

This Horrible Crime

Are we fast becoming a society of rapists? It will be hard to dismiss this fear. Not to speak of provincial and small papers most of whom tend to capitalise on such news, serious national press hardly has a reprieve for a day from publishing stories of the ultimate violation of the human person and dignity. Children are the new quarry of the rapists.

It is only years that the rape and murder of Yasmin at Dinajpur Doshmle ignited a conflagration of public agitation unequalled anywhere in this land at anytime. But a plethora of unending rape-and-murder act seems now to have inured the nation to such shocks. Sheema was raped and murdered without many a one's feeling outraged. And her case, in a classic example of hoodwinking justice, still remains in a limbo with all the culprits untouched. Yasmin and Sheema would continue to be milestones in woman's heroic resistance to rape and other repression.

Tania and Mousumi are again two names that will live long in the story of resistance to the now rapidly aggravating cases of child abuse. For theirs are the name that marks the tip of a gruesome iceberg — for every Tania there must be a hundred others who did not raise an alarm, for every Mousumi there must be a hundred others who were not bloodied on a public road, child abuse is not unknown to our society. But in days past the girl child was abused inside the family and the family took charge to sweep the rare thing under the carpet. The society has rapidly been changing over the last few of the postwar decades. Young men residing or floating outside the family base have become a growing phenomenon in the towns, specially in Dhaka.

Erosion of values upholding human relationship through constant exposure to erotic print and electronic material has been making the ground ripe for the rise of the libidinous male. All libido and little besides. So much so that even the family has been invaded.

Saving the children is essentially tied up with saving women from the carnal attacks. If this is not realised society cannot be saved from becoming an inhumane hell — which would mean an end of man, very certainly. Society in its present condition can hardly beat the spreading crime. The state cannot either do it all by itself. A meaningful beginning towards a recovery of sanity can be made through stiff punishments to culprits. For this beginning to be made a lot would be needed to be done. Making legal provisions wouldn't serve any purpose. Conviction and carrying out of sentences will be needed to embolden society into effective resistance.

But this would only be the beginning. All round economic uplift leading to general well-being and a resurgence of national culture will be the best guarantee for elimination of this horrible crime.

Financial Evenhandedness

We cry hoarse over default culture in the private sector, but the state sector hardly appears as a holy cow there. So, it had better stop putting up a holier than thou image.

The latest statistics of Bangladesh Bank show that 43 per cent of the loans contracted by the government and its sector corporations till September 1997 remained outstanding with the Nationalised Commercial Banks. The liabilities of the government, autonomous and semi-autonomous organisations worked out to Tk 4990.37 crore. Of which Tk 2140.86 crore is yet to be recovered. The total figure for outstanding loans in both public and private sectors was a whopping Tk 13,000 crore in September 1997.

Between the two sectors they repaid only 62 per cent of the loans but the public sector singly made 57 per cent repayment. So percentagewise the state sector looks like being a front-runner in the default race.

Things have gotten only worse and progressively, too. The financial situation of the state sector, as portrayed in the BB report, deteriorated in the nine months from December '96 to September '97 with the defaulted loans in the state sector increasing by Tk 340 crore over the outstanding Tk 1800 crore.

There are cogent reasons why we are unforgiving about the private sector's big loan default. These have been repeated so many times that we do not want to masticate the same any more. Suffice it to say though that chagrined as we are at the legacy of 'political lending' to fake entrepreneurs we need not be glossing over chronic public sector mismanagement which is getting awkwardly translated into heavy unrepaid borrowing from the banking system. How long should we rob Paul to pay Peter?

Risky Constructions

Rajuk (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkho) have listed eighteen buildings at Nakhapara as bad or risky constructions. This follows the recent incident of shooting at the Prime Minister's secretariat in the same vicinity and the subsequent flurry of activities of the security personnel around that area. Earlier the Rajuk had spotted 250 buildings as vulnerable in the city.

We are afraid Dhaka has far more suspect constructions than those included in the Rajuk list. There must be thousands of homeowners who like the one mentioned in the Star report would struggle to produce a copy of the plan or authorities' approval on demand from proper authorities. For the majority of the people, a dwelling place only means a roof over the head, a simple, uncalculated, unspecialised craft of placing brick on brick. Let alone higher considerations like health, environment, neighbour's convenience, even the very basics like planning and proper mix of construction materials hardly feature in their thought. One cannot look for a more perfect recipe for urban disaster.

We would urge the Rajuk authorities to form a task force to conduct an area to area search in order to check the condition of the buildings. The task is arduous even daunting. But if we want to avoid major tragedies, this had better get started now. We also counsel the government to ensure tighter and honest administration in the approving agency to make sure no substandard plan is okayed. And whatever is approved needs to be followed up by inspection.

Globalisation: Costs and Contradictions

It is true that for a handful of countries like China, etc., liberalisation and expanded access to global finance have reduced poverty. But since 1980, poverty has grown in absolute term throughout developing countries.

TODAY, for many millions of people across the world, the globalisation has — even if vaguely — meant greater freedom and prosperity. By the end of 1980s, self-isolating dictatorships from Chile to the Soviet Union had yielded to democratic and free market ideals of globalisation spread by radio, television, the fax machine and e-mail. Since then, in addition to bringing down the Berlin wall and shredding the Iron Curtain, the powerful technological forces of Information Age have helped to stitch together the economic, political and cultural lives of nations, making border more permeable to the movement of people, products and ideas. In our country also there is an omnibus acceptance of globalisation as a great virtue of our time and there are informed and important people ever prepared to stand up in defence of anything from trade to transit, travel to transnational highway, trans-border linkages to opening up markets — all in the name of globalisation.

But for millions of others, the same process has brought economic disadvantage and social disruption — let alone the question of prosperity. For the developing countries, the myth that the globalisation would quickly propel them into modernity and affluence did not work quite the way it was expected. Even in America where the modern version of global economy evolved in 1944 and the pundits still proclaim that economy to be the defining reality of our time, most social and even economic issues are debated there as if

globalisation did not exist or were happening elsewhere.

Among the promises associated with globalisation the most popular one portrays it as a worldwide process of converging incomes and lifestyles driven by ever larger international flow of goods, images, capital and people bringing about a measure of shared prosperity. It was also projected as a great equaliser — equaliser of income, outlook and taste. If embraced, it was argued, globalisation would extricate the poor and backward nations of the developing world out of the economic backward and put them on fast track of progress. The recent experience of much of Sub-Saharan Africa which resisted it shows how deadly and disastrous more the failure to catch the global train. But then the ride on the train also did not always ensure fast, stable and equitable growth for the conformists. Although globalisation did extricate a few developing countries out of protracted stagnation the recent financial crash in East Asia suggests that mere embracing of global financial market can also be treacherous at times. The sharply unequal effects of globalised finance and production across and within developing countries is a pointer to a greater malaise.

Contrary to the expectations the developing countries today are more heterogeneous group than at the beginning of post-war period. Globalisation has not in any way helped them

to become more equal. Particularly the poorest of them are chronically unable to catch up. Instead of helping the weaker ones globalisation is making the differences among the developing nations wider. This is not without a reason. Belying the neo-classical economic theory the international financial flow has continued to go to capital abundant nations. In 1995, for example, 65 per cent of the FDA (Foreign Direct Invest-

ment) inflows went to developed world. The capital inflow for the developing countries were concentrated in a handful of rich emerging markets. Even though international financial flows to the developing countries have grown significantly in recent years it has been unevenly disbursed with 72 per cent of total FDI between 1989-92 going only to 10 countries. This distribution of portfolio investment flow has been even more skewed with another odd one dozen of countries receiving 90 per cent of such investment. The poorer countries have seen little profit from the recent boom in international

financial flows while suffering a great deal from major cuts and reorientation in aid flows from advanced nations. Given the strong reorientation in favour of disaster relief and peacekeeping operation aid flow as a whole contracted. While due to deteriorating terms of trade since early 1980s aid dependence has sharply risen in the LDCs (Least Developed Countries).

The gain for those developing countries which benefit from greater access to international finance resources have however come at a high price. They have lost much of their policy autonomy and increased their vulnerability to external financial shock. Also the heightened dependence on larger volume of short term external capital flows has vastly complicated monetary and exchange rate management on the part of recipient countries and severely limited the government's monetary policy in a way conducive to the growth in real economy. It has also contributed to the increasing fragility of domestic financial

system. Since 1980 more than 100 developing countries experienced serious banking crises. The public cost of these crises has been enormous. Globalisation has exacerbated differences not only among the developing nations but also within them. An exposure to global market has magnified and multiplied domestic inequalities in a manner not experienced before. It is true that for a handful of countries like China, etc., liberalisation and expanded access to global finance have reduced poverty. But since 1980, poverty has grown in absolute term throughout developing countries. The rush to free market has also coincided with increasing inequality throughout the Third World with income differential widening since early '90s. Income inequality has significantly grown in Latin America over past few decades with 15 out of 17 countries having level of income inequality exceeding those normally associated with their level of development. In most of those countries, the globalising 1980s and 1990s have brought more Mercedes and more homeless children to the streets.

So far globalisation is not making things less diverse and more equal. A growing but still small part of the world's population is becoming more similar in what it eats, buys, wears and thinks. And more and more people across the planet have become increasingly exposed to the amenities of the global marketplace, although mostly as permanent window shopper and amused spectator. The large majority of mankind, however, is being left outside and thrown by the wayside. It is not thus surprising that the striking workers in South Korea or Argentina have opposed changes that their national leaders insisted were necessary to meet the demands of the global economy. The unexpected victory of the left parties throughout Europe where in France's picturesque farming town of Rambouillet the leaders of seven most advanced industrialised democracies took another step in 1975 to give globalisation its present shape, stems in part from voters' apprehension about its effects on widening income gap already visible in the continent.



PERSPECTIVES

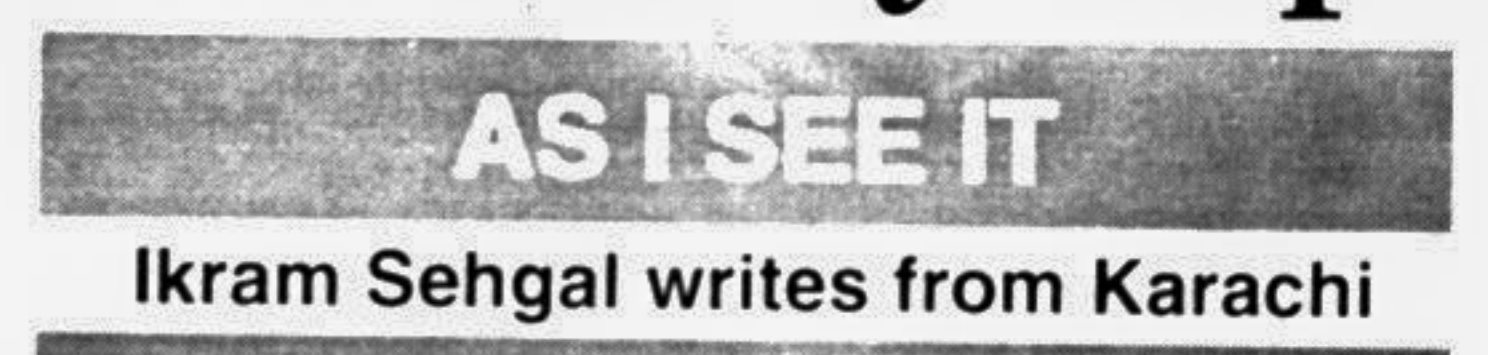
by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

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National Security Imperatives



Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

ing political Band-Aid, it is time to apply Governor's Rule without further delay.

Geo-politically we are in a mess. While there can be no second-guessing of recognizing the Taliban as forming the legitimate Afghan government in Kabul, we have failed woefully in convincing Iran about our good faith. Since we will have a strongly anti-Pakistan BJP-led government in India for the foreseeable future, striving to bait us in a number of ways, partly in order to stoke national feelings and firm up its presently rather weak constitutional base, we should urgently seek to firm up our traditional

allies and remove persisting doubts in the relationship. While not taking Saudi Arabia and Turkey for granted and remembering that China has its own security and economic imperatives, we must make a concerted move to mollify Iran and bring it back to our side as a strong partner in the region.

From the statements emanating from India, it is quite clear that the Indians may be preparing for a limited offensive to grab a chunk of Azad Kashmir, gambling that Pakistan may not opt for all-out war. In the same manner that we miscalculated in 1965 in launching Operations 'Gibraltar' and 'Grand Slam', the Indians will be wrong in thinking that any attack on Kashmir would not get a strong reaction from Pakistan elsewhere and lead to all-out war, with nuclear connotations. While we can hardly afford a war in such economic circumstances, if it is forced upon us, Pakistan will fight, whatever the consequences. Our weakness in the air complement needs urgent attention of the government. With a better ratio in confronting the Indian Air Force, PAF will be able to keep a measure of air parity over the battlefield. We have to find the money and the requisite aircraft as soon as possible. While the Chinese project is a good long-term proposition, we need immediately is a hi-tech combat aircraft virtually off the shelf. Without our traditional allies of the cold-war era we have to scramble to maintain our security; air-power is a measure of self-reliance geo-

politically. Mian Nawaz Sharif must show some spine in dealing with his allies, the world did not come to an end with a parting of the ways with ANP. Since the PML (N) cannot succumb to MQM (A)'s 48 hours deadlines, Governor's Rule should be imposed in Sindh. The PM should treat his broken alliances as positive developments for which he should be thankful. He has to break out of the shackles of his business cronies, both in the paying of taxes and defaulting loans. In the context of geo-politics he has to exploit his personal credibility in the region for the good of the country. Mian Nawaz Sharif has a mandate from the people of Pakistan, it is time that the people of Pakistan benefit from the confidence they have shown in him. This can only be achieved by ensuring that national security imperatives have his macro-attention.

OPINION

Neurosurgery in Shambles—Is It?

Rashiduddin Ahmad

I was rather disturbed, nay, shocked to see the editorial 'Neurosurgery in Shambles' in The Daily Star of 3.3.98. I thought it was a rather hasty remark and not necessarily based on facts in the proper perspective. It has been rather like the famous statement 'half of the people here are idiots'. Many years ago I read an article in the Illustrated Weekly of India which quoted some of Mahatma Gandhi's statements and the journalist himself remarked that these statements could be thought to be made by Hitler.

Without considering all the matters, the functions and facilities and the total volume and nature of work done in my department, in other words not knowing and given the full background and perspective it was rather harsh and not very objective to give such a statement. In the flurry of Raman Lamba's death another newspaper reportedly mentioned Dr Garst was the person to introduce neurosurgery and teach neurosurgery in this country. Dr Garst (an American) is actually an orthopedic surgeon but it can be said he spread and taught orthopedic surgery in this country. I, however, was trained in neurosurgery for the full course of about four-and-a-half years at the University Department of Surgical Neurology of Edinburgh between 1965 and 1970 and then came back and started the first ever neurosurgical service in this country.

What has happened here, I think, is that the article published in the 'Bhorer Kagoj' was misunderstood by the DS as being an exposition to explain Raman Lamba's death. You would have found out the truth if you had taken the trouble to speak to the very young doctor journalist who published some of my conversations and his enquiries with other staff of my department that took place a couple of weeks or more before the accident of Raman Lamba. While this young doctor journalist was preparing and finalising his write up, Raman Lamba's accident occurred and he just added that as an annexure to his already prepared news item. Also the fact is that I had asked him to show me his write-up before he publishes it and he just didn't do that.

It appears to me that firstly because of the coincidental timing of the publication in the 'Bhorer Kagoj' and secondly because of some deficiencies of our department — equipment, staff and personnel wise — you assumed and jumped into the conclusion that I had given an interview deliberately exposing some of our department's

handicaps only to, sort of, explain and defend the ultimate death of Raman Lamba.

It was very, very far from that. I shall talk about the happening of Raman Lamba later. But first let me say that the real reason for the 'Bhorer Kagoj' article was absolutely different. One of the staff of the 'Bhorer Kagoj' was operated upon by me for a brain tumour for which it was almost decided that the patient would be taken to India. But somehow it so happened that eventually I operated on him and he came out of the operation satisfactorily and the patient's relatives and perhaps the staff of the 'Bhorer Kagoj' were satisfied, and in fact, they wanted to make news rather than highlighting that good work done in our department in spite of handicaps (you may ascertain this yourself from the 'Bhorer Kagoj').

But, alas, the result has been just the opposite! When the young doctor journalist of the 'Bhorer Kagoj' came to me I rather naively mentioned about how difficult it was for us to work with some deficiencies and lack of up to date equipment (which of course you wanted us 'Hippocrates community' — should have come out in public loudly), yet we go on doing a reasonable work which could be facilitated and improved further. Mind you, even in the developed countries not all centres are absolutely perfect. Even one Prime Minister of Britain was sent to USA for a reoperation when a complication occurred during a routine gall bladder stone operation (which is done here now routinely even by Assistant Professors) was being done by a UK surgeon. I also like to mention here the famous saying of Professor Sir Charles Wells (an ex-surgeon of the Royal Family). If a surgeon thinks he has attained perfection it is time for him to retire.

Now, contrary to your Hippocrates' teachings I am forced to mention only a few cases (that come to my mind off hand) which were operated upon in our same department with excellent results:

A sitting Deputy Minister of Health was operated upon by us for a back problem.

The father of a Deputy Minister of Health in advanced age and with cardiac problem operated upon for a disc prolapse and was satisfied.

A top order MP (an ex-Senior Minister) was operated upon for a brain haematoma and is now working again normally in full-swing.

thing Bangladesh is not good and this is what she did not like about Bangladesh.

In conclusion I would like to say about Raman Lamba that it is easy to say many things retrospectively. Raman Lamba's initial injury was serious but not lethal. I am told that he was initially taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and he was sent for a CT Scan examination to a private clinic which was quite in order (no government hospital yet has a CT Scanner though last year an MRI was installed in IPGM&R. May be the condition of the emergency ward in DMCH where Raman Lamba would have been kept — may be in an emergency bed in the verandah — did not inspire anybody to keep him there.

While in the private clinic even the next day after the injury from what I hear there was no indication for surgery. It was late in the following afternoon when Lamba started to have a series of convulsions (he was already put on anticonvulsant medications) that his condition turned for the worse. It was the evening of 21st February when I was already operating on a patient with a brain haemorrhage, news came to me that Lamba is having convulsions and I asked them to bring him over immediately. He was already in our department when I was still in operation theatre, operating. When I came out he was in the middle of what we medically say 'status epilepticus'. He was having convulsions in the ambulance and vomited and aspirated some vomitus into the right lung which then started to malfunction. He eventually died from the effects of the series of convulsions and his impaired lung function that gave rise to 'malignant brain oedema' which was the ultimate cause of death and not 'continued haemorrhage' which was erroneously mentioned in some of the newspapers.

At the end I want to mention, not to justify anything but to state facts, that I had worked in Britain for more than eleven years as Registrar, Senior Registrar in two University departments and a famous regional centre (Bristol) and also a Consultant Neurosurgeon which is really the top most post in a specialty in Britain except a few University Professors' posts and I have managed many cases like Lamba's in Britain and was never questioned and if I had managed Raman Lamba in Edinburgh in exactly the same way I managed him here in Dhaka no question would have been raised.

The writer is Professor and Head of the Department of Neurosurgery, IPGM&R.

These are only a few of thousands we have dealt with in our department here in spite of many handicaps.

Alas, good news is no news. So none of these excellent results ever came out in newspapers. I take this opportunity to draw your attention to one of the news published in 'The Daily Star' some years ago as interview of foreign ladies as wives of Dhaka citizens. A Thai lady when asked what she did not like about Bangladesh she answered that every Bangladeshi thinks that any-

To the Editor...

It's senseless

Sir, It is truly appalling to see that not only has the Architecture Department's issue been solved but has taken a turn for the worst. That the department teachers want to decide their admission test is an understandable matter — its plain common sense. That the administration wants to introduce a new test without the total acknowledgment of the relevant department is plain senseless. Just because the majority of the Academic Council say so the wishes of the relevant

department can be ignored is mediaeval dogma. And now we have some of the Academic Council members resorting to swearing at the students, and lying to the press.

Mrs K Aktarunnessa Dhaka

Shaheed Dibash

Sir, It was totally a state affair. Then how come when the Leader of the Opposition went to place her floral wreath at the Shaheed Minar, the security was not enough? Jahanara Saba Iqbal Rd, Dhaka.