

FOCUS

RIGHTS OF THE GIRL-CHILD

Who is Responsible for Safeguarding It?

by Shaheen Anam

In most South Asian countries, a young girl's first encounter with violence is on her wedding night. She is sexually abused not only once but many times in the name of marriage

THE general perception is that children are treated with love and affection in most homes. The image of the loving mother who cares for all her children equally is something of a folklore. At the national level, we constantly hear that children are the future of the country and must be provided with protection and care for their healthy growth and development.

However, this rosy picture is mostly true for the middle-class households. But for the majority, this is something of a myth as we know that millions of children are deprived of their basic rights and needs. The promise of care and protection exists in the Constitution and has little relationship with the real world. Children, of course, from poor families bear a heavier burden of abuse and neglect.

Among the millions of deprived children, there exists a group, which on the surface lives under the protection and care of families. However, their human rights are violated everyday, all over Bangladesh. This violation has society's stamp of approval and sanction. They are the thousands of young girls, married off before they reach physical or emotional maturity. Parents claim they are providing them security, but we all know how elusive and mythical that security is.

The question is: who will safeguard their human and basic rights when even their parents become a party to the violation? The tragedy is compounded by the fact that marriage, no matter what age or situation, once solemnised gets the approval of society. Never mind that Islam dictates that a girl cannot be married without giving her consent. Her marriage is solemnised by few utterances of a mullah after which everything becomes legal. Does anybody know or care what happens to these girls who are still children by all social and biological definition?

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IAN FLEMING'S James Bond



by Jim Davis



DRAWN BY JOHN MCCLUSKY

BCI team meets Energy Minister

A 41-member delegation of Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) held a meeting with Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Nooruddin Khan at the conference room of the ministry yesterday, reports UNB.

BCI president Sharif M Alzal Hossain led the delegation. They discussed the minister's overall situation in the power and gas sector, pointed out some problems in the sector and suggested to privatise the sector, said a press release.

BUET team wins ACM computing contest

The International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) was held at North South University in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

The ICPC, held here for the first time, was organised by the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM), the largest body of computer professionals in the world.

A team of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) secured the first position, while the team from the Computer Science Department of Dhaka University came second.

The winning team will participate in the ICPC international contest finals to be held in Atlanta, USA on Feb 28, 1998.

Obituary

Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury, a former Zemindar of Belgachia Estate in Rajbari district, died Monday night at the IPGMR in the city of old age complications. He was 87, reports BSS.

He left behind five sons, three daughters and a host of relatives.

Chowdhury, a popular and widely respected philanthropist in the greater Faridpur district, was associated with many educational and social organisations throughout his life.

Body to formulate nat'l population policy

The government has formed a 28-member committee to formulate a national population policy as per the decision of the National Population Council, reports UNB.

Health and Family Welfare Minister has been made chairman while State Minister for Health Vice-chairman of the committee. Health Secretary will act as its member secretary, said an official handout.

Leaders of foreign delegations attending the Asia Pacific Youth Gathering '97 pose for a photograph with Father Klaus Beurle, Advisor, ANANDO, and other members of the organisation at a reception held in a city hotel recently.

JMS concerned at repression on women

Jatiya Mohila Sangstha (JMS) has expressed its grave concern over the gradual increase of women repression in different parts of the country, reports UNB.

In a statement, JMS Chairman Ivy Rahman today said, news of some recent women repression published in newspapers have been noticed by her organisation.

She referred to the gangrape of a newly-wedded woman who went to Cox's Bazar for honeymoon and fell victim of night-long rape at a hotel on Saturday.

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Bangladesh Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak (L) and his Chinese counterpart Niu Maosheng exchanging a MOU on flood control and water resources development signed between the two countries in Beijing on Nov 11. — PID photo

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They said Jamaat-Shibir, the defeated forces in the liberation war, attacked Tihu being afraid of the movement against them by Chhatra Union. The leaders expressed their concern over the terrorist attacks by Shibir on the Chittagong University campus.

A Flash of Bangladesh in Bhutan



Jewelry that were exhibited in September last by Aarong at the Food and Jewelry Festival held in Thimpu, Bhutan. It was organised by the Bangladesh Embassy at the residence of the Ambassador, Mrs. Mahmuda Haque Choudhury.

"It was a golden opportunity to share Bangladeshi custom with and expose a certain portion of our culture to one of our neighbouring countries", said Ms. Maheen Khan who is the design manager of Aarong. It was the only jewelry stall at the fair and the exhibits did not only earn a lot of appreciation but also got all sold out.

The visitors to the show largely comprised members from the royal family and elite of Bhutan and also Bangladeshi expatriates, while HM the Queen inaugurated the exhibition.

According to Mrs. Choudhury, "The idea behind having a jewelry exhibition was to project a livelier picture of Bangladesh rather than the usual images of cyclones, floods and drought." The favourite of the exhibition were the very traditional silver hashuls. Each design was a work of art in itself; the 22 karat gold necklace with pearl strings, the oxidised bands adorned with black and white little balls, hashuls in multi-coloured strings etc. All the items were specifically made by Aarong for the exhibition and have not yet been on display at any of its outlets in Bangladesh.

— Jessica Noval

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 41st Prosecution Witness

Following are the excerpts from cross-examination of PW-41 Brig Shahjahan by state defence counsel for Lt Col (retd) Khandaker Abdur Rashid:

Q: 2 Bengal, 16 Bengal and 2 Field Artillery were under the 46 Brigade.

A: Yes.

Q: 2 Field Artillery had night training on August 14.

A: All the units, including 2 Bengal, 16 Bengal and 2 Field Artillery under the 46 Brigade had night training programme. 16 East Bengal Regiment had its night training till 10 pm on August 14 as on the day time we were in ambush demonstration.

Q: Night training programme was a scheduled one.

A: Yes.

Q: When did Col Shafat Jamil give the order to continue the night training till 10 pm.

A: Before the Magrib prayer on August 14.

Q: Major Rashid was your close friend.

A: Yes you can say that... he was my course mate.

Q: Is there any provision to take punitive measure if asked to take part in any job outside the programme?

A: Action should have to be taken. But I don't know whether any action was taken or not in this case. I informed by Brigade Commander about Rashid's request.

Q: Did Gen Zia, CGS and others who were there, came to know about Rashid's request?

A: I informed my Brigade Commander and at that time the CGS also came to know about it. Both of them asked me not to join the road march and go to the New Airport.

Q: Action would have been taken against him, if there was any offence.

A: I don't know about that. Q: You informed Col Jamil about Rashid's request thrice.

A: Twice.

Q: Major Rashid didn't request you for road march.

A: The statement is not true.

Q: Your promotion is due.

A: Yes, it was, since 1995.

Q: For the sake of promotion you have given false statement involving Major Rashid as said by the prosecution.

A: I don't know.

Q: Did you have the habit of reading newspapers?

A: Very little.

A: It is absolutely wrong.

Q: In what capacity you attended the August 17 conference?

A: As the acting CO.

Q: When did Col Amin Ahmed Chowdhury joined as CO of your unit?

A: On August 15 morning, but he left Joydevpur for Dhaka immediately after joining.

Q: When did you join the army?

A: I was commissioned on August 8, 1966 in the Pakistan Army.

Q: When you were promoted as brigadier?

A: Probably in the month of May in 1985.

Q: Where does the personal files of the army officers are kept?

A: In the MS (Military Secretary) branch of the Army HQ.

Q: Col Shahriyar (accused) raised the 15, East Bengal Regiment of the Bangladesh Army.

A: I don't know.

Q: In 1981, Shahriyar was holding the rank of Lt Col.

A: I don't know.

Q: When did you become Lt Col.

A: Probably in August, 1976.

Q: When were you posted in Joydevpur?

A: 2-IC in the 16 East Bengal Regiment in 1973.

Q: Whose permission is required to use the helicopters of the Armed Forces?

A: As per the demand of the requirement, Armed Forces Division gives permission.

Q: Gen Osmany, after August 15, visited several army installations by helicopter and campaigned in favour of the new government.

A: He did not come to my unit and I can't say anything about others.

Q: Osmany was appointed as the Defence Adviser to the President.

A: I don't know.

Q: Did you have the habit of reading newspapers?

A: Very little.

Q: You attended the conference held on August 17. Did you attend another conference at Dhaka Cantonment on August 19?

A: No.

Q: After August 17, when did you visit Dhaka Cantonment for the first time?

A: In September, 1975, on the occasion of my posting outside.

Q: How long had the conference on August 15 continued?

A: For about one hour from 11 am.

Q: Gen Shafullah and Brig Khaled Mosharraf were present at the conference.

A: Only Col Shafat Jamil was present.

Q: Where was the army auditorium in Dhaka Cantonment in August, 1975?

A: Garrison Cinema Hall was used as auditorium.

Q: Gen Osmany addressed the officers and jawans in August 1975 at the auditorium.

A: I can't recollect.

Q: When did you wake up on August 15?

A: At about 7 to 7:15 am.

Q: Did anyone inform you about the killing incident before Lt Rouf came to you with the chit?

A: No.

Q: Didn't you hear the radio announcement? When did you switch on the knob of radio.

A: No, I did not have any radio set.

Q: How you used to communicate with your headquarters in Dhaka?

A: Through magneto telephone.

Q: Where the 16 East Bengal was stationed?

A: At Joydevpur Rajbari (palace).

Q: When you came to know for the first time about the promulgation of Martial Law in the country?

A: I didn't know. My unit was not deployed in any place.

Q: On August 17, when you came to the Dhaka Cantonment, was it a topic of discussion that ML had been promulgated?

A: No.

Q: Organisational matters were in the agenda of the conference.

A: It is not true.

Q: Aziz, CO of 2 Bengal Regiment, did not say that troops of Bengal regiment were not involved with the August 15 killing incident.

A: He said.

— UNB

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

Khoka visits residences of captive BNP leaders

Dhaka city BNP convenor Sadek Hossain Khoka, ML, yesterday visited the residences of some imprisoned party leaders of Mirpur Ward No 4, reports UNB.

He met with the family members of Mirpur thana BNP leader Malek Hawlader, Haji Rafiqul Islam and Khorsheed Alam, consoled them and requested them to have patience.

Talking with the family members, Khoka said this "fascist Baksali" government has arrested thousands of BNP leaders and workers across the country and resorted to torture on them in jails.

The BNP leader demanded immediate release of all those arrested.

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