#### Law and Our Rights

## Constitutions: Points to Ponder

by Manzoor Hasan

Changes in the constitution of any country are merely a reflection of the dynamic nature of the society of which it is an integral part. Rather than being a moribund document, "a museum piece," it is important that a constitution grows over a period of time. The beauty of unwritten constitutions, like that of the United Kingdom, is that "it is important that a constitution grows over a period of time. The beauty of unwritten constitutions, like that of the United Kingdom, is that "it has evolved over the centuries with but few sudden or dramatic changes, and a high degree of historical continuity has been maintained as the constitution has been brought up to date."

HE first written constitution of the world was that of the United States of America's and the second was Poland's of 3rd May 1791; the third was France's of 3rd September 1791. The oldest constitution is also that of America's and the second oldest written constitution still in existence is Norway's dating from 1814. There are now some 160 national constitutions. nearly two-thirds of which have been adopted or revised since 1970. Only fourteen predate World War II.

The comparatively recent Constitution of Bangladesh is divided into eleven parts containing 153 Articles. The Preambles declare that Bangladesh is a sovereign unitary Republic and the guiding principles would be that of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism. In the space of twenty-five years the written constitution of Bangladesh has gone through thirteen amendments, and the latest, introducing the nonparty caretaker government on the dissolution of parliament, could be considered to be one of the innovative amendments. Changes in the constitution of any country are merely a reflection of the dynamic nature of the society of which it is an integral part. Rather than being a moribund document, "a museum piece," it is important that a constitution grows over a period of time. The beauty of unwritten constitutions, like that of the United Kingdom, is that "it is important that a constitution grows over a period of time. The beauty of unwritten constitutions, like that of the United Kingdom, is that "it has evolved over the centuries with but few sudden or dramatic changes. and a high degree of historical continuity has been maintained as the constitution has been

brought up to date." The longevity and stability of the United States' Constitution does not mean that the process of framing the Constitution of 1787 was an easy matter and, as Alexander Hamilton put it, "a torrent of angry and malignant passions" were let loose in the "great national discussion." Thomas Jefferson referred to the group in Philadel-

phia as "an assembly mode,

demigods," who put together the American Constitution in the summer of 1787, "unquestionably the wisest every yet pre-sented to man." To John Adams the Constitution was, "if not the greatest exertion of human understanding.... the greatest single effort of national deliberation that the world has ever seen." James Madison, who was one of the authors of the Constitution, thought "fellow Americans must perceive in the Constitution a finger of that almighty hand which has been so frequently extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution." A century later William Gladstone, the English statesman, asserted that the American Constitution "was the most wonderful work ever

brain and purpose of man." But contrary to the expectation that the new constitution was "the greatest exertion of human understanding" some fellow Americans denounced the Constitution as "a triple headed monster, as deep and wicked a conspiracy as ever was invented in the darkest ages against the liberties of a free people." Rather than uniting the nation the Constitution actually became a divisive force and it was often ratified in the states by the narrowest of margins due to the debate between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists.

The other important aspect

to bear in mind in relation to

struck off at a given time by the

the American Constitution of 1787 is the fact that it was the end product of a process which had begun nearly twenty-five years earlier with the Stamp Act and other taxes imposed by the British Parliament on the colonies. 'Taxation without Representation' triggered off the American Revolution and then the struggle between Americans centred on the question who would rule at home?' The 'politics of liberty' under the Articles of Confederation was reversed by the Constitution of 1787. It is interesting to note that within such a short interval the fruits of the revolution turned sour and America was a sharply divided nation. On the one hand the critics of the 1787

Constitution saw very little

of Philadelphia and the tyranny of George III" and on the other hand the revolution put men in control "without reading, experience, or principle.... who were only fit to patch a shoe ....

Another very recent example of a written constitution is that of the 1997 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand. The 1997 Constitution has made provisions for an elected civil society Senate whereas previously it was a creature of the government. The 1997 Constitution envisages that the majority of senators will be representatives of civil society representing a cross section of diverse national interests rather than narrower political, administrative, or business interests. The 1997 Constitution has embodied an important role for the Senate in appointing nominees to the new independent agencies mandated by the Constitution to promote transparency and accountability. These agencies include the Constitution Court. the National Counter Corruption Commission, the Election Commission, Ombudsmen, the National Human Rights Commission, and the State Audit Commission

has for the first time enshrined civic involvement as both state policy and a civic right. Article 76 stipulates that the government must encourage public participation as a matter of policy. Article 60 reinforces Article 76 and states: "A person shall have the right to participate in the decision-making process of State officials in the performance of an administrative act which affects or may af fect his or her rights and liberties, as provided by law." In terms of resource management the Thai Constitution has made significant public participation an essential requirement and it is not possible for bureaucrats to implement government or state-enterprise projects or grant concessions. The Constitution takes it even further and under Articles 46 and 290 communities and local governments have been given a right to participate in the management, maintenance, preservation and exploitation of natdifference between "the lyranmy fural resources and the envi-

Bangladeshi people.

The new Thai Constitution

ronment. Article 59 requires public hearings for any project or activity that may affect the quality of the environment, the quality of life, or any other interests of an individual or a

community.

The new Thai Constitution has also incorporated certain mechanisms to promote accountability and transparency. Replacing the Counter Corruption Commission (CCC) an independent agency, National CCC, with broad powers of investigation has been established. The NCCC has the power to overrule the attorney general and initiate prosecution. An elaborate process has been chalked out for the appointment of Commission members in order to eliminate any political interference. The NCCC has been given the power to investigate accumulation of 'unusual wealth.' The Thai courts will presume any significant increase in disposal income or assets as outcome of corrupt activities. It is then up the individual to discharge the onus of proof that the wealth was legally obtained. Article 293 will allow citizens and the media to review for themselves the assets of senior politicians, an important safeguard

The Constitution of Bangladesh, which came into operation on 16th December 1972, is as good as any other constitution. Given the dy namic nature of our society it has gone through a number o changes, as has been the case with many such documents and it is also expected that it will go through further refinement in the future, with the betterment of people's welfare in mind. But in the final analy sis what is important is that the Constitution would bring about within our society a balance between change and stability, tolerance and competition, oppor tunity and meritocracy. In order to make the Constitution bear fruit we, as citizens of this republic, need to foster within ourselves virtues rather than vices, and that presently seems to be wanting.

The writer a Barrister at law is Executive Director of Transparency International Bangladeshe

husband my loving wifely care.

On another occasion, I was

### Accountability of NGOs: A View from the South

by Alejandro Bendana

TS there a danger that the mine campaign, and others I modeled after it, will distract from the larger challenge posed by impoverishment, op-pression and violence? Worse still, can such single-issue campaigns, with predominant NGO makeup, undermine national socio-political movements struggling for structural change? Are these campaigns and the NGOs competing for the adherence of local leaders and the activist sectors in our communities, non-governmental or social organizations?

NGOs, North and South, tend to be more interested in projects than in movements, more in "problems" than in structural conditions that create the problems, including violence and light weapon proliferation. In the end there may be a tendency to reduce practical activity to lobbying within a framework of collaboration with donors and government agencies: a preference for non-confrontational politics. Again an easier proposition in the North. than in the South, and among

sell but this would be no reason. at least on the part of some of the organizers, to leave fundamental questions unmentioned and unanswered; indeed to feel that such questions are redundant or anachronistic. From the standpoint of the North and South, NGOs as well as governments and social movements, it is critical that objectives become explicitly linked to the overall foreign policy, demilitarization and peace-building agenda. Otherwise winning individual cases or battles may ultimately prove detrimental to winning the broader argument and war. Otherwise, we will witness the sickening phenomena of NGOs in the South being created and competing to present proposals congenial to the current wave of moral concern in the North, while claiming to

speak for their constituencies. NGO proliferation and competition, in turn, further fragments communities and leaves us all less able to see the broad picture, not to mention unite visions of what must be done in systemic fashion. The real

reaction than consciousness sustaining, particularly when such developments and interests are not explicitly linked to history and to other related manifestations of institution-

alized violence and oppression. If and when we are "successful", are we providing a limited service to narrow groups of communities in a handful of countries? And to whom and to what are we really accountable? To an unstated moral cause, to the donors or to the local people? By our action at the ground level do we not risk upsetting or taking over local initiatives and social support programs for war victims out of the hands of a community and local government becoming accountable to nonelected, overseas officials?

Here as elsewhere NGOs and international campaigns run the risk of depoliticizing sectors of the population which includes co-option of potential local leader and sources of funding. Do we explain that the same governments providing funds for mine action are also

weaponry. Many aspects of the campaign are to be applauded. but other elements may merit more political discussion. Many of us harbor doubts whether in some of our societies arms recollections, for example, is workable and indeed desirable. NGOs and social sectors would become divided between North and South, and amidst them. And once more we just may be dealing with symptoms and not causes, deflecting attention from the real problems related to random killings: impunity, judiciary corruption, poverty, joblessness. And of course the arms trade itself. There are the standard argument, but these must be contextualized.

In many countries, the "Kalashnikov culture" however has move to do with culture and socioeconomic exclusion than with Kalashnikovs. One also becomes suspicious upon wit-nessing, in Central America for example, how the wealthy elites and the private security forces are among the strongest supporters of full fledged attacks

NGO-governmental alliances can be double-edged weapons and end up undermining progressive local initiatives. But here the ICBL has given us motive for questioning the usual knee-jerk "anti-statism" so often practiced by NGOs (not to mention the right).

the South in the North. How has the campaign in each country related to domestic social movements? Do the NGOs involved really represent social sectors? Who are we speaking

In the South, and perhaps elsewhere, an "apolitical" position tends to depoliticize and demobilize the oppressed. Not recognizing the importance of politics in defining struggles means that neoliberalism goes uncontested and the formulation of alternatives is hindered. Mines may be removed but people's lives, including those of survivors, remain essentially unchanged. The responsibility is a shared one, processes and "projects" that are not defined by the most affected according to their own needs opens a vacuum for the acceptance of external agendas.

In the North and South we witness the need for pushing for an integrated approach to social change. In the North this would mean not allowing mine policy or defense policy for that matter be seen as separate from or additional to mainstream foreign and domestic policy determination. The integrated agenda ranging from human rights to antimilitarism and development should be pursued consistently across the board. although this may entail sacrifice to traditional segmented domains and decision making witnessed in both governments

Locally or globally it is dangerous to focus organization on a narrow set of objectives or on a single campaign issue. A single concern may be an easier

question is how NGOs for the mine campaign) can feed into and contribute to social organi-

zation for social change. It is understandable that NGOs would argue that the need to be effective militates against taking up other issues outside their particular agenda. One can argue endlessly about pragmatism, but poor people on the ground in the South are not interested in argument. They want change. Failure to define "success" in a broader context or failure to see what "success" in one field can do to other aspects of policy or other peoples can end up dividing people and organizations that need to work together, nationally and internationally. One need only examine the experience of trade policy debates unrelated to development and investment liberalization and structural adjustment policies, let alone globalized imperialism. We all must understand each other's concerns. And each community must determine its own re-

quirements.

In terms of strategy, we must also consider that a focus on winning concessions from government on specific or easy points at issue may be a way of letting the government off the hook with regard to regressive aspects of their foreign and domestic policies. The crux of the matter may lie, from the North standpoint, with educating the public so as to mobilize public opinion. But single-issue campaigns (refugees, food, etc.) may do more mobilizing than education, more emergency relief than development, more CNN the ones promoting equal violence in the form of structural adjustment policies?

Of course, there is no "fasttrack" to arrive at the necessary social and institutional changes. But segmenting may be too easy. It may be more evasion than confrontation. Segmentation, organizational and analytical, is also welcomed and

promoted by dominant neoliberal thinking. Dealing with a single problem, often in collaboration with governments and big business may be the sure way to avoid structural issues. Which raises another question are NGOs that are excessively dependent on governmental funding really non-governmen-NGO-governmental al-

liances can be double-edged weapons and end up undermining progressive local initiatives. But here the ICBL has given us motive for questioning the usual knee-jerk "antistatism" so often practiced by NGOs (not to mention the right). It reminds us that governments cannot be left off the hook. We cannot and should not separate government from their elementary obligations in regard to demining as part of its social responsibility. Equally unacceptable is the US notion, shared in other quarters, that the "private sector" should take up the burden — a fine example of neoliberal thinking shifting of "privatizing" public responsibilities, including the histori-

Learning from the Past The next sexy global campaign deals with light

on the small-arms trade, which they automatically link to delinquency and subversion. The counter-insurgency potential of such campaigns gives ample ground for reflection and discussion. Just as we recognize that weapons can be acquired for legitimate and illegitimate "national security" reasons, we must also keep in mind that they may also be acquired for the personal and collective defense of human rights. Along with governments and armies. some of the demanding groups may have links with organized crime; some may not. Let us not be so quick to make the same moral judgement and prescriptions on the demand side than we do on the supply side.

All of us have much to learn, perhaps unlearn too, from what the ICBL has taught us about policymaking and policy-influencing. For what it reveals about the power of the North not only to create many of the problems in the South, and then go about pretending to come to the South's rescue — all without the Sough. And for the pretension of many of us in the South that we stand alone and non-understood in our strugtreament to the econt

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the Centro de Estudios Internacionales in Managua. He was a former Ambassador to the United Nations and is the author of several books and articles on International Relations. He is also the coordinator of the International Movement for a Just World's Friends Group in Nicaragua.

#### Teething Pains of an "Early Period" Female Lawyer by Sigma Huda

was enrolled in the year 1970. When I joined the bar, I came across two other lady lawyers in the bar both of whom are no longer in the world - Late Kamrun Nahar Laily and Ayesha Khatoon. Both were at the age I am now. One used to wear a black coat over white sari while the other wrapped a black shawl over white sari. One later on became a Notary Public but died in a sorry state.

When I began my practice I soon found that all my desire to dress in pin striped trousers. white shirt and black jacket was a far cry from reality. The Bar was a conservative area and being very young I felt that to be accepted I shall have to shelve my wishes and dress more discreetly and so I took my

Amendments

Amendment

3rd Amendmen

5th Amendment

6th Amendment

7th Amendment

8th Amendment

Amendment

Amendment

Amendment

Amendment

11th

9th Amendment | 11th July,

4th Amendment | 25th

1st Amendment

15th July,

September

November.

January.

6th April.

10th July.

November,

9th June,

23rd June.

10th

August.

September.

28th

1996

March,

1979

10th

22nd

national dress — the sari!

However when I came to the Supreme Court (High Court Division) in 1972 I found that I was almost the only female walking the court corridors in a black gown. When I joined the Supreme Court (the then High Court) Bar in 1972, the euphoria of our liberation was very much prevalent making a lawyer enthusiastic in her approach to litigation. The Collaborators Order, Abandoned Properties Order, National Order all created in 1972 provided the vigilant lawyer with many briefs, as naturally enough. there were many slips where authorities overstepped the limits of law and encroached into the privacy of individuals thereby violating the fundamental rights of the

genocide, crime against

humanity and war crimes

committed in the liberation

Inclusion of emergency

provision, suspension of

fundamental rights and

To give effect to the boundary-

line treaty between Bangladesh

One party dictatorial system

was substituted for a

responsible parliamentary

Legalising all acts done by the

To make way for the Vice-

President to be a candidate in

Legalising all acts done by the

Setting up six permanent

Benches of the High Court

Division and making 'Islam'

Direct election of the President

and the Vice-President

Period for reservation of 30

women members seats in the

parliament was extended for 10

Legalising the appointment of

Shahabuddin Ahmed, Chief

Justice of Bangladesh, as Vice

President of Bangladesh and

his all activities as the Acting

President and then the return

to his previous position of the

Provision for Caretaker

the

Chief Justice of Bangladesh.

Reintroducing

Government.

parliamentary system.

first Military Authority

2nd Military Authority.

president election.

the state religion.

simultaneously.

preventive detention.

war of 1971

Coming back to the main theme of my topic, and as I was saying, on my joining the legal profession and the Bar Associations of Dhaka as well as the Supreme Court, I soon found myself the centre of curiosity. Not only the clients would ogle and stare but also the lawyers would treat me as a specimen from outer space. Some would be condescending while many would be sympathetic but there were also other lawyers who would make snide remarks about my joining the profession. However on the whole I was also made to feel 'protected' as majority of the lawyers accepted me and my presence in their midst. I, of course, had visions of myself making tremendous waves in the mundane court life by making glorious submissions on complicated legal issues. On the contrary, I found myself bogged down by the strict discipline and standards set by Amendments of the Constitution precedents where seniors would fulfill the role dreamt by me. I had to bide my time. Needless to of Bangladesh say this teaching of respecting seniority in the Bar has paid off and I am greatly indebted to the members of the Bar who made Summary of Substance me feel at home and took me to To make way for prosecution of

their hearts.

However all was not smooth sailing. While I rode the crest of popularity on account of there being no other young lady lawyer at that time I still felt the pinch of being a very marginal minority. I stood for elections to the Bar Association and the National Lawyers Association (founded by late Ahmad Sobhan, Senior Advocate) and won by huge margins but yet there were insurmountable barriers that I had to cross. Any demand for a separate toilet for ladies or a rest room (both of which are now created though insufficient for the increasing number of lady lawyers) would be met with subtle remarks of 'gender equity'. There was an advocates lounge for Senior Advocates next to court room no. 13 which had a private toilet facility and I was able to enjoy the premises on account of being a female lawyer in need of such premises to relax in. The then Chief Justice, too, had allowed access to his rest room, too, and the judges library in case of emergency and need.

increasing young lady lawyers wearing even dresses to Court, it makes me feel the pain of every step taken by me these long arduous years in order to pave the way for our young sisters in profession. It also warms my heart to see our women lawyers holding briefs on their own. I remember an occasion when the then late President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman first came to the Supreme Court premises and during tea asked me whether by joining the legal profession am I not denying my

When I see around me ever

appearing before a court, when the judge asked me if I had a senior and if I was married. The first question understandable but not the second. I felt it was an intrusion into my privacy and posed because I was a female. Incidentally this question was not put to the other young male lawyers present in the court. My reaction was not what he expected to hear. My satisfaction was short lived as the court was livid with anger. Senior member of the Bar came to my rescue. 1975 was the year of the woman. The government eager to show to the world that there were women in the legal profession chose me to be their showpiece. Photographs of me in various poses in the court rooms was taken by the government and sent to the relevant authorities. I felt much pride at being so chosen. In 1979 I saw quite a number of ladies dressed in black coats. found they were lawyers. discussed with them the possibility of forming a women lawyers' association to assist the women to know the law, to provide legal assistance to the oppressed women, to act as a buffer to other women organisations and to enhance the status and dignity of women lawyers by providing them a platform to build up their profession. Today the Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Ainjibi Samity (Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association) is 19 years old with a lot of achievements recorded in their favour — they are responsible for recovering trafficked women, filing wril applications for the violation

of the fundamental rights of women etc. Today we are celebrating 25 years of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and I have been traversing the corridors of the Courts for long 28 years. Though I am an accepted member of the Bar, was an elected member of the Bar Council and on the Boards of many committees both at government and nongovernmental level yet I still have not been blessed with being able to make submission before a lady justice in the High Court. I am now looking forward to such a day.

The writer is an advocate of Bangladesh Supreme Court. Courtesy: Souvenir published to mark the silver jubilee of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh (1998)

CORRECTION In the list of members of Drafting Committee of Bangladesh Constitution published on Nov 4, one member's name should read as 'Dewan Abul Abbas' instead of 'Dewan

Abdul Abbas'.

# Travails of Bonded Labour System

by Uma Joshi

ROM time to time the problem of bonded labour in In-L dia comes into focus through stories of slavery under the bonded labour system published in newspapers with tales of woes from unfortunate persons who somehow manage to escape from the clutches of their masters. And yet, the system goes on with impunity in some states.

What, however, is worse is that the apathetic attitude of the authorities towards the evil has not evoked any revulsion against or condemnation of the pernicious practice by the Indian psyche. Our culture of toleration has

been stretched too far after the country attained independence.

While a suitable methodology for identification of bonded labour has not been evolved, a debate is still continuing on whether the short term and seasonal bondage should also be covered under the definition of bonded labour.

Associated with the issue of

identification and release of bonded labour is the question of rehabilitation which is both physical and psychological. Physical rehabilitation involved reassurance that after release from bondage, the existing debt will not regulate their destiny any longer.

The maximum number of selected beneficiaries have so far been rehabilitated on landbased schemes as most of the re-

farmers and land-owners have come forward to declare themselves as bonded labour with a view to appropriate the benefits in collusion with the authori-

Some labourers work under exploitation in agriculture, handloom, weaving, leather industry and as contract/migrant labourers. Since there were doubts whether they could be called bonded labour, the issue was settled by the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Amendment Act of 1985 in which it was clarified that contract workers and inter-state migrant workers, if they fulfilled the conditions laid down in the act, they have to be considered as bonded labour.

ing to figures available with the union ministry of labour, a total of 2.95 lakh bonded labourers were released by March 31, 1997. However, it is not certain if all of them were actually released from bondage and if formal release certificates have been issued in favour of all of

them. The poignant canvas of the picture is that we are still groping in the dark even with regard to the real magnitude of the problem. Bihar is said to have the largest number of five lakh bonded labourers, followed by Rajasthan, while the figure for southern states is reported to be around 50,000.

Even as there is a scheme for rehabilitation of victims with

The bonded labour system essentially represents the relationship between a creditor and a debtor, the latter agreeing to mortgage his/her services or the services of any or all members of the family for a specified or unspecified period. Such a relationship is built on an agreement of unequal terms. Denial of wage or payment of wage less than the minimum wage is the first consequence of this unequal exchange relationship.

At what cost, perhaps nobody knows. But it is the poor who have borne the brunt of it all. Surely, the administration has to recognise that it does not help to ostrich like bury its head in the sand and ignore the prevalence of bonded labour. for it is not its existence that is a slur on it, but its failure to eradicate it. Moreover, not taking the necessary steps for wiping out the blot is surely a

obligation for all of us. As is well-known, bonded labour is prohibited under Article 23 of the Constitution. This article clearly prohibits "traffic in human beings and...other similar forms of forced labour" practised by anyone.

breach of the constitutional

Thus, there could have been no more solemn and effective prohibition than the one enacted in the Constitution as far back as January 26, 1950.

Parliament enacted in 1976 the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act providing for the abolition of the system with a view to prevent the economic and physical exploitation of the weaker sections of the people. It is a sad commentary that

the pernicious practice of bonded labour has not yet been totally eradicated from the national scene even after 22 years of existence of the law prohibiting it. It continues to disfigure the social and economic life of the country at certain places.

leased labour was working on land prior to release.

The responsibility for implementing provisions of the law is of the district magistrate and such of his subordinates as may be specified by him. Section 13 of the act provides for the constitution of vigilance committee at the district and subdivisional levels. These committees are to be composed of officials and non-officials for identification and rehabilitation of bonded labour.

An official survey shows that these committees have, by and large, not been constituted and even in cases where they are in existence, they never meet regularly or take any firm decision for implementation. The revenue and police authorities collude with the landlords and contractors for earning some extra money for them-

To thwart the provisions of law, fake lists of bonded labour have become a regular racket in Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Ironically enough, the Supreme Court was recently informed that there were only six bonded labourers in Bihar. The judges had to express shock at the submission which they felt was a misrepresentation of facts and no reasonable person could believe such a story.

Another curious phenomenon is that even rich

As for the magnitude of slavery involved in the bonded labour system, the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) had estimated its size at

According to some voluntary organisations, notably the National Labour Institute and the Gandhi Peace Foundation, their number is around 26 lakh. Orissa accounts for 3.5 lakh, Tamil Nadu 2.5 lakh, Andhra Pradesh 3.25 lakh and Uttar Pradesh 5.5 lakh. Kerala, West Bengal and Assam are among those states where no bonded

labourer has been identified. The bonded labour system essentially represents the relationship between a creditor and a debtor, the latter agreeing to mortgage his/her services or the services of any or all members of the family for a specified or unspecified period. Such a relationship is built on an agreement of unequal terms. Denial of wage or payment of wage less than the minimum wage is the first consequence of this un-

equal exchange relationship. The bonded labourer is also denied freedom of movement in any part of the territory of India, nor can he/she seek alternative avenues of employment to earn a reasonable wage.

The National Human Rights Commission has asked state governments to take speedy and definite steps for the elimination of bonded labour. Accordthe help of some cash payment, the utter absence of an effective machinery to oversee its disbursement has denied even this meagre assistance to those who have been liberated from serf-

Also, the time lag between their release and rehabilitation has always been too much with no subsistence allowance for the intervening period. Hence, the freed bonded labourer was in many cases forced to roll back into bondage. The land given to them was generally of poor quality and in the majority of cases, it was unirrigated

and unsuitable for cultivation. A survey on all aspects of the social evil needs to be undertaken before setting up a target for the release of all bonded labourers in the country. Unless this is done and the target period set, the malaise will go on lingering in one form or the

other.

There is also a strong case for setting up a national commission on bonded labour which should thoroughly investigate the problem and work for the rehabilitation of affected labourers. The government should also form a 'social action group' consisting of various social and voluntary organisations to coordinate its work and fight for the amelioration of the unfortunate persons in slavery. — APB/PTI Feature

The writer is a psychologist.

Courtesy: Md Abdul Halim