

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 *panti-poda* by a havidar, 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.

ALMOST 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 (APREET) 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 defined 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

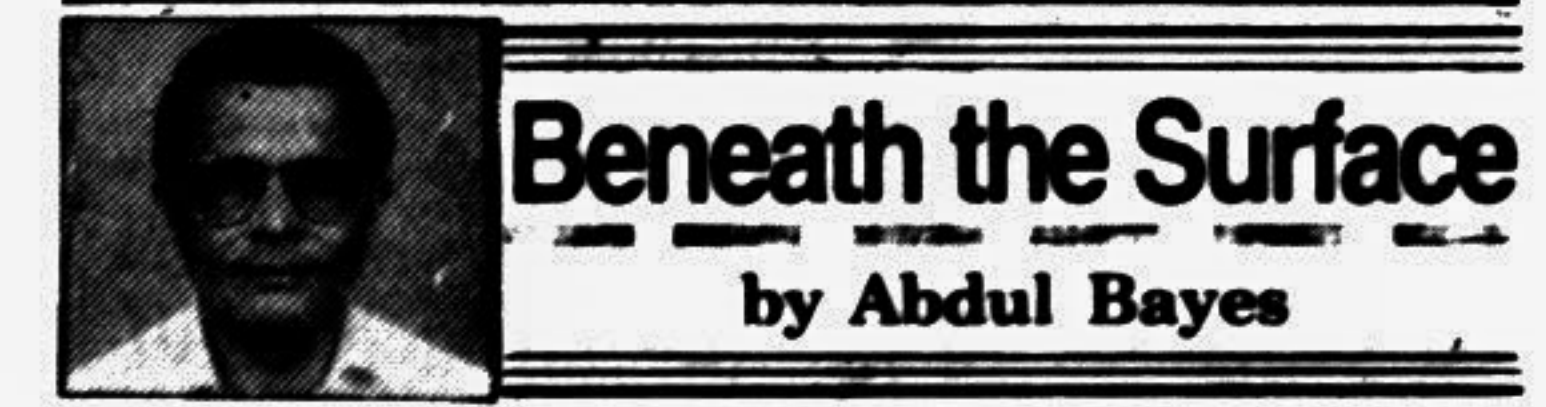
Hazaribagh costs 3.78 lakh compound to Tk 4.39 lakh in Mohammadpur-Rayer Bazar. The difference is 61,000 Taka per katha. But this differs substantially in terms of prices in case of land on the main road side: Tk 5.30 lakh vs 6.40 lakh/katha. Commercial site land price also varies substantially: Tk 4.63 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 foregone income, b) loss of property values and c) loss of rental income due to pollution. It appears that the total loss exceeds

Tk 29551 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 variational 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 Salfur Rahman, defence lawyer for accused Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooq 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 28 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, Jamal 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: Yes.

Q: Where were you in 1971?

A: Melaghar, Agartola.

Q: In war front?

A: No.

Q: Then?

A: Near the war camps.

A: I can't say because I was not at my house on that day.

Q: Were the houses of Bangabandhu and yours parallel?

A: Yes.

Q: How many people you saw while the flag was being hoisted?

A: 3/4 people.

Q: The incidents took place long ago. So you couldn't maintain the accurate continuation of the incidents.

A: I told the basic story. Maybe the continuation was hampered.

Q: 'Gada' rifle means country-made gun. No license is essential for it.

A: I mentioned the two-barrel British-made gun as 'gada' rifle. It had license.

Q: Didn't you see anything abnormal after waking up?

A: Everything had seemed normal before the speeding jeep came.

Q: Was it abnormal for this reason that no vehicle passes the house with such speed?

A: Yes.

Q: You have no training of operating firearms.

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 war 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 'Chanmari' (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: No, we I didn't make any phone call to anywhere.

Q: Did you have any family relation with Mushtaque saheb?

A: No, they were known to us.

Q: Do you know as to why Mushtaque was concern 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 that he, along with a police, had taken position on the ground floor.

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 after the incident?

(Prosecution lawyer Mosharraf Hossain Kajal raised objection over the question saying it was not relevant to the case.)

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 I was not.

Examination by advocate Sharfuddin Mukul, defence counsel for accused former state minister Taheruddin Thakur:

Q: Where were you after the incident?

A: I was in Bangladesh.

— UNB

Further texts of cross examinations will be published as and when received.

To the Editor...

Engineers vs engineers

Sir, In recent days, we are coming across many hard talks within the professional groups in our country. But the most crucial one is the 'engineers vs engineers'. One group is the graduates while the other is the diploma cadre. It is by virtue of one's academic achievement that one becomes in his professional attainment whether he or she may be engineer, doctor, lawyer, bureaucrat, diploma holder in particular discipline etc. Why the intra-disciplinary professional conflict should exist is a matter to be really thought of. The conflicts between the two cadres of engineers are not new and becoming critical day by day.

The most recent one is the country-wide campaigning of the diploma cadre of engineers who are simply against the implementation of the Chartered Engineers Acts and the establishment of Engineering Staff College. We are all human beings. Our fathers, brothers, close relatives or even the family members belong to either of the cadres. Why then one cadre just hate the other within the same discipline? Everybody belongs to one society. One is contemporary to the other. It is obvious that graduates are superior in knowledge to the others and by this virtue they attain the hierarchic position in the govt or in the development forum. However, the diploma group has always many options to recast their career to move to the other group. Then why this conflict? Is it a created one for political gains or a bureaucratic dilemma?

On the other hand, the apex bodies of the institutions concerned in general and the graduate group in particular have many things to do. They are just unable to make the other understand what Chartered Engineers Acts and Engineering

Staff College are. So far no such activities have taken place yet to make people aware about the facts.

MAS
Uttara, Dhaka

The winter of discontent

Sir, It looks like that this winter will be a severe winter of discontent, with the regime in power all out to dish out all the physical provocation and persecution, setting world record in political intolerance. The snow will not thaw, nor the bridge will return from river Khowai.

AZ
Dhaka

Why second thought on 'road dividers'?

Sir, A Citizen from Dhaka wrote on the 4th November issue of your daily how dividers are being quickly set up throughout the city. Especially at less congested places. Probably the Citizen prefers to come out of the house only during weekends in a chauffeur-driven AC car to visit a relative's house. Or else it is practically impossible to travel through the city without facing traffic jams. Yes, I admit, that there is no traffic congestion at the Manik Mia Avenue. Have you ever seen the dare devil drivers perform their overtaking manoeuvres in that stretch of road?

Some of these vehicles tend to separate from their normal route and come face to face with the opposite traffic as well. It is not only frightening but dangerous too. And in the night, it becomes much more life threatening. Have you ever seen how dangerously rickshaws and auto-rickshaws without look-

ing, or slowing down or hesitating, so calmly and peacefully cut across the high speed lanes to the other side of the road? Now tell me that whether or not a divider was needed there?

Then the Citizen pointed out Dhanmondi R/A. I fall to see the 'residential' part of Dhanmondi any more. It is now invaded by swarms of private schools, restaurants and community centers. Each and every single one of these demands vehicle parking. At times, those roads become extremely chaotic. To keep the traffic flowing in its proper path, these dividers are constructed.

As a matter of fact I would urge the Mayor to look into the traffic problems of Dhaka even more thoroughly and construct dividers wherever needed. Only then the traffic problems can be tackled with that much ease and confidence.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak
By e-mail
Dhaka

DCC waste management programme

Sir, The letter written by Maqsood Sinha and Iftekhar Enayetullah on the above subject and published in your esteemed daily of Oct. 29, '97 was very timely and appropriate. The expert opinion very clearly gives a real situation and the steps to be taken to solve the waste management problem of Dhaka city. It is not understood how it is possible to finish a techno-economic feasibility study within 3 months of a project costing \$400m. Some components of baseline surveys was conducted for the metropolitan city in April-May 1991 by the Implementation Support Consultants of the 1st Urban Development Project of

Bangladesh funded by UNDP/WB.

Similar studies have been made for Khulna and Rajshahi City Corporations during 1994 by the local consultants under the Municipal Service Project funded by World Bank. In view of this, it is quite justified to conduct a feasibility study which can be accomplished by local experts. Without a feasibility study, how one can prepare a shopping list?

There are very high densely populated areas like Islambag, Shaheednagar where only a rickshaw van can enter. In solid waste management there is no unique solution, because method of primary collection is very much dependent on the locality. The component primary collection is a very critical issue particularly in the developing countries where people are less conscientious of their duties as citizens. The failure of the demountable container system introduced by DCC related to absence of proper primary collection system and wrong operation technique.

So the introduction of the Demountable Container System without properly designed primary collection technique has become a white elephant for DCC. In view of this, DCC should not use any more demountable container without developing the primary collection system. Pilot studies on different components of Solid Waste Management are essential part of the feasibility study of such environmental improvement projects.

The techno feasibility study should also contain least cost options with a view to determine the overall cost of the system and determine the users' charges. The study should also contain the environmental impact assessment.

Shamsuzzohra
2/2A Pisciculture Housing
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

OPINION

The Hypocrisy of Hartals

A Zabr

There is message for the political and other parties who call for strikes/hartals, now being blatantly misused as a weapon. Nowadays, hartals have become a farce as most of the people observe it out of fear of assault and physical damage to property. Hartals are enforced (force, intimidation are brutally used) by violent activists (hired?); and only a minority percentage participate voluntarily.

A person cannot participate, and should not be made to participate unwillingly, in all the hartals called by any particular political party at any time, as in such a case he is left with no choice of his own, because he is not allowed to exercise his options according to his own judgement. Which is a fundamental right. This type of coercion is not a democratic practice.

So we are faced with a dilemma: the brute majority and the brutal minority dictating terms in the name of democracy! How to escape? Remain at home, and lock up the factory or the office. Even a smaller group can enforce a hartal by employing mastans. What else we have to learn from politics? (There is politics outside politics).

Then the question arises

There Must be Priorities

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

One most important thing in administration and management is the fixing up of priorities of one's work. There may be tasks which are needed to be completed at this very moment. There are things that can be done during the day. And there are most things that can be done in a week's time or a month's time.

To prepare a 'to do' list, is a necessary thing for all young executives, and the old ones as well. It is mostly our inability to prioritise our work that leads to success or failure.

There is a common human tendency to take up a softer job — so the important responsibilities are often delayed, leading to serious consequences. This writer, while in government service, kept an important case pending for nearly two years, and would have lost his job. But for the very sympathetic attitude of his immediate boss Morhum Golam Rasul Bhatti, who wrote the following note in the file: "This particular file unfortunately got mixed up with old papers, hence the inordinate delay. This is very much regretted."

The concerned Joint Secretary was a very tough person, but as luck would have it, he

gave his decision. This case which I kept in my steel almirah for two years took me not more than six hours to complete, for my part of the work. My Joint Secretary disposed off the case the same day. I have not met my super boss Khawja Abdur Rahman for a quarter of a century now, but his clean table and razor sharp notes were an awe to me.