E are not at all im-

pressed with the Ja-

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## Doesn't it Amount to Licence to Rape?

by Anu Muhammod, Meghna Guhathakurta Shameem Akhter, Khaleda Khatun and Rahnuma Ahmed

The Jahangirnagar University 'campus rapes' took place within a peculiar set of political and economic arrangements, backed not only by male aggression but by a monopoly of armed violence.

hangirnagar Unimembers? Did they receive any threats? versity's Syndicate decision. The Syndicate Yes, threats were received awarded the following punishduring the six-weeklong movement. By students, both ments for committing what women and men. Women stuthey termed as 'morally degraddents were threatened and, with ing' activities: Jasimuddin what else, but rape? Obscene Manik, received a life-long exphone calls were continuously pulsion order from Jahangirmade at the women's halls of nagar University. Two others, residence. Word was spread Sheikh Miradul Islam and Moaround that rape lists were behammad Ali Dallas received a ing prepared. Death threats three-year expulsion. Atiqur were made. The name of one of Rahman Naim received a twoyear expulsion. Nabiul Haq the women organizers, a Chhatro Union member, was hung Ronny received a one year suspended expulsion (i.e. he faces around a dog's neck and it was let loose on campus. The alleged expulsion if found guilty of rapists hung around the wommisconduct, within a year). The en's halls of residence, with suspended expulsion was on actheir mobiles in hand, in incount of his 'good conduct' as a student. Hasibur Rahman timidating postures. Taunting. teasing remarks (the usual) Barkat and Anisur Rahman were now accompanied by were served with warning noslurs, swear words, insults ('If tices. The six students who were we had given them some money accused of aiding and abetting after raping them, they would the others in committing rape have kept shut,' 'This one - Mir Mehedi Hasan Titu, Ferhasn't quietened down even afdous Alam Kabir, Rafiqul Ister being raped', 'We are keeping lam, Nur Mohammod Ruhul track of all those who are Quddus, Mohammod Farhaprotesting. After the movement duddin Siddique Shohag and is over, we will rape them en Yusuf bin Sattar Kajol — were masse,' 'Earlier, we had raped acquitted of the charges. Two them in the dark, now we will students who were accused of drag them out of the halls and giving obscene slogans — Piyas rape them'). Processions chantand Milton - were acquitted. ing horrible slogans (Andolon Four other students were also kore jara, deho baybsha kore acquitted: two had been accused tara, Women who protest, are of mastani or thuggery - Babu tarts at best), threatening sloand Hamidul - and two others gans Action action direct of harassing women students -Said and Mahfuz. The names of rect rape) went round the camthe three outsiders who were pus, particularly around the reported to be involved — Sohel, women's halls of residence. Mukul and Raj - are to be Unknown men suddenly apforwarded to the police authopeared in Bangladesh Chhatro League processions on campus.

ing reprisals? Were they afraid

for themselves, for their family

The university authorities have failed to give exemplary Women students surmised that punishment. That is the reacthey were hired musclemen. BCL members constantly ention, not only of Jahangirnagar University General Students circled groups of women students, who were keeping night-Unity (Shadharon Chhatro long vigils outside the Registry Oikko) — who waged an unrebuilding when the Syndicate lenting struggle against campus met inside to deliberate. On the rape demanding that the night of the 24" one BCL rapists be punished — it is also member was seen moving the reaction of organizations around with a bag. Some of the and of groups (women's organizations, students' organizamale students who were part of tions, political groups, civil the student's movement were rights groups, legal groups), and beaten up, others were hassled, of people generally as voiced in post-editorials, in letters to the newspapers, in interviews, and in conversations. In these cirdidn't. cumstances some questions are only natural: why did the university authorities fail to give exemplary punishment? What prevented them from doing so especially in matters so serious? Does not the nature and the extent of the punishment

roughed up, threatened. Some male students were forced to join BCL processions under the threat of being beaten up if they Teachers were also recipients of threats, of intimidation. Naseem Akhter Hussain, the Provost of a women's hall of residence, and a member of the Truth Assessment Committee (Shottashotto Jachai Committee), received threats. She was warned that once her Committee membership was over, she

ber of the Assessment Committee, was assaulted by BCL leaders and members on the night of the 24" of September when she tried to leave the Registry building premises. One of us. Rahnuma Ahmed, a university teacher who was earlier assaulted while taking photographs of a BCL 'anti-rape' rally was the object of a smear campaign. BCL processions chanted slogans against her. outside the department where she teaches, and all around campus (Rahnuma Ahmeder chamra, kutta diye kamra, Let dogs tear at Rahnuma Ahmed's skin, Baybhicharini Rahnuma Ahmed, et muhurte campus chhar. Adulteress Rahnuma Ahmed, leave the campus this very moment). Obscene letters, of course anonymous ones, were sent to the Truth Assessment Committee naming a few other teachers, among them Anu Mohammad. Khaleda Khatun, who taught part-time last year at Jahangirnagar, has been receiving obscene phone calls at her home in Dhaka city. There were also others teachers, another Committee member, members of the residential community who were targetted. However, the list is not a never-ending one. It does end and right at its edges one

can see a pattern. It is only

some outside the student com-

munity -some teachers, or

some Committee members, or a

few Syndicate members — who

are the objects of, at times

ridicule, and at other times

veiled warnings, threats,

within the campus itself,

friends and well wishers of the

rapists occupy positions of

power: whether among the Ja-

hangirnagar University teach-

ing community, or among the

residential community, or

among the Hall administra-

tion, or among the Syndicate

itself. Why else should a section

of the teachers, a section of the

University authorities among

which there are also Syndicate

members, be so concerned

'studentship' of armed cadres,

of rapists, of assaulters, of mo-

retaining the

There is a possibility that

smears, hate campaigns.

of required votes.' And from unpublished accounts, but highly reliable ones, we have learnt of what actually went on: the attempts to save this one's nephew, that one's shagred (disciple), the wheeling and dealing, the mobile phone calls to Dhaka, the endless bickering, the handful of Syndicate members who strongly felt that the offenders should receive strict punishment, and the hard, merciless, unrelenting countenances of the others who sat in that august house, and refused. Refused to punish those who had committed grave injustices. It was not 'lack of evidence,' or the 'failure of rape victims to come forward and voice their sufferings,' or 'their sad mutedness' (in the words of well-known journalist and JU Syndicate member A. B. M. Musa) which resulted in this unjust decision. It was patronage, it was corruption, and a total disrespect bordering on paranoia and hatred of any form of protest. Regardless of how valid and just the cause

of the nineteen students ac-

cused, the decision was as it

was, 'not due to lack of written

complaints, but due to the lack

Why should those who are meting out justice — in the form

of disciplinary sanctions — be

unable to distinguish between

'justice' and 'injustice'? So

many others can make the dis-

tinction: firstly, the women

students themselves, secondly

the larger student community

irrespective of which univer-

sity, or college, or school they

belong to, and thirdly, a whole

range of people — housewives,

writers, lawyers, garments

workers, professionals, bu-

reaucrats, peasants, activists,

journalists, the neighbourhood

shopkeeper, and many many

more. So why is it that the

keepers of the university

(whether elected by the teachers

in different categories such as,

from the Dean category, or

from the Provost category, or

nominated by the government).

are blind? The happenings at

Jahangirnagar campus have

astounded and enraged the na-

tion, they have also astounded

may be.

Assessment Committee's report, thanks to the courageous efforts of three women members — Naseem Akhter Hussain, A. N. Rasheda and Sauda Akhter — describes in some detail the student leader, and cadre, underworld of Jahangirnagar University. To those among us who teach, it has been clear for some time that in the university authorities eyes, there are two categories of students: a) those who are student leaders, petty-leaders and cadres and b) the general students. However, as to all generalizations, a note of caution must be added to this one. Members of left-wing organizations fall under the category of 'general students' since they are marginal to ruling party politics, whether positional or oppositional. Since the ousting of the Islamic Chhatro Shibir (Jahangirnagar University campus is the only Shibir-free campus in Bangladesh) there are only two student wings, the Bangladesh Chhatro League (BCL) and the Jativatabad Chhatra Dal (JCD) linked to ruling party politics namely, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party respectively. Students of either party have been known to

change allegiances with the

change of government. For in-

Rape is an assault on a woman's moral as well as physical integrity.

(first and second year students). (d) garments workers, who live in neighbouring villages and walk across the university area to reach the highway, have also been forcibly picked up and raped, (e) gang rapes took place, (f) in some of these, 'outsiders' i.e. non-students, often professional criminals who provide armed support to the BCL cadres, took part. In a few cases, it is reported that (g) the victims were re-raped, not once but several times, under the threat of public exposure. One victim is said to have been raped thirteen times by Manik, (h) Manik, a student of Drama and Dramatics department, is reported to have raped a woman student of the same department, within the premises of that department. Some rapists had been subjected to peer group pressure in committing gang rapes; 'outsiders' are reported to have received 'leader' status through taking part in gang rapes. It is also reported that the rape squad referred to themselves as a 'rape mission,' and sometimes jokingly, as the 'Kochi Kachar Ashor.

The Chief Rapist: Jasimuddin Manik was powerful on the basis of his political position in the JU unit of the BCL, he also has powerful relatives in

highup administrative posi-

tions within the university

Manik is a cadre-turned-leader

and beside other armed cadres

his gang included 'outsiders.'

These outsiders provided him

with personal armed protec-

tion, in return he gave them

protection and a share of the

cuts: extortion money, drugs,

women. He was officially allot-

ted a room (no. 308) in Shaheed

Salam Barkat Hall, it was a

double room which he was ex-

pected to share with another

student. He became the sole oc-

cupant of the room, by remov-

ing the other bed. He had also

occupied the room next to his

(no. 309) and had the window

glasses painted dark green from

the outside; this room was

known as the jolsha ghor

('party room'). Salam Barkat

Hall officials and employees

reported to members of the

Truth Assessment Committee

that Manik frequently brought

prostitutes from Mirpur in

Dhaka; armed cadres of the BCL

and 'outsiders' engaged in sex-

ual intercourse with the prosti-

tutes. The Hall employees fur-

ther said that the prostitutes

would be brought to the univer-

sity in a university-owned mi-

crobus. Jasimuddin Manik is

known to have celebrated his

'outsiders' who are often professional criminals, implicated in murder and other criminal cases. These 'outsiders' hang around student leaders in the hope that the police cases against them will be withdrawn through the latter's political connections. According to Committee reports, four to five 'outsiders' reside on campus during normal periods. It is reported that there was an influx of 'outsiders' during the summer holidays this year because of an increase in police investigations in Dhaka. The increase in 'outsiders' was accompanied by an increase in the use of drugs, phensedyl, drinking, and sexual assaults. The Committee investigations reveal that the 'outsiders' were residing in Shaheed Salam Barkat and Moulana Bhashani halls; it was also noted that they often leave the campus only to reappear after a couple of days. They regularly eat at the hall canteens but do not pay their food bills, they were also reported to have brought prostitutes to their rooms. Male students had complained to Committee members that, after nightly drinking bouts, the 'outsiders' and cadres would engage in yelling, swearing and beating

Manik and his gang of student cadres and 'outsiders' are reputed to be extortionists. They exact large sums of money from bus and truck drivers, and also passengers, by stopping vehicles on the Dhaka-Aricha highway in the middle of the night. They get a 2 per cent cut from each building contractor who works within the university. They also influence the distribution of university tenders (the auctioning of jackfruit trees, fishing in university lakes, library furniture supply) thereby ensuring that they receive sizable cuts from these contracts. It is difficult for a cadre student to leave the group, if he so wishes, for fear of blackmail. In such cases, he is threatened that his past misdeeds will be exposed. In a very few cases, Hall administrations have been known to have expelled cadre students on charges of misconduct and in-

### pipeguns, cocktails, and axes.

discipline. Each male hall of

residence is reported to have a

cache of arms, these include ri-

fles, sawn-off shotguns,

Allegations of a cover-up: Of the twenty women students who are reported to have been raped, two women, both students of the Drama and Dramatics department, are said to have notified the-then Proctor. One of the rape victims is also known to have informed the Hall Provost, a woman teacher. Both the Proctor and the Provost are reported to have discouraged them from bringing written complaints; they had reminded them of the social ostracism which they would face if it were to become widely known. These allegations have been denied both by the Proctor and the Provost

Male Behaviour: Yet, after having surveyed all this evidence - rape squad, the use of weapons, the targetting of newcomers, Manik's celebration of his hundredth rape, extortionism, drug-dealing, the allegations of an administrative coverup - the Vice-Chancellor still thinks it is women students who are to blame. It is women's behaviour which is at fault, 'women go and live in the male halls of residence, 'they are out till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning,' and, 'it is this freelance (sic) state of affairs which enabled miscreants to take advantage of the situation' (see the Vice-Chancellor's exclusive interview, Bhorer Kagoj, 30th September, 1998). We presume the Vice-Chancellor means 'free living' and not 'free lancing which refers to a person who works for oneself, one

without an employer, a selfemployed person. Whose 'free living and which 'miscreants' is the honourable Vice-Chancellor talking about? Why should armed-cadre-rapists be termed 'miscreants'? Is that not a vague, ill-defined word? If there was any 'free living' it was the rapists who practised it, and under administrative cover, as the Committee report clearly shows. Women are being chastised to be 'modest' in their behaviour, in their appearances, in their demeanour. What about male behaviour? It is male behaviour which should be up for trial, definitely not female behaviour. It is men who are immodest, who violate the norms of decency, who are a threat to women's security and their sense of well-being. It is men who sexually harass women at work and on the streets, who sexually and violently assault women, who sexually abuse women, who rape women — these are all exercises of male power, which routinely takes violent forms.

woman's moral as well as physical integrity. Rape and wifebeating are the more glaring instances but there is also, and most importantly, a range of male behaviour patterns which are dismissed as everyday nuisances such as obscene phone calls, making obscene comments about the woman's body, touching parts of a woman's body in crowded situations, giving catcalls which are nothing but different manifestations of collective male violence. These cannot be dismissed as being 'purely individual,' 'a lack of taste," 'bad upbringing,' rather they express a collective, socially sanctioned hatred of women which is important in maintaining the collective power of men. Why should these be tolerated?

And, if it is women who in-

Rape is an assault on a

vite rape by not behaving modestly, what about the hundreds of thousands of Bengali women who were raped during 1971 by Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators? Are the Birangonas to be blamed for being raped? Were the Birangonas raped because they were 'free living in their behaviour, in their demeanour and appearances and hence taken advantage of? By unnamed miscreants? Or was it part of a statesanctioned ethnocide, which separately targetted the 'nation' of Bengali women and sexually brutalised them, to their very beings? The experience of 'freedom' was very different for the Birangonas. Many Bengali men, whether fathers, husbands, brothers or sons, shuddered to receive them back in their homes because they, these courageous women, were 'defiled.' In a recent publication (Nilima Ibrahim ed, Ami Birangona Bolchi) many of these freedom-fighters have accused their menfolk of cowardice, not only for having left them behind, for the rapacious soldiers to attack and consume, but also for not having stood by them after the birth of the new nation. Male cowardice works

in devious ways. What About the Godfathers?: Since the Syndicate decision, we have learnt that the campus rapists are angry at their godfathers, at those who had protected them, and given them the licence to rape. They feel that they, the smaller fry, have been named and identified whilst the bigger fry have gone

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scot-free.

### What prevented those who are lesters? From A. N. Rasheda's and enraged some Syndicate open letter addressed to women members but not all. Why? in positions of authority? Were would have a lot to answer for. they afraid? Of being humili-A. N. Rasheda, a Syndicate students (Sangbad, 6th Septem-The Structures in which ber, 1998) we know by now that, ated, of being attacked, of facmember who was also a mem-Rape Thrived: The Truth The Making and Maintaining of the

Female Divorcee Destitute by Lubna Marium

The reality in Bangladesh is that women are not only denied their share of resources, their rights are further derogated by denying them the right to better their situation through the basic opportunities such as nutrition, health and education.

T certainly seems a pity, that while theologians, jurists **L** and feminists continue to engage in an unending pedantic discussion about the ultimate fate of the divorcee women. Shahbanu, Shamshunnahar et al continue to languish in a state of poverty and destitution.

given say something about the

University authorities itself?

Well, fortunately, now that the West has decorated Dr. Sen. thus sanctioning discussions on unspeakable topics like 'welfare' and 'equity', can we please get to the basics of the problem? So, who are these female divorcee destitutes? What are the forces which work in the making of such an entity? Does the state distinguish between a destitute and a divorcee destitute?

The equal rights of the women of Bangladesh are not just safeguarded by its Constitution, it also provides that the state shall not be prevented from making special provisions in favor of women; the basic secular concern being the right of a woman to share all socioeconomic opportunities to defend herself against an inequitable social system. The crux of the matter is then the inequity inherent in our soci-

On the one hand, the Constitution and the Legislation constitute the fundamental documents which declare the 'intention of the state' to uphold equality. On the other hand, it is the socio-economic and gender thrust of the state that governs equity.

The reality in Bangladesh is that the postulates of 'market economy', founded on production for the market and profit by the proprietary classes, governs overall planning and shaping of socio-economic development strategies. On this rests the states inability to satisfy the basic needs of the people, including providing purchasing power, social, educational, health and cultural facilities to vast masses of the people; people whose only power is their own labor, a puny inefficient tool, or a tiny piece of land. This, too, in a setting wherein they have to purchase these requirements as commodities from the market. It is thus these contentious forces which give rise to deep-seated disparities in income, which are further compounded by gender discrimination against

In the social context, the above disparities in income and gender are, unfortunately, translated into the subsuming of the needs and priorities of the disadvantaged, specially that of women. Power holders further tend to discriminate on the basis of religion, customs. and strong social norms of patriarchy and female subordina-

The reality in Bangladesh is that women are not only denied their share of resources, their rights are further derogated by denying them the right to better their situation through the basic opportunities such as nutrition, health and education.

They fare just as badly in spheres of wages for labor, social services, credit procurement and asset creation. This, in spite of the fact that women devote most of their working time to intangible contributions in the care and maintenance of the household and unpaid labor at most levels of economic activity.

And even when women are involved in waged work or selfemployment their family commitments can prevent them from participating to the same extent as men. Furthermore, assertion of rights leads to a situation of conflict which often results in withdrawal of support from the family. So, here we have an emerging picture of the marginalized Bangladeshi woman, dependent on the male members of her household for her sustenance

and maintenance One other pressing manifestation of this disempowerment of women is the loss of security and fear of harassment, often up to the point of sexual abuse. Thus, as soon as girls cross puberty the first concern of the family is to hand over the burden of an 'unmarried daughter' into the hands of the first available and willing bridegroom. The situation in the upper echelons of society, one may say is not so grim.

However, disempowerment and subordination of the needs of women is equally prevalent.

The picture further sharpens. We have before us women lulled into a make-believe world of security courtesy their husband's hand-outs, unconsciously, or often consciously too, failing to make indepen-

dent provisions for themselves.

Thus, one day if they so choose, the husbands have the undeniable prerogative to throw their wives out in the streets with token provisions to tide them over the period till they find themselves another savior to cling on, too. Voila! there before you stands the female divorcee destitute with barely a stitch on her back.

You may well say, she has only herself to blame. Why for goodness sake did

she not make provisions for herself? You may even say, why the street, why not back to the parental abode? Or for that matter the State? For the first, the inability of the women to better their situation is in itself

the root cause of this problem and the need to address has al-

ready been discussed. To answer the next query, there are no laws that oblige the parents to maintain a daughter who has left their abode. The State, too, has a long list of destitutes to take care of, with the divorcee coming way down in the list. Come on, you say. someone must be responsible for this poor woman, for she certainly is not at fault.

And this is where the cycle returns to the academic discussion on her ultimate fate. Enter the theologians for, throwing constitutional provisions of equality to the winds, it has been so ordained that matters of such personal concern are to be governed by Islamic jurisprudence, that too as interpreted by a masculine understanding. Setting aside a discussion on the tenability of religious tenets dictating such matters, let us listen to this learned discourse. Therein lies

the first problem. Which discourse, or which interpretation? For there have been many, all by men of much learning but all in the context of their own present social scenario. The debate now shifts to the acceptability of traditional interpretations that dictate all Muslim Laws by commentators who lived some hundreds of years ago and also the admissibility of their reinterpretation in the changing world. Iqbal in his book The Reconstruction gives one of the most generous and rational perspectives in

this matter. He says. The closing of the door of ljtihad (analogical deduction) is pure fiction suggested partly by the crystallization of legal thought in Islam, and partly by that intellectual laziness which, especially in the period of spiritual decay, turns great thinkers into idols. The Lahore High Court reported in PLD 1960 Lah 1142 (Mst. Rashida Begum Vs. Shahan Din) as follows: 'If the interpretation of the Holy Quran by the commentators who lived thirteen or twelve hundred years ago is considered as the last word on the subject, then the whole Islamic Society will be shut up in an iron cage and not allowed to develop along with

the time. It will then cease to be a universal religion and will remain a religion confined to the time and place when and where it was revealed...

So, what then are the religious dictates concerning the destitute Muslim female divorcee? The debate revolves around whether the woman is entitled to a one-time provision or to an on-going maintenance;

and if it is be a maintenance what the period and the amount of maintenance should be.

The matter now lies at the hands of the appellate division of our judiciary, a high court decision having recently decreed that Muslim women are entitled to indefinite monthly maintenance commensurate to the earnings of their former husbands till such date that they re-marry. This is without doubt is a path-breaking decision that has been hailed widely by forward looking jurists and human rights ac-

The question is will the Supreme Court stand by this decision? Through the ages great social reforms have been achieved by far-sighted men of the jury, with their generous interpretation of legislation laid down some hundred years ago by the founding fathers of soci-

This burden of responsibility one may comment is far too great for a few shoulders to carry, however learned they may be. Here we see the role of the legislature in enacting and reforming laws to accommodate changing social attitudes and norms. Of course, the matter is not be treated lightly, for that which is 'true' and 'just should remain so through the ages, come what may.

The entire process of reforming laws should then be governed by a comprehensive procedure which encompasses public and professional debate and deliberation; finally to be set tled by consensus. This of course constitutes a long drawn out process.

Here we come back to the role of the judiciary in making judgements with the best interest of their citizenry in mind. This the people can certainly demand from the learned few whom they have seated at the highest bench of their courts. One and all, theologians and jurists included, unanimously agree that the entity of the divorcee destitute is the making of an unjust social system. All agree that the responsibility of her maintenance needs to be defined. Who and what then is it to be? Thus the country awaits with baited breathe to hear from these the learned and the knowledgeable judges what the fate of the destitute divorcees is to be. However, there is still need for a word of advice: 'Sister, you stand alone. So stand up and fight for your rights, make this world a better place for yourself, for not your father.

The author is a member of Ain-O-Shalish Kendra (ASK)

not your husband nor your son

will make it so for you.

stance, Jasimuddin Manik and a few others left the Jahangirnagar unit of the JCD and joined the BCL, soon after the Awami League government came to power. Students wings are equally critical to both positional and oppositional political parties in the interests of exercising and maintaining political control, among the student community. Since key university appointments are political ones the role of the fuling party's students group at the local level becomes one of political brokerage. This political brokerage is the coin of exchange for the granting of economic and political favours and privileges, and the concentration of political violence in the government student wing To consolidate the monopoly of armed violence, the help of bohiragoto or 'outsiders' meaning non-students, often professional criminals, is sought. These outsiders reside in halls of residence alongwith the armed cadres. The university authorities are far removed from the concerns and tribulations of the general students. and look upon the ruling students wing as indispensable to 'smooth administration.' And viewed superficially, things did seem calm and quiet and 'smooth' until explosions occurred, as they did in Jahangirnagar, in the months of August and September, this The Nature of Campus

Rapes: The Jahangirnagar University 'campus rapes' took place within a peculiar set of political and economic arrangements, backed not only by male aggression but by a monopoly of armed violence. In the following, we have tried to piece together the nature of campus rapes and the structures within which it thrived from the Committee's report, which has been highlighted in sections of the press.

First, the nature of rape: (a) Rape was committed by a rape squad which consisted wholly of BCL leaders and cadres, and in some cases 'outsiders,' (b) rape often took place at gunpoint, (c) victims were often newcomers to the university

hundredth act of sexual violence by throwing a party in his room. He is also known to be a drug-dealer. Cadre Rapists: important bit of information that one gets about cadres from the Assessment Committee's report is that there has been a major change in the position of the cadres. Earlier, there was a sharp hierarchy between leaders and cadres ('brains' and 'brawn' as it were), the cadres occupied a secondary position within the party structure and were at the command of party leaders. In recent times, party cadres have turned into leaders. Cadres were also reported to have brought prostitutes to the male halls of residence for their sexual enjoyment. The iron grill to the windows of the rooms in which cadres and

make possible a quick escape when necessary. Outsider Rapists: The cadres coercive strength depends on

'outsiders' live are sawn off to

### Life in Dhaka

### Private Tuition at Taka Two Per Minute!

The enthusiasm is driving the market crazy, the pupils

crazier, the guardians craziest, and teachers are be-

mused to watch the raindrops of mercy called money

dropping into their laps from all sides.

by A Husnain

senior student of a private English-A private English-medium school, confronted his father with the estimate for private tuition. It is Taka 1500 per month for eight sessions for one subject, at the residence of the private tutor.

It is not individual coaching (1:1 teacher-pupil ratio) but group coaching, a regular duplicate class as in the school (sometimes by the same teacher!). There are added perks or enhancements, such as remote audio coaching with audio cassette player and headphone/loudspeaker; with the live teacher taking a live class in the adjoining room.

Bangladesh is certainly booming or inflating, thanks to the government's relentless pursuit for quick development of the education sector. The enthusiasm is driving the market crazy, the pupils crazier, the guardians craziest, and teachers are bemused to watch the raindrops of mercy called money dropping into their laps from all sides. A hundred yards from our residence, during the evening, art of the road is double-parked with cars waiting to pick the students. When do these students get the time for other extra-curricular activities for balanced development of the mind and the body? Cram and vomit cannot be a noble philosophy of life!

This is not black-marketing or sale of education. It is a highly educated service to the future rulers of the country. On the average, the rate comes to around Taka two per minute for the private tuition of a school student (not college or 'varsity student). For four subjects, the guardian has to cough up around Taka 3,000 per month (for an English-medium pupil).

school/educational expenses -

and that is for one of his several

children.

addition to the

In a private English-medium school, the monthly fee is around Taka 1,000 pm for the upper classes, and 3,000 for A level grade; excluding the transport and tiffin expenses (it is not known how VAT is paid, because it is not shown in the money receipt). During the initial admission, there are a lot of mysterious surcharges which amount to several thousand taka - and all these are excluding the coercive 'donation' for 'development' of the land and buildings (not the mind). On promotion each year to the next higher class, the "admission" charges mysteriously reappear in different forms. For external

about Tk 4,000 (quoted from first-hand experience). As for the foreign books (English-medium), the "origi-

examinations, the cost of the

'signature' on the form is also

nal" editions cost between 500 to 1000 taka each, published in Europe or more to the West. The pirated or photocopies are cheaper, but still a couple of hundred taka. The second-hand Nilkhet market is doing brisk business. As for the "notes", please do not take any notice it is an institution.

Schooling in the Englishmedium is subject to "official" recognition, but the types and grades of recognitions, at home and abroad, is a complex issue which is difficult to grasp by outdated guardians. Such schools are immensely popular, keeping in view Ekusey February, for reasons not clear even to the authorities only! Lately the embargo on the teaching of English in the lower grades have been lifted — after 26 years in the wilderness — perhaps to reach the export target of five billion dollars per annum (commodities); and another couple of billion estimated to be generated out of our HR and computer software.

The estimated number of families in Bangladesh would be near about 20 million; of which about 3m live in the urban areas. How many families

go for English-medium education? One per cent of three million is 30,000. Can such a large number of families afford private English-medium schooling for their children at the rates roughly indicated above; and in addition, pay for the tutorials?

The effect of official regulation of English-medium education in the country is not very clear to the guardians and to the public at large, as there are quite a number of grey areas. If English-medium education is so popular, then the authority have to take notice of the situation and help provide educational facilities in that sector at popular and affordable rates, to match the take-home pay in the middle class families.

One guardian lamented how to get out of the trap, as he had become a new pensioner, and suddenly he had to take up some tuition jobs to meet the tuition expenses of his own son! A father cannot coach a son, according to the son (supported by the mother). So, while the son leaves home to go to his private tutor, other pupils enter his home to be coached by his father; and the money goes for the

son's tutorial fees! PS: That pupil has grown up, and is now at the university. and he has started coaching some school students to earn his pocket money.

We have built up a practical social movement in the education sector. The merits and demerits of the prevailing educational environment is left to the experts on Education.