = 100,000). By and large, a *katha* of land in

## BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

### Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 36th Prosecution Witness

Continued from yesterday

Cross-examination of PW 36 in Bangabandhu murder case. Newaz Ahmed Gorjon, began when the court resumed Thursday morning.

Following are the excerpts from his examination by advocate Khan Saitur Rahman, defence lawyer for accused Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooqur Rahman:

Q: Did you take breakfast on August 15?

A: No.

Q: Was your lunch cooked? Did you take lunch?

A: Yes.

Q: When your father returned home from abroad?

A: On August 26 and he was immediately arrested on that night.

Q: Was any inmate of your house absconding after the incident?

A: No.

Q: Did your father joined his service after his release?

A: No, he joined the Forest and Livestock Ministry as secretary in 1975 on contract although he went on retirement during Pakistan regime.

Q: Was your mother a state minister when your father serving as a secretary?

A: Yes.

Q: Did anyone from Bangabandhu's residence take refuge at your house during the incident?

A: No.

Q: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina wrote: "My mother, Kamal and Russel somehow managed to cross a wall and took shelter at an adjacent house on March 26, 1971." Was that house of yours?

A: No.

Q: Did your father joined his service after his release?

A: No.

Q: Did anyone from Bangabandhu's residence take refuge at your house during the incident?

A: No.

Q: Where were you in 1971?

A: Melaghar, Agartola.

Q: In front?

A: No.

Q: Then?

A: Near the war camps.

Q: How many names of firearms are known to you?

A: Pistol, revolver, gada rifle, sten gun and cannon.

Q: Did you see the arms?

A: While I was a student of cadet college.

Q: What kinds of arms?

A: Machine gun, sten gun.

Q: Did you go to 'Chamrai' (firing range)? Do you understand it?

A: No, I don't understand it and I never went to such a place.

Q: Are you afraid of arms and firings?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you handle grenade?

A: No, I saw in films.

Q: Are the exploding sounds of grenade, bomb and cannon shell same?

A: It seems to be the same hearing the sounds.

Q: Is a road sustains damage if any tank rolls on it?

A: Yes, it is marked by a red sign.

Q: How long you were under army controlling?

A: Approximately from 6 am to 11 am.

Q: Did none of your house make phone call to Bangabandhu's house after receiving a phone from your sister-in-law that Moni had been killed?

A: No.

Q: Did you try to realise the situation by making phone call to anywhere after hearing the news of Moni?

A: Yes, I have no training.

Q: Can you identify the sounds of firing by different types of arms?

A: Yes, I can.

Q: Did you have any experience?

A: No, I have no direct experience.

Q: It means you have indirect experience.

A: In 1971.

Q: Where were you in 1971?

A: Melaghar, Agartola.

Q: In front?

A: No.

Q: Then?

A: Near the war camps.

Q: Do you know as to why Mushtaque was concerned about

your father?

A: No.

Q: Kamal sent arms and ammunition to you and asked to take position on the rooftop of your house. He also sent message that Jamal had taken position on the rooftop of Bangabandhu's residence.

A: The statement is false.

Q: Kamal also told you along with arms as you threw it on the compound of Bangabandhu's residence.

A: This is not true.

Q: Military personnel were killed and injured by shots fired from the two houses.

A: This is false.

Q: Army didn't get you along with arms as you threw it on the compound of Bangabandhu's residence.

A: This is a false statement.

Q: You are politically conscious. Can you say whether there was BAKSAL government or Awami League government after the incident?

A: I don't know.

Q: Do you know that the three chiefs of the armed forces were the members of BAKSAL?

A: I know that was not.