

Sexual Abuse of Minors: A Return of the Barbarians?

by Md. Asadullah Khan

Until and unless we can stop repetition of such grisly crime, every Bangladeshi shall consciously remain guilty of the sexual abuse and murder of Shumi of Shiblalaya, Afroza of Tangail, Tania of Dhaka city and many such others that remain unreported. That calls for every man, woman and child in the country to be united as never before: by a collective sense of revulsion.

THE gruesome murder of a seven year old girl Shumi in Sibrampur village of Shiblalaya thana in the district of Manikganj after rape on 11th June by one Shukur Ali (18) has once again shocked the nation. Even in a country where life is so easily extinguished now-a-days by miscreants, diseases and disasters, there was a feeling of revulsion about the macabre crime committed. To violate a seven year old girl who has yet to know the meaning of sex is simply barbaric. That morning (of 13th June) when the news broke, a chill ran up the nation's spine.

About a year ago, the nation learnt with similar trepidation about the incidence of rape of a ten year old girl in the Talata busee of Mirpur section-I in the early part of February. In this case the rapist could not be apprehended. Reports quoting doctors at the DMCH who performed a lengthy operation on Rokeya, daughter of Mumtaz and Amir, a rickshaw puller revealed that the victim's condition was critical with all the internal and external tissues of her body badly damaged. Doctors also confirmed that it was a very brutal incident of rape.

Sadly enough, the grotesque incident of rape in Shiblalaya thana was committed in broad day light when the child had gone out to play with her mates at about 9 AM in the morning and the rapist was no stranger to the child in as much as he was living in the same courtyard of victim's house.

This spurt of violence against children is more than alarming. Nevertheless these sorts of heinous crimes perpetrated with increasing frequency have threatened to knock the rock bottom of our civil society. Precisely true, crimes and criminality exist in every society but sexual violation of minors manifests a sort of depravity which unless checked immediately will tear apart the entire social fabric. About two years ago, two such incidents of rape on a six year old girl Tania in the Dhaka Court compound and another on Mousumi of the same age in Satrapur area provoked violent public outcry. In both the cases actual offenders could not be apprehended or there was

hardly any vigorous attempt to bring the culprits to book.

Add to this the insecure working condition of the young women garment workers. People have hardly forgotten the report of some adolescent women employees of a garment factory in the Banani area of the city being allegedly sexually harassed by their employers. Coming back to Sumi's case, the beastly act done, the poor victim was put to death when she tried to resist the violation. But the resentment generated in the conscious citizenry and the outrage stoked are far from ebbing even after days of the incident. Even as conscious citizenry hang their head in shame, a nation with the slightest of human virtues still alive must go numb with shock and trepidation. Sure enough, these sorts of depravity belong to the inventory of black deeds. True, not even the harshest words could measure up to the indignation felt in the length and breadth of the country. It is as if we all have had a personal bereavement. What is further disturbing is that such "novel" crimes have a tendency to catch on. Those acts with such alarming frequency prove that a sizeable section of society is being fast criminalised.

The question one tends to ask, "what ails our society?" Why such criminal and murderous instincts are increasingly getting the better of self-restraint, ethics, religious virtues that are heard aplenty these days? If some deep-rooted psychological factor is interfering with decent living and societal balance, it should be diagnosed and the cause identified. Something seems to have gone awfully wrong with our society leading to ever increasing instances of depraved behaviour. It is not very unnatural in our country that every time such dastardly acts of sexual abuse on minors, often leading to death, takes place, people are naturally outraged and loud protests are voiced by it, especially by the human rights activists. But, as it often happens, when the alleged offenders go away with impunity, the perpetrators of crime feel emboldened to commit crimes of greater enormity.

And not infrequently the law enforcers' reluctance and indifferent attitude to tackle such crime, since it relates to children, and is not taken up as an adult problem, makes situation worse. In many cases, as it has been observed after a review of the past records, the policemen themselves are to blame. If the present rate of criminalisation of the whole society including the police personnel meant to curb crime go unabated, every democratic norm and value will be thrown to the wind.

All segments of the society as a whole must try to root out the fast spreading cancer threatening to unsettle the very foundations of morality. Some human rights groups and women activists are voicing their protests and indignations. The present reports of such violence is published in the newspaper, but unfortunately the policy makers and law makers do not seem to have been seriously perturbed. Rather they are locked in a duel of words in the Parliament undermining each other, digging the past of the leaders and bringing in issues not related to burning problems like the development efforts, deteriorating law and order situation and escalating occurrence of crime. Without contradiction, security of children comes as the most essential part of ushering the growth of a democratic and healthy society and should be considered sine qua non to any civilised order and must be guaranteed by the state. Protecting them from abuse and violence is the first prerogative of good governance, peace and stability in the country.

Sexual abuse hurts children both physically and psychologically and the violence becomes doubly repulsive when the victim is a minor. When such violence keeps on occurring and as such poses to become a norm of the society, one is led to think that apart from individual aberrations, a lot of other things are wrong with the society and the social culture that make inroads to such perverse propensity. People are led to believe that the increasing drug crime nexus in the urban shanties and criminal underworld is exacting its toll. It may be that due to social conflict and unrest, some individuals

Liberation and Beyond

by J N Dixit

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1972: Efforts at National Consolidation

TWO macro-level challenges which Bangladesh faced immediately after coming into existence were, domestically to ensure politico-economic consolidation, and to again international recognition for its sovereign existence. The problems of domestic consolidation and development were daunting. The traditionally neglected economy of Bangladesh was in shambles aggravated by military repression and the liberation war. Most of the capital and foreign exchange resources of the country, both governmental and private, had been taken away by the West Pakistani authorities. Whatever little industrial activity was there had come to a complete standstill. Most of the West Pakistani owners had fled to West Pakistan or elsewhere and the labour force had joined the freedom struggle. The Pakistani authorities had taken away all the aircraft and ships which serviced Bangladesh. The Pakistan army had systematically destroyed ports, bridges, roads, railway lines and telecommunication facilities, ruining the infrastructure of Bangladesh economy completely. The army had gone to the extent of even destroying school and university buildings and irrigation channels.

Bangladeshi constituted only a negligible minority of the armed forces and civil services of Pakistan. Many of them were still in the process of deciding on their future as to which State they should choose to serve. This was specially so in the case of some of the civilians. Bangladeshi armed forces personnel were under suspicion from the beginning of the liberation war itself, regardless of their personal inclinations. Those who were in Bangladesh opted for the liberation war and others who were in West Pakistan or abroad were still uncertain about what to do. Three Pakistani foreign service officers of Bangladeshi origin, who later rose to high positions in Bangladesh foreign office and illustrated this dilemma, were Ambassadors K M Kaiser and Panni, the then First Secretary or Counsellor of the Pakistani Embassy in China, Farookh Sobhan, Kaiser, Panni and Sobhan decided to leave the Pakistan foreign service only after the liberation of Bangladesh. All the three served as ambassadors of Bangladesh in later years with Sobhan rising to be the Foreign Secretary in which position he served between 1995 and 1997. The point to note is that the new Government of Bangladesh, apart from building political institutions had to find personnel for all the branches of public services. To

eration was undertaken by the Soviet Navy. The Food Corporation of India opened a branch office as part of India's diplomatic mission in Dhaka with field offices in different parts of Bangladesh to ensure adequate food distribution.

A high level economic task force was created by Mrs. Indira Gandhi under the chairmanship of DP Dhar to oversee the extensive cooperation programme. Members of this team were Sukhamoy Chakravarty, Member of the Planning Commission, and Ashok Mitra, Economic Advisor to the Government of India in the Ministry of Finance. This work was coordinated at the official level by R D Sathe, Joint Secretary and Mani Shankar Iyer, two Deputy Secretaries. Kuldip Sahdev and Mani Shankar Iyer. All these foreign service officers rose to high positions in Indian diplomatic service in later years. Sathe ended up as Foreign Secretary and Mani Shankar Iyer transcended the Civil Service to become a leading Congress Member of Parliament. Two other officials who dealt with the political and administrative side of relations with Bangladesh and coordinated the work were M K Rasgotra and KPS Menon, Joint Secretaries in the new Territorial Division dealing with Bangladesh. Both of them later distinguished themselves as Foreign Secretaries of India.

Mrs Gandhi also agreed that a brigade of Indian troops should move out to Cox's Bazar. The brigade was to establish its headquarters at Cox's Bazar and undertake final mopping up operations against the remnants of the Pakistani troops in the region and along the Bangladesh-Burma border. Brig Pandey moved down to Cox's Bazar with a full brigade which had been controlling Dhaka and its surrounding areas in the aftermath of the surrender.

It may be worthwhile at this stage to analyse Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's personality and his mindset as I discerned them in the first year of my assignment in Dhaka. I feel this is relevant to understand the drift of events between January, 1972 and August, 1975 ultimately leading to his tragic assassination along with his family and several of his close associates. The political background of Mujibur Rahman from his youthful years merits recall. He was a student of the Islamic College at Calcutta in pre-partition days. He was an active member of the Youth Wing of the All India Muslim League in mid-forties. He was a follower of Fazlul Huq and Hosseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, two great leaders of the Muslim League Movement in Bengal. Even in his youth, he was a charismatic leader and an outstanding public orator. However, his oratory was more effective in arousing emotion and intense passion rather than being an exercise in reasoning with or educating the public. He emerged as the foremost leader of the young in the Muslim League in East Pakistan. In the immediate aftermath of the partition he started getting disillusioned with the attitude of West Pakistani compatriots. While being committed to Pakistan, he also had an intense sense of Bengali identity in terms of language and culture. Mohammed Ali Jinnah's declaration of Urdu alone being the national language of Pakistan, without giving due status to Bengali, within a year of partition was the beginning of his disenchantment. Jinnah's death and Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination followed by the shabby manner in which East Pakistani leaders who became heads of government and State in Pakistan (Suhrawardy, Nazimuddin and Mohammed Ali Bogra) were treated by West Pakistani political circles and civil service establishment accentuated his sense of alienation. The brutal manner in which the Bengali language movement was suppressed by federal Pakistan culminating in the shooting of East Pakistani students on February 21, 1952 radically transformed his political thinking and orientation. He still believed in the legitimacy and the unity of Pakistan but, by the early 1950s, he had come to a clear conclusion that Pakistan's survival as one country can only be guaranteed by East Pakistanis getting an appropriate share in the power structure of the country. Equally the linguistic and ethno-cultural identity of the East Pakistanis needed to be given due recognition in the institutional and political organisations of the Pakistani State. The feeling of alienation only increased with the advent of Field Marshal Ayub Khan's military regime in Pakistan. The phenomenon of exploitation and discrimination of East Pakistan was deeply felt by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman which first led to his demand for decentralisation and, ultimately, autonomy (the six-point programme). The last straw was the denial of Prime Ministership of Pakistan despite his winning a clear majority in the first ever democratic elections held in Pakistan. That in the first ever democratic elections in Pakistan, he was not elected to the office of Prime Minister but to that of a junior minister, led to his demand for and declaration of independence. By the late 1950s and early 1960s Mujibur Rahman had emerged as the charismatic leader of East Pakistan and the foremost articulator of all Bangladeshis' aspirations.

It is the next phase of his life, especially the eleven months of incarceration in West Pakistan and his trial and sentence to death for high treason which profoundly affected his mindset. The sense of let down at not being allowed his due despite a favourable electoral verdict and the military suppression embittered him against the Pakistani military establishment. Even more profound was the frustration at not being able to lead the liberation struggle of Bangladesh throughout 1971 while his junior colleagues managed the liberation struggle and brought it to a successful culmination. He felt cheated of the historical role that he believed he was destined to play. The consequence was a sub-conscious resentment against leading members of his own political party, the Awami League, who constituted the Mujibnagar Government. This resentment ultimately found open expression in the manner in which he treated Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin, Kamaruzzaman and Mansoor Ali. Senior Awami League figures, who constituted the Mujibnagar Government and who led the liberation war at the political and strategic levels.

compound the problem there were segments of pro-Pakistani, elements in Bangladesh including supporters of Pakistan with the capacity to generate internal violence and disturbance.

The most critical development was that groups of Pakistani army stragglers, having escaped to South eastern parts of Bangladesh, had set up base camps around Cox's Bazar and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to carry out subversive activities. There was also a shortage of food supplies and basic health facilities. Mujibur Rahman sent three requests to Mrs Indira Gandhi immediately after assuming charge. He desired Indian personnel with experience in district administration to come and serve in Bangladesh on deputation for a period of three to six months till Bangladeshi civil servants could replace them. The second message was that a part of the Indian armed forces should remain in Bangladesh for about a year more to neutralise pockets of anti-Bangladeshi resistance within the country. He particularly desired the deployment of Indian troops in Chittagong Hills to mop up the remnants of the Pakistani army trying to consolidate themselves there. The third request was that India should render across the board economic assistance and help create a Bangladeshi national airlines and shipping. He desired that India undertake the repair of main roads, bridges and railway communications. India was prompt in responding to these requirements. A number of Indian Administrative Service Officers were deputed to Bangladesh to carry on district administration and to manage essential supplies and food distribution. India handed over two ships and two Fokker Friendship aircraft to Bangladesh for the establishment of Bangladesh's commercial airlines and shipping lines. These ships and aircraft were offered to Bangladesh as gifts but Mujibur Rahman desired to purchase them on long-term credit with no interest. This was in keeping with his sense of self-respect for his country. India agreed to this suggestion. Indian military and railway engineers were deputed to restore surface transport communications. The Indian Navy was assigned to clear the Chittagong Port of mines laid by Pakistan.

The technically more difficult aspect of mine clearing op-

eration was undertaken by the Soviet Navy. The Food Corporation of India opened a branch office as part of India's diplomatic mission in Dhaka with field offices in different parts of Bangladesh to ensure adequate food distribution.

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Drug Menace : An Issue to Resolve

by A T M Habibur Rahman

What is needed at this moment is to mobilise public opinion into a movement against drug abuse and illegal drug traffic. Strong family ties and religious values need to be zealously inculcated in our decadent society if we are to successfully fight this scourge of drugs.

DESPITE concerted efforts at national, regional and international levels, drug situation everywhere remains grim even at a time when human civilisation has almost reached its peak and we are at the doorsteps of the 21st century with hopes and aspirations for more sustainable development and well-being of people at large. In fact, 20th century has been a landmark for the advancement of science and technology. On the other hand, this century has brought many disasters like the greenhouse effect, AIDS, drug menace etc., posing a serious threat to our hard earned civilisation. Among these, drug menace is a problem that weighs heavily upon the world conscience. To combat this problem, United Nations General Assembly in 1988, in its 48th session, decided to observe the decade from 1990 to 2000 against drug abuse and illegal drug traffic to make the people aware of the disastrous effects of drug abuse and thereby organise a movement against the drug traffickers.

The problem of drug abuse is not confined to a particular geographical location or to a particular section of people. The entire world is affected by it and consequently, it has to be resolved globally. In this connection, United Nations has initiated three international conventions:

- (1) single convention on narcotic drugs (1954) as amended by the protocol 1972; (2) convention on psychotropic substances, 1971 and (3) UN convention on narcotic drug and psychotropic substances, 1988.

These conventions have been signed and ratified by many countries including Bangladesh. In addition, in the South Asian region there is another convention known as SAARC Convention 1990.

The objective of these conventions is to have control over the movement of drugs which are lawfully used for medical

and scientific purposes and also to have control over the disposal of seized drugs. International cooperation regarding exchange of information among the signatories to the conventions is also one of the objectives of these conventions. Over and above, under these conventions, the signatories will treat drug offence as a criminal offence and in this regard, they will enunciate their rules and regulations.

Bangladesh as a signatory to these conventions has taken a serious vow to eradicate this menace and stringent legislations have been promulgated with the provision for capital punishment for trafficking more than 25 grams of heroin. This Act came into being in the year 1990 known as Narcotics Control Act 1990. DNC (Department of Narcotics Control) was established in the same year to enforce these regulations.

DNC in fact, has multi-dimensional activities like supply reduction, demand reduction, preventive education and treatment and rehabilitation. All these four sectors are equally important for the resolution of the drug problem. In the supply reduction process, availability of drug is being checked with the effective enforcement of drug law in the supply line. Concurrently, through public awareness programmes, the demand for drugs is being reduced. But that is not all. People already addicted to drugs are being treated in drug addict treatment centres. The problem does not end there. Because, after treatment, the relapse rate is alarming which ranges from 60 to 80 per cent. So the question of rehabilitation of drug addicts comes up. The entire process is a gigantic one and a matter of huge financial involvement resulting in a meagre positive output. So it is better to adhere to the old saying "Prevention is better than cure."

What is needed at this mo-

Growth of Micro Credit Financing An NGO Management Experience

by Md Enamul Haque

fast in Bangladesh, but most of such NGOs fail to maintain the required standard of service.

But some of the MFI category large NGOs have been successfully implementing their programmes. One of them is ASA. It has achieved a remarkable growth, compared with other large NGOs in Bangladesh. It has been providing financial service to the poor households efficiently in an innovative way. Its low cost management and sustainable implementation process has drawn attention of many in the country and abroad. Lot of visitors from home and abroad come to see its approaches and implementation at the field level. At present it has extended its financial service to 61 districts through 800 units and the disbursed amount up to May, '99 was Tk 1,600 crore as loan amongst nine lakh borrowers.

ASA has developed very easy

management at low cost. Its unit office is very small with one branch manager and four credit officers; one unit serves 1440 group members. All the furnitures and equipment of the units is standardized within fixed budget.

Besides cost efficiency, quick decision is another relevant factor for fast growth. ASA has decentralized the decision making authority up to grassroots (unit office) level and 16 senior level officers (divisional manager) are posted at the field level. Nobody has to depend on central office approval and unwanted delay is avoided. This innovative, fast and sustainable model is being replicated by other MFIs at home and abroad. This model was implemented in 1998 in Jordan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Cambodia and India through ASA's consultants with assistance from Save the Children (USA) and the Netherlands based donor agency BILANCE. Presently this model is being implemented in the Philippines and Nigeria, financed by UNDP.

