

Shocking

We are shocked and strongly condemn the bomb attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. It was a most disturbing orgy of gore and destruction that these explosions, occurring five minutes apart, triggered off in the capitals of the two sub-Saharan countries.

When the State is a Bully

Gullible voters apart, there was no shortage of people who knew the true colour of BJP and its puppeteer masters, the RSS-Jan Sangh. But no one could imagine the kind of destabilisation BJP would subject the region so soon after its induction to power.

Shiv-Sena is perhaps as fascist as BJP but is not overly interested in wrapping its tuggery with velvet. This in spite of its being a partner in the Joshi government of Bombay which fact should have invoked in them some self-respect.

All this pales before the Shiv-Sena's performance after the publication of the Sri Krishna Commission Report on the Great Bombay killing, implicating Shiv-Sena and its chief Bal Thackeray with a dirty and pronounced role in that. Far from accepting the report and acting on it, Chief Minister Manohar Joshi has branded the report as 'pro-Muslim' and 'anti-Hindu'.

True, the Union government cannot do much to improve upon a state government's acts of indiscretion. But the Sri Krishna Commission Report is not one that has only zonal relevance. On the handling of the Report depends the good name of the government at New Delhi, and the sense of security of the minorities in India.

Admission Crisis

The percentage of students passing SSC examination this year is less than that of the previous year. But that is no relief for the snowballing problem over the next step of these 'successful students' - admission into colleges.

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THERE is something sinister in the air. The incident of stripping of two women in Bagha thana of Rajshahi district on July 20 last, as reported in the press is a grim pointer to the erosion of last vestiges of civility and morality in a section of our male chauvinists that mostly comprise some goons and hoodlums.

Admittedly, the number of crimes either of dowry related or sexual abuse committed in the country so far is unusually high. The newspapers carry reports of young girls being sexually abused, tortured or even killed almost every day.

A recent report that was published in a vernacular daily on July 5 last has stunned people through the length and breadth of the country. The news reported from Keshabpur in the district of Jessore indicated that Iman Ali, a farmer, did not consider it a necessity to buy bullocks for drawing the plough in the agricultural land he owned.

Another report on the same day told about the rape of a dumb girl (16) in the village Maharajpur in the Chapainawabganj thana by one Akbar Hossain (25) of the same village. Taking advantage of the girl's stupidity, he had seduced her and to an extent federal government on the subject sparked off noisy scenes in the house.

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I vividly remember last time a storm was sought to be created over the presence of the Bangladesh nationals in India was nearly two decades ago - in the late Seventies and early Eighties - when an agitation was launched in the north-eastern state Assam against the Bengalee. This agitation was drawn movement and the needle of suspicion was pointed primarily at the so-called Bengali-speaking people from East Bengal-turned East Pakistan-turned Bangladesh although Bengalees as a whole suffered at that time.

The two situations that binds the two communities is that the Bengali-speaking Indians were the victims of both occasions, and the major political parties did not turn a blind eye to the problems. This time too the issue has been taken up by different political parties whose determined position on the matter challenging the policies of the Maharashtra state government.

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poor girl's plight, no case was instituted in the thana and the UP chairman of the Maharaipur village has already buried the case. In another report published in the same daily on the same day (July 5, '98), it was learnt that in the Bhaluka thana in Mymensingh an eight-year old girl was raped by one Asad(30), son of Akkas Ali of the same village. Another report published in the same paper on July 6 said that Sufia Akhter who was abducted from Feni by some known Mastans was recovered from Chittagong where she was held captive for twenty days and sexually abused by at least four Mastans.

After a series of incidents involving young girls in the country that rocked the administration, it was only expected that women would be getting a fair deal in the country. But the order for these unfortunate and impoverished girls seems to be increasing without respite and remedy.

The murder of Shahnaz Parveen alias Pyari (18), daughter of Ganjar Ali Mollah of Dumuria thana under Khulna District who was married to Rezaul Islam, a police constable serving in the Range Reserve Police Force in Khulna, on April 4, 1997, gave grim testimony, if any were needed, to the suffering inflicted by the cruel dowry customs still prevailing in the country. The photograph of Pyari published in a section of the press on July 20 last along with a gruesome report of her death made one thing clear that the marriage of Pyari, a pretty girl was solemnized on Feb. 13, 1997 at the unusual insistence and fervent entreaties of Rezaul. But the drama started unfolding in the most gruesome way and the happy dawn of life that Pyari wanted to see evaporated just within one month when Rezaul started creating pressure on her to bring bridal gifts from her parents.

In a seminar organised by the 'Coalition against Trafficking in Women in Asia-Pacific Region' and participated by 14 nations in Dhaka on June 26, last speakers dwelt at length on the increasing trends of repression on women in the Asia-Pacific region in the name of growth of tourism industry. Most worrisome, the statistics presented in the meeting indicated that about 200-400 young women are being trafficked every month to other countries economically better-off than Bangladesh.

Thus the scourge of dowry continues to take away the lives of young women in the country in a horrifying rate, all of which people can't know since newspapers can report only a few cases of the whole lot. The whole society has got to be scared about the way the dowry-related crimes are increasing in the country. Poverty coupled with lack of even elementary education has made these women-folk extremely vulnerable to such repression.

On the other side of the picture, the militant activists of the Shiv Sena in New Delhi flaunting weapons like knives and swords demonstrated near the parliament asking ouster of the 'Bangladeshis'.

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Are Things Falling Apart?

By Md Asadullah Khan

The social prejudice and double standard of morality prevailing in countries like Bangladesh tend to stigmatise women even if they had been sinned against instead of sinning.

Because a police personnel was being indicted in the case, Abhoyagar thana in the Jessore district was more than willing to rule this incident a case of suicide and refused to record an ejarah. Subsequently, the autopsy report of Pyari was also manipulated in favour of the accused dubbing Pyari's death as a case of suicide by taking poison. That meant that the case was buried under the carpet once for all, the report said.

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women in the country look more grim in the light of the fact that in a male-dominated society like Bangladesh, women are not allowed to inherit their paternal property and that situation blocks all doors for remedial measures as well as rehabilitation for women abandoned by husbands on some pretext.

That brings us to the moot question of empowering women so to enable them to support themselves. The women activist groups, NGOs and legal aid groups have been doing a wonderful job by keeping a constant vigil on gender-related discrimination and physical torture on women. But precisely true, their awareness building activities can't bring about the desired result unless the whole community rises as one man to thwart the heinous perpetration of crimes by a section of the easily identifiable group.

The root cause of all such problems stem from abysmal poverty. And education, it has been asserted by experts, is an essential component in the eradication of poverty. While education has become more accessible in all parts of the world, it is still far from available for all. At the present moment, there are 905 million illiterate adults world wide. Despite all efforts, they may still number 870 million by the turn of the century. As one statistics reveal, seventy per cent of the 120 million population in the country are still illiterate. Coupled with illiteracy and poverty it is the population boom, still a high figure for this country, that tends to turn all development activities in the country in a fiasco.

In our own country, there are numerous examples as to how enlightenment and education have helped families to grapple with the problem of economic hardship. Rowshan Ara Begum, 75, living in the Sathkira district with her children now educated and well placed in the society, portrays a life that stood against all the odds in the family and society. Rowshan Ara, a promising and bright student at the prime of her life who got scholarship at the primary level examination could somehow complete her education upto class VI against all odds of a conservative society at that time.

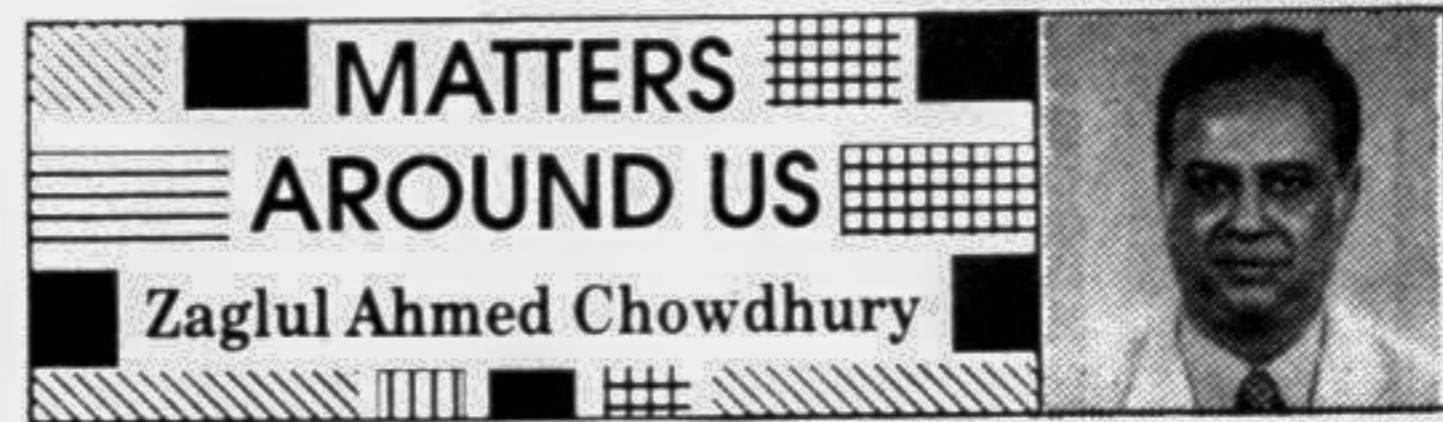
With the earnings she got from her teaching job and through teaching young boys and girls in the locality in the spare time, she supplemented the meagre family income and helped the family overcome the disaster that had overtaken it. Now she is a member of many socio-cultural organisation and has helped set up a high school in her village and continues to inspire local people to invest money in setting up schools and colleges and health care projects. The children hospital that was set up in the Sathkira town with the financial help and institutional guidance of one of her philanthropic physician relation national Professor Dr. M. R. Khan stands now as a monument of her dedication, inspirational guidance and a deep feeling for humanity in distress.

But facts are stranger than fiction. Fatwabaz people in the villages still oppose literacy programme and women employment under different NGOs in the rural areas. Reports are there that women have been subjected to humiliation, torture and even divorce on the basis of some fatwas issued by these fatwabaz. And the conclusion is: the social prejudice and double standard of morality prevailing in countries like Bangladesh tend to stigmatise women even if they had been sinned against instead of sinning.

The writer is Controller of Examinations, BUET.

Presence of Bangladeshis in India: Where is the Rationale?

One wonders why poor families who lived in the slums of Mumbai would go from Bangladesh all the way to Mumbai - a long distance indeed - for a livelihood.



Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

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have large concentration in Mumbai as well. When one watches the 'Z' TV programmes, one can see a lot of Bengalees - as it is understood from the pattern of their surnames like Mona Bhat-tacharaya or Aurobinda Mukherjee - which shows that Indian Bengalees are in good numbers in the capital of Maharashtra.

Why has then the Maharashtra government been raising the bogey of Bangladeshis living in Mumbai in big numbers and seeking to deport people from there after 'identifying' them as 'aliens'? The state government is known for its communal approach and it may be feeling that it can derive political mileage by coming down on some people describing them as aliens in the city. They rounded up several families as 'Bangladeshis' but one wonders why poor families who lived in the slums of Mumbai would go from Bangladesh all the way to Mumbai - a long distance indeed - for a livelihood.

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countries but this can only be few cases.

The Maharashtra government has rejected the findings of Sri Krishna commission which has indicted its two ruling parties for the communal riots in 1991-92 that saw a killing of many people in the aftermath of the Babri mosque demolition. At that time, the Congress was in power in the state and the BJP and the Shiv Sena were in the opposition. The commission said these two parties played active role in the trouble.

It appears ridiculous that city of the size of Mumbai where more than one crore people live and a country of the size of India will be benefited by expelling some people on the ground of being 'foreigners'. The main idea behind the drive seems political with a communal overtone and it is plausible to think that Maharashtra government cannot pursue with ease with weak moorings.

It is laudable that secular parties in India have openly come out against this move. Maharashtra's ruling coalition suffered electoral reverses in the last national elections as their opponents won most of the federal parliament seats from the state. The coalition is seeking to face the next state assembly elections with some new slogans or issues. Although the state polls are still far off, the discovery of the 'Bangladeshis' could be a part of the new policies of the state government to drum up support on cheap subjects.

rupt practices of the officials posted there and lack of efficient official supervision from the head office, which is costing the nation heavily, both financially and ethically.

I reiterate our demand of bringing to book the culprits and curb their practice so that no further nose-diving is experienced in the future for malpractices and they work jointly to keep the image of the nation high in the financial world.

The UK government, one can realise, do not run as that of ours. They have the law of the land and no one is above it. And I appreciate their graciousness to save our bank from total closure. But yet I would urge upon the authority concerned to continue their efforts to convince their colleagues in the UK to allow the new company to remain engaged in the remittance of our wage-earners who are a part of the backbone of our ailing economy.

A F Rahman, Dhaka

To the Editor...

Justification Sir, How justifiable was it for our prime minister to attend the Colombo meeting, that I don't know. What I know is that she should have been with the flood victims at that very moment.

MATTERS AROUND US

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Visa pangs

Sir, There are a few countries in the world i.e. Middle East, Korea, Malaysia and Singapore, whom both fear and look down upon us Bangladeshis, who are about to obtain visa to enter those countries.

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Sonali Get Bronzy

Sir, I have read with appreciation your editorial comments on the disastrous performance of Sonali bank. UK. This is not the unique instance of Bangladesh Bank's failure overseas due mainly to favouritism, nepotism and cor-

rupt practices of the officials posted there and lack of efficient official supervision from the head office, which is costing the nation heavily, both financially and ethically.

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