The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Sunday, May 16, 1999

She, a Rape Victim?

THE alleged rape of Roushanara, an elected UP member from Jangalia under Pakundia Thana in Kishoreganj district, inevitably raises this question: if an empowered woman met with such a fate what lies in store for the ordinary female members of our society?

The details of Roushanara story as carried in our last weekend issue may help unmask another reality. Her pro-active role as UP member might not have been looked kindly on by some interested quarters. Apparently, tension had been growing between her and some of her male colleagues. Despite her having called a meeting on distribution of sanitary latrines the latter paid no heed to it. The local UP chairman admitted that she was cleared of complaints that she had been manipulating VGF cards.

To the extent such information help the process of investigation we do not mind their recital by the local administration, the UP chairman and others, but these should not be allowed to fudge the issue at hand. The basic question here is that a rape has been allegedly committed and this needs to be gone into - head-on without any distraction or diversion whatsoever. If there had been any link at all between the five accused named by the victim and those among her male colleagues who might have been hostile to her, for some reason or the other, then that would definitely be probed as a matter of course. But this should not come in the way of a focused and speedy disposal of the highly culpable offence that has been purportedly committed. The list of the accused, including specially the principal one — Fazlul Haq, who allegedly violated her chastity — has been already furnished. With only two of them arrested and Fazlu Mia at large, the police have the better part of their job left to be done.

Roushanara's plight may have also brought to the fore the 'male egocentric attitude towards new female leadership in local government bodies.' But while executive orders may be of help in revamping the participatory role of the women chairmen and members of the Union Parishads vis-a-vis their male counterparts the question is: what are we going to do with the prospect of repression of an empowered woman? In this case the punishment ought to be highly exemplary. This involves not only the violation of the human person but also strikes at the root of the women's empowerment exercise.

HPSP in a Tangle

NIFICATION of the health and family Uplanning services at the thana level and below under the health and population sector programme (HPSP) hit a bureaucratic snag. The element of concern at the slow-go progress reflected in the annual performance review, prepared by the government and the World Bank, seems lost on the health ministry officials. They are still in the wait for the statutory regulatory order (SRO) required to engineer the proposed reorganisation, ignoring the very fact that passivity at their end is "causing major obstacles in achieving goals of the reforms in the health programmes". One wonders how many more months would it take the ministry to sort out the "difficulties".

The proposed one-stop centre for general health and family planning services is certainly a sound concept towards ensuring quality health-care services for the rural populace. In fact, separate centres for general and reproductive health services have rendered the health-care system rather inconvenient for the majority in the rural areas. The HPSP provided the perfect solution. Unfortunately, there seems to be lack of administrative will to carry forward the implementation of the project. The ministry's inertia is not acceptable on any grounds. It is hard to believe that it could not prepare and issue an SRO specifying staff position and status in the proposed reorganisation in all these months. The officials must realise that lack of activism has already slowed down the pace of reforms in the sector. Their laid-back attitude only undermines the significance of the process.

We strongly urge the ministry to pay heed to the recommendations put forth in the review and "reinvigorate the process with more effort to increase understanding and ownership of the reform process at all levels within the ministry and in other ministries such as establishment and finance."

Calls for Action

A report in The Daily Star on Friday states that the Resident Medical Officer (RMO) of Pirojpur Modern Government Hospital has been seeing patients at his office in lieu of fees during his duty hours. This is a highly immoral and unethical act by a member of the medical profession and a government servant who is not supposed to conduct his own private business in the government building and also during duty hours. A few days back we wrote in these columns about the perfidy of doctors in the hill districts of the country and now it is happening in a southern district. We are afraid that there may be many more cases like this in the far-flung areas of Bangladesh.

We know doctors are supposed to take the Hippocratic Oath at the time of passing out but it seems that a large number of them forget about it as soon as they develop love for money. The RMO at Pirojpur has given his own reasons for his 'illegal' private practice; but has he ever given a damn to the suffering of patients who could not afford his special care offer? Patients have complained about the indifference of the doctors to their needs. And the most interesting aspect is that even though private practice is illegal at the government hospital punishment prescribed for such an offence as told by the DG Health Services to our correspondent, sounds ridiculous. This is a grave offence no doubt and we would strongly suggest that the authorities concerned take stern measures against such a violation of rules.

How to Stop Lawlessness and Terrorism

Confrontational Politics and Terrorism

by Mohammad Siddiquer Rahman

The first thing needed to stop lawlessness and terrorism is to restructure and upgrade the police and the magistracy judiciary. The second step needed to prevent crime and antisocial activities is social mobilisation whereby the society and the local community are actively involved in this great task. The third and most important thing needed to stop political terrorism and armed violence is political commitment on the part of the political parties.

AL leaders in Atrai Thana; attack on BNP meeting in Rajshahi injured 25 persons; Chittagong BCL activist was gunned down and an old man beaten to death. The other day, 25th April, seven persons were slaughtered by an extremist group in Chaudanga while two persons were killed and seven injured in a fight between BCL and JCD in Feni. Bombs were hurled at Islamic University staff bus and seven JCD men were held. Four persons were killed in the city in 16 hours and five dacoities committed in one day in the city. Almost everyday one can see news about snatching, hijacking, bombblasts, acid throwing, armed dacoity, gunfight and killing. A bus full of passengers was poured with petrol and set on fine resulting in the death of three persons and serious burn injures of many others. Violent processions are taken out on the streets by the workers of political parties cracking bombs like fire works, as if there is no explosive control law in the

Some MPs are reported to be activity involved in terrorist activities with the help of armed terrorists and mastans reared by them. Recently two

persons were killed due to bomb blast in the house of an MP at the time of making bombs. In one incident, after the killing of two persons, the killers were given safe shelter in the house of an MP and no action was taken by the police because of interference by the MP even after the killers were identified and known to the police. It is hardly realized that harbouring criminals or acts of crime are as much punishable crime as doing it himself. In some places the OC and the police have become the subordinate agency of MP and carry out whatever orders and directions are given by the MP for persecuting innocent people, arresting them and filing false cases against them. Such godfathers can do whatever they like with the help of their armed mastans and terrorists and create a reign of terror. The ordinary man cannot even lodge an FIR in the thana unless he can spend sufficient money or is strongly backed by

The other plague that has infested the whole country is boundless corruption at all strata of the society - politicians, businessmen, professionals and bureaucrats. This has entirely demoralized the

management and administration of the country ineffective. According to a newspaper re-port; the World Bank has identified the police as the most corrupt organisation of Bangladesh. Recently Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights conducted a survey of the level of earning of 80 police officers of the rank of ASI to DIG. The startling revelation was that all of them were found to be corrupt and were earning an average of 1000 times their salary. Such corruption has put the law and order administration completely out of gear. Confrontational politics has made it imperative for the major political parties to rear and maintain a strong band of armed cadres, terrorists and musclemen to fight their rival parties and opponents. Virtually these armed cadres Bomb squads and Mastans have become the mainstay of the Political Parties. These terrorists nurtured by the political parties as their strongholds, have got the taste of power and money. Besides, fighting for their party at the time of need, they carry out all

sorts of terrorist activities,

knowing fully well that their

whole society and rendered the

political godfathers will come to their rescue, whenever they may be in trouble. According to IDR, a Human Rights organisation, on an average seven persons were killed every day during the month of April 1999.

The Foreign donors were also deeply concerned by the political intolerance and violence and appealed to the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition to resolve political differences peacefully in forums like parliament and not through violent confrontation. President Justice Shahabuddin stated, "Not confrontation Compromise is essential" to arrive at understanding on political issues.

The prevalent state of anarchy and Terrorism leading the country to destruction cannot be allowed to continue. The question is, how to stop this lawlessness and political ter-

The most important activity needed to maintain law and order, prevent and detect crime, and stop terrorism and armed violence is to organise and carry out an effective and strong law and order Administration. The following three main players are involved in this Task:

i) An honest, committed and effective police to prevent and detect crimes, arrest criminals and send them to the court for trial.

ii) An honest, professionally qualified and competent prosecution officer/public prosecutor capable of preparing and conducting the case in the court

properly and efficiently so that the guilty is punished. iii) An honest conscientious and just magistrate or judge who will try the cases promptly for the proper dispensation of justice on points of law and

facts and to punish the guilty.

Each one of the players must, first of all be honest and play his role properly and effectively. Unfortunately the present generation of the police as well as the magistracy and judiciary have earned bad reputation of corruption and ineffectiveness. Even the World Ban is reported to have stated that the present day police and judiciary are not in a position to restore and maintain law and order. As such the first thing needed to stop lawlessness and terrorism is to Restructure and upgrade the police and the magistracy judiciary. The second step needed to prevent crime and antisocial activities is Social mobilisation whereby the society and the local community are actively involved in this great task. The third and most important thing needed to stop political terrorism and armed violence is political commitment on the part of the

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political parties.

Bangladesh: An Overpoliticised Democracy?

M. Rashiduzzaman writes from Glassboro, New Jersey, USA

Now a perceptible equilibrium exists between the ruling party and the hartal-capable opposition alliance. Political parleys between two sides usually work better under such circumstances when one group cannot abruptly dismiss the other.

pressed as the uncom-Opromising partisanship across the political and social spectrum is the gaping hole in the nascent democracy of Bangladesh that offered neither political stability, nor economic prosperity to the nation. It is a contrast to the most established democracies where the major parties have moved to the centre, either to the centre-right or the centre-left, and even the warring politicians have made pragmatic concessions to each other.

ONFRONTATIONAL

political parties and their

front organisations and the

fight between the party workers, armed cadres,

musclemen and bomb squads are the main source of political

terrorism and lawlessness

prevalent in the country today.

According to news reports, 210

political fights took place in the

country in one year since Jan-uary 1998 and 46 armed clashes

took place between the rival

groups of students wings of po-

litical parties in Dhaka city

alone. The whole nation was

bewildered and shaken to the

feet by the unprecedented inci-

dent of killing of Qazi Aref and

his four compatriots by firing

in broad daylight on the stage of

a public meeting in Kushtia.

The people all over the country

were terribly shocked and dumb

founded at the killing of 10 cul-

tural activists and artists in the

function of Udichi in Jessore.

In Chittagong 11 persons were

killed in three months because

of group fighting within BCL. A

petrol pump was looted in Chittagong and a JCD leader

was held. Eighteen persons were

killed during the last Eid holi-

days by terrorists and armed

mastans. Four persons died

when a village was set on fire by

an extremist group in Jhinaida,

nine preplanned murders took

place in three days. Mastans

ruled Eid Cattle market in the

city and killed five per cent by

says, 2 JCD activists were shot

dead by armed assailants in

Jessore: rivals slaughtered two

News report on 1st April

gunshot and bomb blasts.

politics between the major

Much of the institutional slump in general and legislative decline in particular, disorder, terrorism, unpunished killings and rapes, and abuse of power is attributed to the excessive politicisation in Bangladesh. A level of politicisation is desirable and perhaps inevitable in a pluralistic democracy, but for Bangladesh now an all-consuming partisanship threatens the democratic process itself, unless the politicians put their act together.

Disturbing as it is, the civil society is deeply divided along the party lines; not only the politicians, but even the cominunity leaders do not seem to trust each other. Uncompromising political denunciations have now turned into a cycle of vengeance between the government party and the opposition activists, and countless police brutalities and political killings are on the rise all over the country. Excessive partisanship is not entirely new in Bangladesh politics, but people are openly worried about it.

Quite a few editorials and articles in recent weeks expressed deep concern over the downhill slope of the economy, law and order deterioration and inflex-

ible impasse.

It may be of some comfort that neighbouring countries including India and Pakistan are also going through politically difficult times but the political dynamics of Bangladesh are qualitatively different. New Delhi has been in the grip of fractured politics since the decline of the Indian National Congress, the single dominant party that ruled India for decades after independence. But Indian political institutions are on more solid ground although there is an unraveling of regionalisation, separatism, religious extremism, and criminalisation of politics in recent

Compared to Bangladesh, the non-political Indian bureaucracy is generally trusted for running the country while the politicians frayed, and the Indian military is stronger than ever before to fight both external and internal threats. In Pakistan, the military is the ultimate arbiter, and it may easily step in like as it happens in Turkey; as we are aware of it. the Pakistanis are not totally

averse to periodic political in-

tervention by the military. In the light of the uncompromising partisanship and relentless confrontation, I am inclined to downgrade the importance of a fresh poll immediately as a cure all medicine for political woes. Elections alone did not always guarantee a smooth operation of democracy and political development.

The Awami League had won

a spectacular victory in 1970, but the Pakistani military regime refused to restore power to the freshly elected civilian leaders that led to the break up of Pakistan, as we all know about it. The 1973 election did not strengthen democracy in the newly independent Bangladesh; on the contrary, the country became a single party dictatorship with totalisation of power under one single leader. The 1991 election. generally acclaimed as fair, also failed to guarantee a democracy through a mutual give and take. Nearly half of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's term was paralysed by the Awami League-led hartals and, for a while, a strident non-cooperation and even a bureaucratic revolt brought the country to a halt.

High expectations generated by the 1996 elections evaporated when the opposition blamed the newly victorious party for alleged rigging with bureaucratic connivance. Whoever loses the election in Bangladesh challenges the validity of the poll, and confronts the government with disastrous protest, noise and unrest. No matter when the next election comes, it may even further politicise the nation bringing the rivals on the brink of such an abyss that cannot be bridged by the interim political author-

ity overseeing the election. A candid assessment for mutual trust building between the partisan rivals can start immediately by ending the politics of finger pointing, but it may already be too late for such sober choices. The election date is not yet known, and the next caretaker government is not yet constituted, but the nonpolitical stopgap authority alone would not be able to resolve the partisan gridlock. The caretaker government had no control over the revenge-filled partisanship unless the political parties cooperate. What is needed is a consensus-based depoliticisation; otherwise it will not hold. The opposition has an obligation to allow a legitimate government to run its term, but

a boisterous one could not be denied in a competitive party system.

The Awami League's perception that it was the only legitimate inheritor of power, and its deliberate neglect, bypassing and harassment of the opposition marked the beginning of political confrontation after the last election. Sheikh Hasina's apology for her party's past wrongdoing, her Islamic posture, her lilting enchantment for "consensus government" all those inspiring signals vanished into oblivion. The main

opposition BNP has charged that the Awami League government has showered them with volleys of politically motivated cases, and unleashed a variety of invectives, coercion, intimidation and harassment against its leaders. But the Awami League retorted that the BNP had already overstated itself even when the government enforced its legal obligations.

I am not sure how many of such politically inspired cases have been withdrawn. Meanwhile, in the name of "keeping the streets clear" the Awami League government has used counter-processions by its activists against the BNP-led hartals and demonstrations. The opposition should be parsimonious about hartals, mass protests and work stoppages that affect the whole nation, but the ruling party should think twice before facing the opposition-led hartals with their own wave of violence besides the police and the legal apparatus that the Awami League now commands. The growing prospect of such violent and ill-considered brush with the opposition is a chilling concern for all right

minded citizens. No matter how long is the Awami League supported procession against the BNP-led strikes, it is a crude opposition-bashing that few will condone except the uncompromising partisans.

So far the ruling party and the opposition have only postured, but they have not been on speaking terms, far less than mutually respecting each other. That's worrisome! I am fully aware of the difficulties of achieving those accommodating goals, but I am cautiously optimistic for a few reasons. The ruling Awami League did not seriously believe that the BNP was capable of launching any big anti-government protest; disappointing though it is, parties/leaders in Bangladesh are not taken seriously unless and until they were capable of imposing strikes and

Over the last few months, the BNP-led opposition has already demonstrated that capacity. Khaleda seems to be slowly heading towards an "oust the Awami League government" movement, a strategy reminiscent of what Hasina did against the BNP government. So far, the BNP and its allies have not launched a catastrophic agitation throughout the country, and their work stoppages have been periodic so far, which earned them some political goodwill. Now a perceptible equilibrium exists between the ruling party and the hartal-capable opposition alliance. Political parleys between two sides usually work better under such circumstances when one group cannot abruptly dismiss

What else can the Bangladeshis hope for? They have already lost a good part of the 20th century's second half either fighting Pakistan or fighting amongst themselves. But they cannot afford to lose the 21st century by such mindboggling encounters amongst themselves!

the other.

Uncaring leaders

Sir, I do not understand the activities of our leaders. While we are going through so many other problems, there is absolutely no need to host NAM conference at all. While thousands of homeless people are spending days and nights without food. proper clothing and all the basic needs, how can our leaders think about speding TK 300 crore to entertain all the NAM leaders from around the world?

While thousands of students are getting frustrated of not getting a job, how can our leaders think of wasting that much money for nothing? While thousands of people are becoming ill due to serious pollution, how can our leaders cut down the saviors of nature? What goes on in the heads of our intellectuals and the leaders? Do they think Bangladesh is just a property of theirs that they can do whatever they want?

We the people have right to opine too, and I say there should not be any NAM conference in Bangladesh until we are ready to host one!

Khalid Ikram Norfolk, USA

'Unprofitable' flight to New York

Sir, This refers to the Hon'ble Minister of Civil Aviation's press conference on Thursday (May 6) in his office and the news item by Mr Shehab Ahmed published in your esteem daily on May 8, and April 26, respectively. Every newspaper is only writing about the 'unprofitable' flight but nobody is asking why?

It is true, by reducing the price of the aviation fuel at ZIA it will certainly arrest the loss to certain extent on all routes of Biman particularly the long flights. The other airlines now will be encouraged to change their fuel policy to lift fuel from Dhaka by not carrying fuel for their return flights from the last air port. This will definitely increase more revenue for the oil company in particular and the Government of Bangladesh in general. But that is not enough. The Hon'ble Minister will have to take further action to.

sels/Amsterdam as another station with 5th Freedom Rights like Bombay and Delhi; 2) put a dynamic and foresighted salesman/general sales agent in charge wherever Biman has 5th Freedom Rights;

3) stop the gimmics of charging one hundred US dollars to be upgraded to 'J/D" class to enjoy facilities worth five hundred US dollars;

4) make Biman Flight Catering Centre (BFCC) more attractive with more tasty items and more hygienic for the other airlines to lift food and beverages; 5) pamper more the ethnic passengers like other airlines;

6) bring back KLM to ZIA giving them the 5th Freedom Rights should they ask for, and in return you obtain the same from Schipol. Please do not live in the watertight compartment. With the free economic market around the world, the free sky market is also coming around the airports of the world'

7) stop inducting the good riddance to the bad rubbish from other organisations into Biman and also bury Late Major General Enam (Retd) Commission's O&M which has become out dated and has made enough mess at ZIA.

Mazhar Haq Hs#52, Rd-28, Apt-A5 Gulshan, Dhaka.

Captan/Thatari Bazar Road

Sir, Most of the time we find digging, demolition and construction works of drains. sewage system and roads of Captan Bazar/Thatari Bazar are going on in full swing. As a result the movement of vehicular traffic is closed and it becomes very difficult and troublesome for the members of the public to move from one place to another in this crowed and busy area due to necessary

repair and construction works. We wonder how many times during last ten years Captan Bazar/Thatari Bazar roads have been dug, repaired and reconstructed and what amount of public money has been spent so far?

accountability transparency we would request the Dhaka City Corporation to kindly issue a press release and tell the members of public as to what amount of public money has been spent during last ten years, and when the said development works of this area would be completed.

O H Kabir Hare Street. Wari, Dhaka-1203

Recalling Frank Sinatra

Sir, The 15th May came back to remind millions of music lovers all over the world of the first death anniversary of Frank Sinatra. A year ago on 15th May, he died at the age of 83. When Frank Sinatra died, thousands of his fans and film artists gathered at his funeral to pay their last respect to one of the greatest and most popular

stars of the 20th century. Through this letter, I request the BTV authorities to telecast a programme with excerpts of his songs and movies on the occasion of his death anniversary. We thank BTV in advance.

Adib Reza 6 Paribagh House Dhaka-1000.

National Zoo

Sir, Congratulations on the timely decision of renaming and upgrading Dhaka Zoo as National Zoo. We expect different home species which abound our country to get priority of display. They will surely make very interesting study as well as observations. We got to know our own neighbours well before being entertained by outsiders.

Tanzia Choudhury Chittagong.

The state and the

party Sir, Consolidate the government or consolidate the party? Which comes first? Obviously the party did not come into power in a disarray, to confuse (itself and others) the dis-

tinction between the state and party! But that is exactly what the citizens of this country have been finding all these decades of governance by better and better leaderships; meaning the previous regimes just did not know their jobs! It is wrongly presumed that

its right to dissent, even though

all party decisions could be automatically transferred into government policies. There are many types of implications in different types of public services, which restrict the freedom of the political decisions or stands; similar to the concept of 'freedom' which does not mean licence to do anything at one's sweet whim. Governance is anonymous, and it is not necessary for the citizens to know who are running the government, so long it runs well. In our society anonymity has no social value.

Our leaders may speak on this topic publicly.

A Husnain Dhaka.

Foreign-origin issue

Sir, A few days back Atal

Behari Bajpayee the out-going Prime Minister of India said he would not stoop that low to question the foreign origin of Sonia Ghandi. In this connection it may be mentioned that the former Prime Minister of India I K Gujral is a Pakistani by birth as he was born in a place near Lahore. Then Joyti Basu the Chief Minister of West Bengal is a Bangladeshi by birth as he was born in Sonargaon near Dhaka. Nawaz Sharif the current PM of Pakistan is an Indian by birth as he was born in East Punjab (India). Our ex-president Late Justice Abdus Sattar was an Indian by birth as he was born in Birbhum in West Bengal.

There are lots of such examples where the immigrants held the highest offices of their migrated country but none of them had ever betrayed the cause of their adopted country. Then why Sonia should be accused of serving Rome instead of Ram (the Hindu god)?

Syed Abu Saleh. 170, Malibagh, Dhaka-1217.

OPINION

Micro Governance is a Macro Issue Abul M Ahmad

It is unbelievable that the powerful authorities are unable to control the increasing menace of unauthorized use of blaring loudspeakers for publicity of products in the residential and other areas during odd hours of the day and night. The mobile rickshaw mikes have mighty decibels.

Man-made or machine noise, like surface and aerial pollution, is also a kind of pollution and public nuisance, which is controlled in other countries, including the DCs and LDCs. Here the regulations are there, but monitoring and persecution are perennial weaknesses in administration in Bangladesh, especially when

the politicians are in power. The live loudspeakers can be easily traced for instant action (seize the equipment, which may be released later on payment of the heavy fine; say 100 per cent of the hiring cost). All such sites, stationary or mobile, must carry and display the temporary permit for inspection by the police or the public The Police constables on area duty have to keep a watch; (I talked to a couple of patrolling policemen for stray sampling; they complain of too many items on their daily duty roster: 'Do we have to do everything; where are the other civilian inspectors and monitoring agencies?').

In the bazaars, the vendors and hawkers sit everywhere and block traffic. This is not possible without toll collection. 'Rent-seeking' business is flourishing in Bangladesh, thanks to the peoples' representatives, who appear to be insensitive to activities not in the

public interest. The attitude is similar with the misuses of the footpaths everywhere.

In contrast we read a lot about huge Metropolitan schemes, plans, and projects in the pipeline to overcome the macro issues. Start in a small way and graduate up the ladder. Control of the nuisance mentioned above do not need mega projects (what to do with slums is a mega project).

Traffic control is not a mega project, once the unauthorized vehicles and drivers are prosecuted (road diversification is). Then work at leisure on the mega project phases. Start at the bottom or base of the triangle, and not at the top; except for the rich and the influential who misuse money and power, who are at the apex of the social triangle (the slow disappearance of the water bodies in Dhaka city). This triangle is distorted. bulging at the top, narrow at the middle, and narrower at the base (imagine an inverted triangle, which is unstable). Sort out the good and the evil at the top and the bottom. Too much evil is roaming around (like mobile cellular phones).

Where there is a way not to do something, it cannot be done. "Hail the 'popular' regime!". say the disgusted citizens - or is it the 'popular' politicians who are patronizing themselves? Even sarcasm and irony have no effect. What has happened to our sense of humour? There is too much seriousness in running the country. but it is operating from the side. not from the centre (core). The gear ratio has to be changed (watch the reverse gear!).