

Clearing Rots before Ensuring Rights

by Mir A Zaman

In a country like ours where the majority of the population are extremely poor, where survival is often mistaken for living, where dogs, cats and street children together sift through garbage for something to eat, insurance of child's rights is just another distant dream. We cannot simply afford to talk about the rights of the children, when we cannot ensure the rights of an individual.

THE boy ran across the road, ignoring the vehicles that sped along. One car screeched to a halt and the driver heaved a sigh of relief. A fatal accident had narrowly been averted. The boy appeared to be no more than five. We would not let loose our kids on the busy streets of the capital. But his parents did. Maybe, he was an orphan. Maybe, he had nobody to tell him he should not cross the road like that. Maybe. The on-lookers were happy that there hadn't been an accident. Little did they care that the boy might do the same thing again and luck might desert him next time.

Another day, another time and another place. A little girl, hardly two years of age, was almost run down by a car. She suddenly took a sprint across the road. The driver pressed down the brake as hard as possible but the car hit the girl anyway. But fortunately, apart from a few cuts and bruises, there was no serious damage. The shock was enough to leave her and the others around dumb-founded. But what followed was more stupefying. The girl's father came out of nowhere, dragged her on to her feet and started beating her mercilessly. In his violent rage, he must have forgot that he was about to lose his daughter for his own fault. He shouldn't have let the girl alone on the busy street in the first place. The on-lookers were only happy that the girl was alive and in the safe hands of her parent. But how safe the hands that let her alone on the busy streets are?

Cruel, heartless and so on, some termed the girl's father but they knew what the man did was out of frustration. He was angry not to his daughter. He was angry at life, angry at what it has to offer for poor people like him. Fight, fight and fight, just to earn living for the family. It takes so much out of him that he doesn't even have the time to pay attention to the tiny tot. Everyone knew that the

man would later regret, perhaps cry, for being so cruel to her. Like any parent, the man certainly wishes the best things in life for his daughter. When an expensive car races by, with the happy face of a school girl in the company of an affluent father framed in the side screen, the man surely heaves a sigh. He would never be able to give his daughter such a secured life.

The man is just another face in the familiar lot. In this land of the poor, food and clothes are the basic needs. There are lots of open spaces to spend the night on. Sleep for a few hours under the open sky is enough. Throughout the day, the fight is on for something to eat. Healthcare and education, they couldn't care much about. Majority of the country's population, more than 80 per cent, fight everyday for survival. Two meals a day is part of a sweet dream for many. In the land of foodless, shelterless mass, children's rights seem just another topic in academic discussion.

Education and healthcare "is not for my children," said Monu Mian of Gazipur, when asked if he ever thought of sending his three sons to school. "We are poor. Education is for rich people, not for us."

Mian used to be a hand for hire. Extreme hard work over the years has taken its toll. Tuberculosis has been diagnosed. He can't work anymore. "They take care of me, now," he says. His wife works as a maid. The eldest of their three sons has followed in his father's steps. Their earnings together were not enough. So when a 'generous' family wanted their second son to help them in domestic chores, the parents were more than grateful. Concerns that their little boy, asked about seven, might be asked to do heavy household works like washing and mopping the floors, took a back seat. They were relieved. At least the boy would not starve.

When the primary concern for people like Monu Mian is

ensuring food and clothes for the family, Monu Mian's children and many others don't even dream of education and health care. The moment they are able to walk and do things on their own, they are out there on the streets, exponents in the economics of existence. Poor parents have little choice. Poverty has their hands tied. Resignation to fate is complete.

The children of these hapless and helpless parents, on the other hand, have accepted what life has to offer for them. Those who have found a working place—at a restaurant, at an automobile garage or at a house to do domestic chores—deem themselves fortunate; at least they have a place to stay, two decent meals a day and even some used clothes once in a while. Despite the 'professional hazards' like a slap or even severe beating from the employer for not 'delivering', inadequate care for even minimum medical needs, etc., life is 'secured' for these child workers. But for those who don't have a 'permanent' job, life is more difficult a proposition. They do whatever job they get. Most of them take to begging; although uncertain, it requires less exertion. Others sell newspapers, cigarettes, cheap chocolates, flowers, even water at parks, malls and on streetsides. Stop your car at a traffic light, they will rush to you. "Sir, please take some flowers... sir, do you need cigarette?... sir, please buy two chocolates from me, I haven't eaten anything since morning... need newspapers, Janakantha, Janakantha, Inqilab... Inqilab... Ittefaq..."

They are not welcome by fellow 'professionals'. The adults regard them as an impediment to 'good income'. Last month, some registered porters at the Kamalapur Railway Station bundled some 40 children into a wagon on a Mymensingh-bound local train. These children were eating into their daily income.

More often than not we fail to differentiate between rites

and rights and thus, we restrict our efforts towards ensuring the child's rights to some rituals. We hold rallies, arrange seminar and symposia to observe the Child's Rights Week every year, but then for the rest of the year conveniently become indifferent. Whenever there is an incident of a child abuse, we raise storm in the cup and then simply forget it.

"States Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognised in the convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States Parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resource and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation," says Article 4 of the UN convention on child's rights. In a country like ours where the majority of the population are extremely poor, where survival is often mistaken for living, where dogs, cats and street children together sift through garbage for something to eat, insurance of child's rights is just another distant dream. We cannot simply afford to talk about the rights of the children, when we cannot ensure the rights of an individual.

The focus should not only be on one particular aspect of human rights, at least not in the context of a poor nation like ours; 'appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures' should be directed towards eradication of poverty. When the adults have jobs to earn living for the family, our children won't have to come outdoors to work. Otherwise, the child's rights will only be applicable to the children of the solvent class and poor parents would only regret their inability to protect their child from 'economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous... to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

Will Quebec Province Break Away from Canada?

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

The election victory of the separatist party in Quebec has introduced an element of political distrust as Canada enters into the 21st century.

THE voters in the French-speaking Quebec province (7.4 million people) in Canada have re-elected on 1st December the separatist leader Mr. Lucien Bouchard as the Premier and sent a strong message that they were not yet prepared to abandon the option of breaking away from the rest of Canada. The Liberal Party leader and anti-separatist Mr. Jean Charest lost the election. Mr. Bouchard has pledged to hold another referendum on separation as soon as "the winning conditions" would exist for the separatists in Quebec.

The people in Quebec nurtured the dream of its independence for a long time. It was re-activated when French President Charles de Gaulle during his visit to the province raised a French toast. Thereafter the push for independence was acted upon through referendums but the separatists lost previous two referendums on the issue in 1980 and 1995. The last one was lost with a narrow margin.

Only seven weeks ago when the election was called, it was predicted that Mr. Charest would win the election and the issue of separation would be put

to an end. During the election campaign, Mr. Charest could not make any headway with his policies with the electorate and he made a great political error in advocating tough spending cuts to the budget which was unpopular with the electorate. Gradually he slipped behind Mr. Bouchard. The victory result for Mr. Bouchard was far smaller than the polls predicted. In fact anti-separatist Liberal Party achieved a slim majority of the overall vote, indicating uncertainty about separatism but the separatists lost previous two referendums on the issue in 1980 and 1995. The last one was lost with a narrow margin.

It is interesting that although the voters supported Mr. Bouchard, they do not want separation from Canada. One voter was heard saying "I voted for Bouchard... I do not want Quebec to separate. I am keeping my Canadian passport. I want to work for the UN, I want to be Canadian." This means that those who voted for Mr. Bouchard were not necessarily the supporters of separatism. Many voters supported Mr. Bouchard not because he wanted to make Quebec a separate country but because he was perceived as a better economic manager and a smart campaigner compared to his political opponent Mr. Charest.

The election result demonstrated that the majority of the people in Quebec do not want another referendum just yet. What they want is a better deal

for Quebec within Canada. The Canadian Federal government in Ottawa will be relieved, the Liberal Party did well enough to dampen Mr. Bouchard of having a referendum immediately. The "winning condition" for the referendum appears to be far away. Mr. Bouchard may use the separation issue as a leverage to win more financial concessions from Ottawa. This tactic may not be successful as the English-speaking Canada seems to be tired of Quebec's flirtation with separation.

The result provides a message that the people of Quebec do not want to separate from Canada but they kept the option available. Political analysts believe that in doing so, the Quebecois can and may use the threat of separation to their own advantage. However, the election victory of the separatist party in Quebec has introduced an element of political distrust as Canada enters into the 21st century. It appears that the people of Canada are likely to be the losers in maintaining this political uncertainty.

The writer is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the United Nations in Europe, Geneva.

ANC General Proves Truth Can Bring Reconciliation

South Africa's Truth and reconciliation Commission found that torture and executions occurred in camps run by the African National Congress from 1979 to 1989. Gemini News Service reports on the story of one victim. Timothy Seremane, and the man who ordered his execution, Andrew Masondo. Charlene Smith writes from Johannesburg.

SOUTH African General Andrew Masondo is white-haired and elderly. He blinks through thick glasses, thanks to the torturers on Robben Island. He still mourns a daughter-in-law blown up by a bomb placed by apartheid's agents. But some say he was one of the worst torturers of the African National Congress.

Victims rarely allow their actions to be examined along with those of the vanquished. Even though the ANC disappointed many when it tried to block parties of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, setting up the commission to investigate atrocities perpetrated by all sides in the South African struggle was itself a big step.

The report accused almost every South African political party of gross human rights violations during the apartheid years—the ANC included, particularly for torture at its Quatro 'rehabilitation' camp in Angola between 1979 and 1989. Atrocities at Quatro included guards pouring boiling water onto a man's head until it burst open like a tomato; interrogators dripping burning plastic onto the backs of victims; women repeatedly gangraped; others left to decay in their own urine and faeces in tiny cells.

"Even today we live in fear," says one former Quatro inmate who bears the scars of his beatings. "Since 1990, 57 former Mooko inmates of the ANC security arm have been assassinated in South Africa and seven former Quatro inmates—who are being killed because of what they know about those who are in power now. Quatro left a dark shadow that has not retreated."

Rather than hiding behind the cloak of the political organisation, government and hopes of a blanket amnesty, Masondo—then a commander at Quatro and now head of personnel for the SA National Defence Force—stepped forward before the commission and denied torture allegations made against him by former Quatro inmates.

But one allegation that continues to dog Masondo comes from a former top ANC leader, Joe Seremane. His brother Timothy was one of the most promising young ANC recruits in the late 1970s and was executed at Quatro.

In 1976, after the June 16 student uprising, 24-year-old Timothy Seremane went into exile. He received military training and rapidly rose through the ranks, becoming commander of the ANC's three most important camps, Quibaxe, Fadzura and Panga.

In 1980, with Zimbabwean independence, ANC guerrillas in the Luthuli, June 16 and Mondaca detachments were summoned back to Angola. They refused, citing the appalling con-



Truth and reconciliation

The 3,500-page final report of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission called apartheid a crime against humanity that legitimised gross atrocities

Reconciliation is going to be painful
Desmond Tutu

Key findings:
• P.W. Botha: responsible for gross violations of human rights
• Mangosuthu Buthe: incited supporters to commit violence
• Winnie Madikizela-Mandela: implicated in murders and kidnappings committed by her bodyguards
• ANC: used torture in camps in Angola and Tanzania
• Business: benefited from apartheid

Key recommendations:
• help the poor through a wealth tax or surcharge on corporate profits
• convene a national summit of reconciliation
• reduce legislation controlling the media
• churches should organise ceremonies for perpetrators to acknowledge their crimes
• judiciary should establish compensation fund for serious crime victims

First hearings: 15 April 1996
15 commissioners
20,000 statements taken
Final report issued: 29 October 1998

ditions in Angolan camps. The June 16 detachment was headed by William Mashotana, Seremane's childhood friend. Seremane was among those who supported Mashotana's protest against camp conditions.

Today, the ANC leaders acknowledge the poor conditions. "We had money for food, but Angola was in the throes of a civil war," says Masondo. "It had gone for us to buy 'Sizwe' Mthembu, Quatro's first commander at the age of 19, told the commission: 'The conditions were extreme, inhuman because of deprivation. It was difficult eating rice and beans every day and just water. You had to be made of special fibre, most of us were affected and are still affected.'"

But overall, the ANC leadership was caught off guard by the discontent, and reacted negatively to its dissatisfied cadres. At the time it was a fundamentally undemocratic organisation led by ageing men. It had held its last membership conference in 1969. The thousands of youth who left South Africa after the student uprising in 1976 wanted another conference and open elections.

The discontent, said the leadership, proved there was a spy ring intent on ousting the leadership and replacing it with South African security police spies. The ANC's security arm—trained by East Germany's Stasi and known as 'the Panbelaers'—began a witchhunt. Hundreds were detained and tortured. At one stage half the people at its Quibaxe camp in An-

gola were suspected of being SA security branch informers.

"We had people who committed acts of indiscipline, very serious cases," said Mthembu, who today is a senior official at the National Intelligence Agency and whom the commission found guilty of gross human rights violations.

"We had comrades who abused their positions. To be a member of the security and intelligence department afforded you certain powers—other people took advantage, either abusing women or taking favours. Others got away with murder. They were not punished, we did not have a watertight system of dealing with these people."

While some detained at Quatro were spies, many were held and tortured for offences that included smoking marijuana, stealing Angolan peasants' bananas, having vehicle accidents on Angola's rutted roads, or because they posed a threat to others' leadership ambitions.

Masondo insists the ANC was not being paranoid. "We had to be careful. We had not screened the thousands of young people who fled South Africa after 1976 carefully enough."

If the ANC had researched Timothy Seremane's background, they would have found that although his school headmasters spoke of his academic brilliance and his leadership qualities, he was expelled from two schools for wild behaviour.

Schoolfriend James Matsile recalled: "We would booze, chase beauties and play cool music."

Seremane was summoned to Quatro, and accused of being a spy. "He seemed astonished," Masondo admits, "and denied it."

Masondo led the hearings. Seremane's provable 'crimes': driving badly, drinking, beating up cadres (a vice he shared with other camp commanders) and speaking his mind.

The Panelbeaters got to work. Afterward, the cellmate said Seremane's face was unrecognisable: "We could only recognise him by his voice."

Early in 1982, Seremane was taken into a ravine behind Quatro and shot at Masondo's behest. Seremane's brother Joe, now 60, has been loyal to the ANC all his life. But he first found out about his brother's fate only 18 months after from a returned exile and took the ANC's task because no-one had informed him. He petitioned President Nelson Mandela, had no response, and finally turned to the commission. At the end of it all he lost his job as Chief Land Claims Commissioner, resigned from the ANC, and accepted a senior post in the opposition Democratic party.

Joe Seremane first met Masondo when the two were jailed on Robben Island for being active supporters of the ANC. At a recent two-hour meeting in Pretoria, the two shared the pain of their experiences. Masondo talked of torture on Robben Island, and of a daughter-in-law blown up in Harare in 1987 by a bomb placed in her television by a SA spy.

At the end the two men, both wounded by the many unseen arrows of apartheid, embraced.

The writer is a South African freelance journalist living in Johannesburg.

Exploring the Red Planet

by Radhakrishna Rao

Both the Pathfinder and Sojourner sent back excellent pictures on the dynamics of Martian atmosphere. More than 16,000 pictures transmitted by Pathfinder have shown signs of water and heat—two critical elements of life—on Mars.

FOR more than a decade now, planetary researchers in the US have been speculating about the existence of primitive life forms on Mars whose seasonal cycle is very similar to that on earth. Against this backdrop, the 890-kg Pathfinder probe, launched in December 1996 and which landed on Martian surface in July this year, has opened up the way for exploring the planet in greater depth in the years ahead. In fact, the Mars Pathfinder became the first spacecraft to land on the red planet in more than 20 years.

Essentially, Pathfinder was intended to demonstrate that a low cost entry descent and landing system can be used to deliver a science payload and robotic rover to the surface of Mars on future missions.

In late September this year, scientists and engineers of the American space outfit National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) bid a reluctant farewell to the highly successful Pathfinder after it went out of control.

The 266 million US dollar mission has been described as "an unqualified success". Scientifically, we have received more information than anyone could have hoped or programmed," said Mathew Golombek, the project scientist associated with the mission.

The most significant feature of Pathfinder was that it arrived on Mars with a tiny six-wheeled microwave oven sized boggy Sojourner which became the first ever man-made mobile explorer on another planet.

Using infrared lasers to avoid hazards, the rover crawled at a steady pace of one centimeter per second to analyse Martian soil.

Sojourner's analysis of

Martian rocks have showed it to be rich in quartz.

Both the Pathfinder and Sojourner sent back excellent pictures on the dynamics of Martian atmosphere. More than 16,000 pictures transmitted by Pathfinder have shown signs of water and heat—two critical elements of life—on Mars.

Although two Viking spacecraft orbited Mars for several years in 1976, they were not equipped to produce maps of the planet's mineralogy. Nor were the cameras designed to reveal the texture of the Martian landscape in sufficient details for planning landing for future spacecraft. And this drawback has been efficiently made good by the Pathfinder-Sojourner mission.

Indeed, the remarkably smart and dirt cheap Pathfinder and Sojourner have rekindled America's enthusiasm for space exploration that had somewhat dimmed after the space shuttle Challenger catastrophe that claimed the lives of seven astronauts in 1986.

According to NASA administrator Daniel Goldin, the Johnson space Centre in Houston is close to designing a manned probe to Mars that could cost less than 20 billion US dollar. As things stand now, the first manned mission to Mars could take off as early as in 2011.

All said and done, it is too early to hazard a guess whether the arid barren surface of Mars, which is nearly double the size of earth, conceals a watery interior. The Martian atmosphere is made up of carbon dioxide, nitrogen, oxygen, water vapour and carbon monoxide. The average pressure is less than one hundredth of that on earth.

Due to the thinness of the atmosphere, daily temperature variations and atmospheric

pressure can be high. By far, the most spectacular geological discovery has been the channels that superficially resemble the valleys of dried up rivers. These have been singled out as proof that Mars had higher pressure and warmer temperature in the past.

There is substantial evidence that Mars once contained late amounts of surface water. While some of the water is now locked in polar caps, scientists believe a significant amount may have filtered underground beneath the planet's surface over time or has been lost to space.

Portions of the Martian terrain show the remnants of large flood channels that resemble catastrophic flood channels seen on earth today. "These flood channels suggest that there is still lot of water beneath the surface," says Bruce Jakosky, a research associate at the University of Colorado laboratory for atmospheric science.

According to Wesley Hunter, NASA's office of space science, water is the centrepiece of the Mars exploration programme, for scientists believe it is in the ancient wet environment that once existed as Mars that are most likely to contain signs of life. The key to all this is water where is the water—where is the water, when did the planet have water and what did it do with it," Hunter says.

Even as the Pathfinder mission came to an end, yet another probe—Global Surveyor—landed on the planet in September to begin its mission of mapping the Martian surface for two years.

This robotic mission will detect mineral deposits, create global weather charts and map Martian topography. Thus from May 1998 to January

2000, a period of one Martian year of 687 earth days, the Surveyor's cameras will take pictures of the entire planet in great detail.

Instrumentation packages onboard the spacecraft will measure the height of mountains and depths of valleys and establish the nature of planet's magnetic field. In particular, the mineral survey should lead to comprehensive map of the planet's resources for future human explorers and the regions where minerals suggest conditions that were once warmer and wet and possibly conducive to some forms of life.

"Mars presents the challenge of a new frontier, a place we can plant a new branch of human civilisation," says Robert Zubrin, President of Pioneer Astronautics, an aerospace consultancy in Indian Hills.

Launched on board Delta-2 rocket from Kennedy Space Centre in November, 1996 the Global Surveyor Mission will gather scientific data and wait for Mars to move into correct alignment with the sun for the mapping mission.

Based on the success of Pathfinder and Global Surveyor mission, NASA and its international collaborators plan to launch a series of low-cost spacecraft to Mars once every two years. This will find its ground culmination in a sample return mission slated for a launch in 2005.

As things stand now towards the close of 1998, NASA hopes to launch Mars surveyor mission involving Orbiter and Lander mission. While the Orbiter is designed to measure atmospheric water content during seasonal cycles, the Lander will probe past and present day water reservoir on the Red Planet.

— APB / PTI Feature

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by Jim Davis

Anti-virus Protection for Administration

by Abul MAhmad

Looks like we have to start afresh with a clean slate and build up the country from zero. This is what each regime had been trying to do, but the succeeding regime object and start all over again.

other regimes). Public relations is being decided and approved by veteran amateurs with vast years of political experience only.

It just won't do. Leave the PR job to PR pros, and listen to what they have to say about the dos and don'ts (there was an article in the Star recently on this topic). The 'saab jaanta' experts should be firmly snubbed by the higher ups (if available), and the society.

The professionals are living a miserable life in Bangladesh (it is not so noisy as they are busy earning their living working at their desks or in the field). They enjoy scant respect and steeage from the policy makers. As for patronage, it may not be 'neutral', as pointed out above. If patrons run the country, where are the patron saints?

Bangladeshers are suffering from accumulated excesses in all fields. These 'excesses' must be theoretically balanced by

proportional 'losses'; hence the output is lower than expected, but correct as per calculation. There is no escape from misused power of the elected kind (licensed to abuse power?). The elected reps select their own well-wishers (the general masses) for perpetual display of unwanted and unnecessary power muscles. SPA has become a toy gun to play with, judging by the popular use of this vicious device. It is naively hinted officially that its withdrawal would not be in public interest! The more the laws, according to traditional Chinese wisdom, the more the corruption.

Looks like we have to start afresh with a clean slate and build up the country from zero. This is what each regime had been trying to do, but the succeeding regime object and start all over again. Besides capacity, there is this vast communication gap, comparable to the limitless space.

Coming to the individual

level, the message is something like this: "Unless I can read your mind, you are suspect". Spread the sheet, and save the database from damage by the viruses, multiplying fast. Insert Toolkit in the Administrative System, as the computer experts would suggest! But there is no toolkit for the viruses under the political purdahs and burgas. Nobody knows how to design this software program. A sure Nobel Prize is reserved for any Bangladeshi who can come up with this invaluable preventive maintenance kit.

Therefore it could be concluded that bad politics carries within itself the self-destructive AIDS which renders the immune system inoperative and causes that particular political system to crash. There are documentation on the rise and fall of history and civilisation, but political history has no instant cure for politicism, a paranoid disease seen mostly in the emerging countries. It is an irony of fate that such diabolic weapons are used more in the least developed countries.

This is the internal phase of true freedom which is not publicised by the leaders. I'm writing this in public interest; but surely, it would be misunderstood!