

Eliminating Molestation

Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru has said the AL government believes in a participatory process of law making. If properly practised this can become a very good point for the government. We are fortunate in that a test case is at hand and Minister Khasru was himself present in the event as a participant. This was the event on Thursday in which the sponsors Nari Protagi Sangha had a cross-section of our intellectuals, women power activists and jurists exchange ideas on the proposed bill to fight woman and child persecution. The draft bill has been having a welcome exposure for months. Thanks to the government for that. Now on to what government does in response to the inadequacies and mistakes shown in the bill through such exposure.

To begin with: why had it been made too unwieldy to be of any effect by jumbling it up with extortion and terrorism of various kinds? Irrefutable point number two: women's repression in Bangladesh is often the product of *fatwabazi*. Why has that not been made a punishable offence? The discussion threw light on many other aspects of the bill and the problems it wanted to address. Abuse of victimised women in the name of keeping them in judicial custody was one of the horrible things perpetrated in the name governance. It must go.

Cursed is the process of a rape victim being made to face police interrogation and cross-examination by the criminal's counsel — each of these many encounters constituting veritable rape, over and over again *ad nauseum*.

These and many other points made in the discussion should not be unfamiliar to the minister. All that was left for him was to assure the present leaders of social opinion of the responsiveness of the government.

Now the wait. To gauge the difference between assurance and performance. There is literally a tide of women and children abuse all over the land. One important instrument to counter this is a good and effective law leading to harsh deterring punishment. Let the government do this easy thing first and embark on a *jihad* on all front — motivating the broad masses and their many leaderships to join the fight. Anything less, the problem would stay. And grow.

More Than a Routine Visit

Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom's visit to Dhaka proved successful both in regional and bilateral terms. One could even add without any fear of contradiction that it went beyond the rituals of an official visit.

In fact Gayoom himself set the tenor in Dhaka talks when he recalled the Male Summit decision for 'informal consultation among the top SAARC leaders and urged all concerned to implement this religiously. The next summit is scheduled for July in Colombo. Bangladesh Prime Minister and Maldives President stressed the need for informal discussions among SAARC member-states with a view to formulating a guideline for the next summit. Official time-table drawn on mutual convenience has a way of missing out on the pressing urgency of cooperation issues.

Continuing consultation especially among top SAARC leaders is important as a way of lessening tensions and building confidence in the region. This commends itself in a context where the SAARC charter does not permit discussion on contentious bilateral issues to let off the steam.

Purely in the realm of bilateral relations, Dhaka and Male have not only had six agreements on cultural exchange air service and sound broadcasting, but they have also struck new depths of understanding on environmental cooperation against the backdrop of climate changes and global warming. Maldives' expertise in the protection of low laying coastal areas, sea-fishing and tourism can be harnessed by us. The question of welfare of the Bangladesh expatriates working in Maldives figured and it is heartening that we are going to have a resident mission in Male as mark of growing ties between the two countries.

It is a measure of Maldives' special bonding with Bangladesh that she has agreed to support Dhaka's candidature for non-permanent UNSC seat and her inclusion in the Indian Ocean Rim Association of Regional Cooperation (IORARC).

Night Coach Robbery

Night coach robbery is on the rise. Only the other day robbers looted passengers of a Bogra-bound bus from Dhaka and slipped out comfortably on the way. The bitter truth about this nocturnal scourge in long distance travel in Bangladesh is that it has waxed over the years due to the sheer indifference of the authorities. Reassuringly, night coach dacoity is neither too difficult nor too novel a problem to tackle. It happens only in the long distance routes and the technique applied by the plunderers is pretty simple. Either the dacoits board the vehicle in the guise of passengers and force the rest at gun point to hand over whatever they have or they bring the speeding bus to a halt with roadblocks to rob them. Both are eminently challengeable. At least if they cannot be wholly stopped, they can certainly be scaled down. One calls for screening at the start of the journey while the other requires vigilance on the way or highway patrolling. This is the second palpable line of defence which the authorities are found wanting in much to our frustration.

Government must realise that there is no point in allowing a service without ensuring its safety. If it cannot ensure enough police patrol for the safety of the roads at night coach, it should stop the night service. Long distance buses will only ply in the day time.

Real problem is the authorities never took the matter up with due seriousness. It is time they did.

Are We Drifting Towards Anarchy?

Men and women with social conscience, commitment to the good old values of honesty, integrity, respect for life and limb, and equal treatment of all in the eyes of law and moral fibre to fight against the fast spreading criminality in the society should come forward to build such a movement. Otherwise, they themselves will be victims of criminals today or tomorrow.

business properties are safe from the attacks of terrorists and extortionists. The existing laws to ensure the safety and security of life and property of citizens seem to be on the verge of collapse despite the Home Minister's attempt at enforcing them. A general sense of insecurity and fear of life is settling in the minds of innocent citizens.

This state of things raises three questions: 1) Are these just some unrelated stray incidents or are these the manifestations of the society's growing criminal tendencies? 2) How has the country got into such a state? and 3) What can be done to combat such explosions of criminality in the society?

Ground-swell of Criminality

From the increasing number of incidents of terrorist activities of various Mafia-like groups spread across the country, with or without networks, and rape, murder, abduction and violation of women and teenage girls, one can draw an inference: although these activities are unrelated on the surface and conducted by different groups of people who are not nationally organised under one umbrella, there seems to have developed a unifying national psyche the dominant characteristic of which is criminality. Criminal tendencies of various groups of people have

grown unchecked and are being externalised in various forms of illegal and immoral activities which are going unpunished.

Legal weaknesses in the form of getting easy bails, lengthy process of getting judgments from the courts, (which amounts to almost a denial of justice), and the lack of exemplary punishments for the criminals seem to be contributing to the ground-swell of

decade of 1950s, when my generation went through the college and university education in Dhaka and elsewhere, but it has grown since then. Why and how it has developed is a fertile subject of research for the social psychologists. I haven't read so far any well-documented and objectively analysed research work on this subject.

However, I will put forward my own observations on the

were submerged under the tidal wave of nationalist movement of 1968-69, the lesson of bribing students for partisan political support remained. Ayub Khan also bribed politicians and business people of the time heavily.

However, after independence, Sheikh Shaheb could not recover all the weapons from the freedom fighters and some of these weapons passed into the hands of anti-social elements. Later on, when people saw that politicians were abusing their powers for promoting their own self-interests and the interests of their supporters even if the latter were extorting money from others, it turned into a common practice with organised groups. These groups terrorise ordinary people in their areas of influence and collect regular tolls from them.

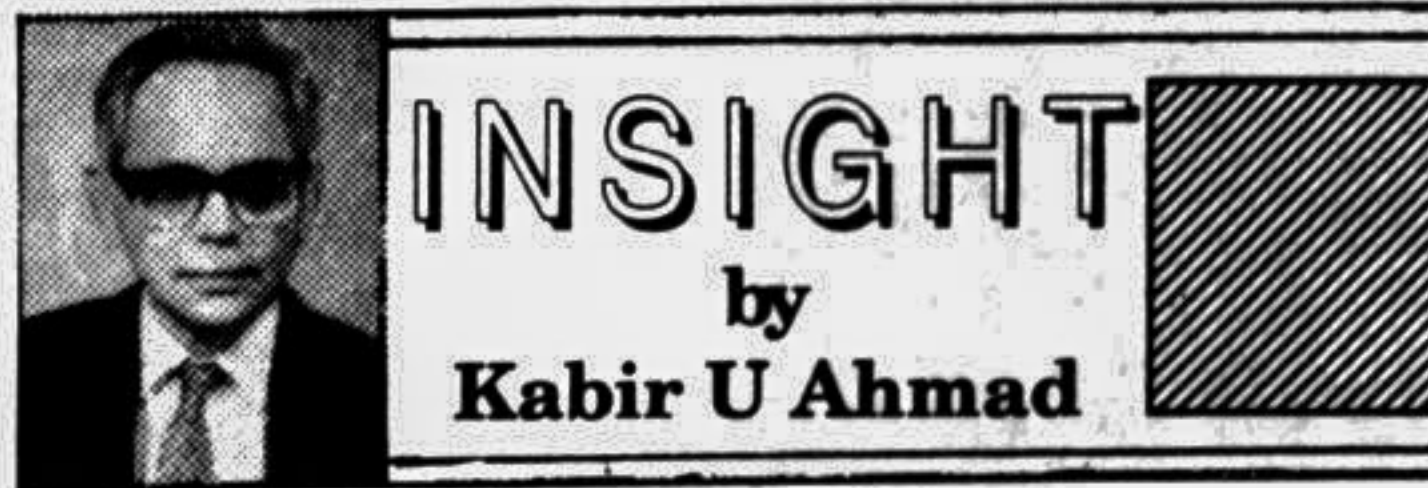
When politicians go for election, they realise that without the support of these terrorist groups they cannot win the votes of these voters, then they come to some alliance with these terrorist groups. A political link is then established between these terrorist groups and the politicians. When these terrorists are caught and jailed, then politicians have to go to seek bails for them. In this process, politics itself gets criminalised and terrorists themselves get political cover.

Once these terrorists get themselves firmly rooted in some areas, they can bribe po-

How to Combat the Criminalisation Process?

There is no doubt that if decency, sanity and safety of life and limb of ordinary citizens of the country have to be restored and protected, there is a need for mobilisation of all law abiding citizens from all walks of life and develop it into a major national movement.

It has to be fought at legal, political, social and educational levels. Politics has to be made clean and fair and untied with criminal elements. Laws have to be tightened and enforced properly and any offender and abettor must be punished severely irrespective of party affiliations. Anyone found to be supporting criminals and terrorist groups should be socially and politically boycotted in all forms. Educational institutions should be completely freed from the clutches of terrorist groups, both students and teachers, irrespective of their party affiliations. Men and women with social conscience, commitment to the good old values of honesty, integrity, respect for life and limb, and equal treatment of all in the eyes of law and moral fibre to fight against the fast spreading criminality in the society should come forward to build such a movement. Otherwise, they themselves will be victims of criminals today or tomorrow.



INSIGHT
by
Kabir U Ahmad

criminality in the society at large. Violence, therefore, is gradually replacing the civilised way (legal and ethical ways) of settling matters in general. If this tendency is left unchecked, the criminal behaviour will rule the society. It will then be the worst possible social cancer which has the potentiality of destroying everything that every Bengali was proud of and held valuable.

How Has It Developed?

Such widespread criminality was certainly not there in the Bengali society in the

origin and spread of criminality in this society. By and large, the origin of the practice of criminality with state patronisation goes back to the dictatorial regime of Ayub Khan. He planned to destroy the universities, especially Dhaka University, the students of which played a glorious role in the decade of 1950s without any bribe or perks. It was Ayub Khan who in the early 1960s supplied money, weapons, transports and other perks to his supporters in the universities. Although these people

To the Editor...

Shohag's dream

Sir, I was moved by Chandra Shekhar Das's article, 'Stark Visage of Cruelty'. The following is my thought.

It was hard for me to resist my tears as I read the story of Shohag, an eight-year-old Bengali child hired as domestic help. Shohag is no different from my nine-year-old only child, Justin. Justin is in 2nd Grade, rides bicycle, plays video games, watches NBA on TV and now getting to use the Internet in the house. Not only as a father, but also as a human being, satisfying my child's innocent desires only gives me heavenly joy.

Shohag's world was also full of dreams. His desires and curiosity were no less than Justin's. But due to sheer fate of Shohag, being born in a Bangladeshi poor family, he was denied his childhood and made to work as child labourer to cater the fantasy of Sabiha Hossain's family in Dhaka. His body and soul were tortured. Sabiha Hossain denied Shohag his laughter. Her family violated every spiritual norm and became a bunch of grotesque beasts. Sabiha Hossain made her fellow human being ashamed.

Shohag was never shown fairness by the Hossain family. This child's last desire probably is a mere expectation fairness and justice from Bangladeshi law. I hope, Shohag's soul can pardon those ugly beasts.

Chandra Shekhar Das's 'Stark Visage of Cruelty' makes every heart cry.

Anwar Ghazi
12241 Marilla Drive
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U.S.A.

Is it a war field?

Sir, What is BUET doing? How can they accept a resignation that has been withdrawn? Didn't this newspaper quote the VC as saying that a joint resignation is not acceptable? Do they think they can replace 13 qualified teachers some of who have years of worthy experience and higher degrees? The university is not a war field of vengeance, or is it? The Prime Minister herself intervened and resolved the matter and they had their admission test the way they wanted to. Some teachers had protested and not without reason.

Now that those teachers have accepted the admission test, is BUET trying to punish them? This is not acceptable behaviour from one of the most prestigious institutions of this country. What they should do is to look after student welfare and see to it that the situation is normalized as soon as possible, yet we know that one month has passed since the admission test but architecture classes have not yet started. One begins to doubt the integrity of all those academics who run BUET. Can we trust our children's future with such an institution?

Chemom Ara
Banani, Dhaka.

PM on student politics

Sir, I have to admit to a new-found respect for the PM. It takes a certain degree of courage and conviction, especially from the head of the ruling party, to say that the time for student politics is over. We all remember the similar promise of the BNP while in opposition, followed by the about-face once in power.

In fact, I even applaud her willingness to shoot armed student insurgents — make no mistake, that's what they are — on sight. If violence will end violence, then so be it. Why should killers deserve 'kid gloves' treatment from law enforcement personnel? The less I say about the 'teachers' who 'support' student politics, the better.

Bravo, Madam PM! The right decisions are the hardest to make, but there is a silent majority who will stand by you, and who for once would like to see the greater national good put before party interests.

Sadat Omar
Dhaka

Bring normalcy at DU

Sir, What is happening at DU is really unexpected to the general students. We do not want our institution to be closed due to the causes to which we have no involvement.

We humbly want to say that 'we want to go to our classes, we want to study'. We request our Prime Minister, the Leader or the Opposition, and the Vice Chancellor to take pragmatic steps so that normalcy prevail on the DU campus forever. We are hoping for the best.

S M Enayetur Raheem
3rd Year (Hons)
Applied Statistics
ISRT, DU

Chanda collectors

Sir, Added to so many problems cropping up these days is another new one — the chanda collectors. These guys have nowadays become so numerous and daring, that they don't spare anybody. They have become a complete public nuisance.

Whether you are at home or in offices or in a shop or on highway or at a construction site, they are always there everywhere. They plague the ordinary citizens with their demands for money, day in and day out. As excuse for money collection, they cook up all sorts of stories — sports, function, publication of magazine or for some saint and what not.

In the city they just push into the office, without any permission whatsoever. On highways they stop speeding vehicles by just obstructing the roads by human barricades. With complete disregard for the inconvenience they cause the travelers or the risk of an accident. Not one but few gangs of collectors will stop your vehicle at different points on the highway. Harassing and delaying the poor travellers.

Why isn't the law enforcing agencies or the government doing anything to put an end to this endless public suffering, in the hands of some people who choose to make easy money without any work?

This is and can be possible only in our country. Nowhere else in the world would anyone dream of forcing somebody to contribute a big sum of money only for wastage. It is like robbery in broad daylight, forcing people to throw away their hard earned money — which nobody with honest income would like to do.

Dr Sarah
Dhaka.

Local fruit juices

Sir, I have tried most of the different local brands of fruit juices made and marketed in Dhaka. I do not feel like buying any more, as these appear to be mostly synthetic than real fruit juice. It is too thin and tastes artificial. It is a highly profitable business, as the major portion is added water.

The information on the label do not explain the lack of A-1 quality. In contrast, the fresh fruit crushed in presence of the customer at the fast-food outlets is refreshing.

The consumers should get value for money. Another point: the pulp of the fruit (solids) should be retained to a certain extent (latest finding by the scientists). We come back to the basic weaknesses: the sense of duty and respect for quality control, testing, regulatory exercises, deterrent measures are

A Daughter Lost

(Dedicated to Shazneen's family)
by Chowdhury Rashaad Shabab

God,
Take this life from within my veins.
For what is life
Without one for whom I would have given it all
And been glad of it?

O! Cease your restless fluttering,
My heart.
For one you loved,
No longer treads this earth.
No longer kisses the sweet air a greeting at morn;
And no longer bids this beautiful night
A farewell at the end of each day's living.

Yes! cease your senseless rising and falling,
My chest.
For the one you held
So close and so strong.
For the one you would enfold
Within these two arms.
To protect her from the evils of this world
As your ribs do my heart.
And the night does the stars,
Is no more.

Eyes,
Be closed.
For your apple you shall see no more.

And ears,
Fall to the ground and rot!
For her sweet voice
Shall never again

Murmur and whisper...
Poetry,
Sweeter than the raindrop,
Unto you again.

But wait!
No...

God give me patience,
That I break not the line,
And see her, only when it is my time.

Heart,
Share your warmth
Among those who seek it,
And those who need it.
For in her absence,
They too feel a chill.

And chest,
Find your warmth
In the others you love,
For they still need to shed it.
And you
Still need its benevolent nourishment.

And eyes,
Weep not.
Grieve not.
For she still lives:
Only in volumes too multitudinous for us to dare dream.

Tears for Shazneen

Sir, There is none who is not shocked and horrified by the brutal murder of Shazneen. It is terrible to know that our daughters are not safe within our protective walls. Whom can we trust? How can our daughters live a normal life?

The government and the conscientious citizens should come forward to find out ways to end this sort of crimes. The punishment for such crimes should be quick and exemplary so that none can ever dare to do so in future.

Our tears should not go in vain. Our love and affection will certainly reach Shazneen in her eternal abode. My deepest sympathy for her parents, relatives and friends.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong.

and many are fighting for their lives, many rape victims are being murdered, women are being abducted and all sorts of cruelty to women are increasing alarmingly. Not only these, violent crimes are happening routinely. People are passing their days in great fear and anxiety not knowing when they will be struck with misfortune.

We are deeply disappointed by the role of the Home Minister — it seems that he has failed to check the growing incidents of crimes. When he took the responsibility, he promised that he will make the country crime-free or will resign. Is it not high time that we should see some weight of his words?

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong.

Shazneen murder

Sir, 15-year old Shazneen was yet to understand what life is all about when her life was snatched away in the most brutal and horrific way. The killer/killers have most outrageously violated the girl and murdered her with a vengeance. This is one of the many violations that are being committed to our daughters, sisters and mothers in all parts of our country. The moral degradation has reached a point where the conscious citizens must wake up to do something about this breakdown and bankruptcy of the very social fabric that we Bangladeshis were once proud of. Mere talking and writing will not do anymore, we must have a pressure group belonging to all shades of people to make a strict law that brings to justice and give capital punishment to

May Shazneen be in eternal peace

Sir, People all over the country are deeply shocked and grief-stricken by the untimely and violent death of Shazneen. Why this horrible thing had to happen to this innocent girl? We could not find any words of consolation for her parents — what could one say to those who are suffering such an unbearable agony? We could only pray to the Almighty Allah to give them strength so that they could bear this immense loss and bestow His peace upon them.

Rapes of all sorts have become every-day incident these days. Every girls are violated

weak or missing. Part of a whole system cannot work independently.

The administration do not point out these aberrations, while the leaders are too busy in self-defence operations. The fruit juice and the leaders are not far distanced! Quality is the common leveller?

A Zabr
Dhaka

Au revoir, Architecture

Sir, I read with shocked disbelief that 13 architect teachers of BUET have been relieved by the Syndicate and the VC, through a show of childish logic and blatant double standard. It shows that the alleged step-motherly attitude of the BUET authorities are indeed true.

* A joint resignation letter is



the rapists and murderers who go Scot free after such heinous crime.

We cannot bring back Yasmin, Shazneen and hundreds of others who have been violated and murdered but we can surely stop this happening to many of those who are living in constant fear of this vicious violence.

Akku Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

How safe am I?

Sir, First and foremost I would like to offer my condolences to all the family and friends of Shazneen Tasnim Rahman. Her tragic death has shook us all — hopefully to become more alert of the deteriorating trend of violence in our country.

I am a student of class X and will be finishing my O-Levels

and experienced and willing architect teachers do not come by the dozen!

Munirul Haque
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Friday as working day

Sir, Some dailies (dt 16.4.98) came up with the news that the BOI (Board of Investment) has suggested to change the weekly holiday from Friday to Sunday on lame excuses. One of the instances people supporting the change cite the Pakistani's which recently has done so for no valid reasons. If people meant that Friday closures affect export foreign exchange earning's etc., then this is simply a guess-work not supported by statistics.

The scenario is rather just the reverse even if we take Bangladesh's case in reference.

this May. But with what guarantee can this society ensure that I won't be the victim of such a similar crime today or tomorrow? How safe am I within the protective walls of my own house? I can't even go out without feeling terrified of the fact that even the streets are contaminated with rapists, murderers and kidnappers. Who knows when they'll pop up!

But it is also unjust to blame these villains entirely for their actions — media have an immense contribution in encouraging such violence; not to mention some of the grotesque video and computer games consisting mainly of fighting, killing and slaughtering. This puts a tremendous imprint in the minds of teenagers and adults alike. It might even make them blood-thirsty.

Although I haven't had the pleasure of Shazneen's acquaintance, her death has had a great impact on me.

Tania Hossain
Dhaka

No words to console

Sir, We learnt with utter sorrow and distress about the brutal murder of Shazneen, the youngest daughter of Mr Latifur Rahman. We simply have no words to console the ones who have lost their child. May Allah rest her soul in eternal peace. Ameen.

Since, the main accused Shaidul should be promptly tried, and if found guilty he should be openly punished.

Khawja Viqar Moinuddin
Purana Paltan,
Dhaka

The official figure suggested that during the last year the export growth recorded 20 per cent higher than the previous year, although it was Friday holiday then as it is now. No single LC was cancelled during the last 10 years because of Friday being the holiday. These figures came up in time when a debate was on here. Many arguments both in favour and against were given but ultimately it transpired that Friday as holiday had more merit both in terms of life-mundane and life-spiritual so much so that 70 per cent people favoured Friday as holiday, since a survey conducted then indicated. And the issue was considered closed.

Reopening the issue by the BOI at this stage is quite surprising.

Abu Imran
Dhaka