

Feature

When fate plays a joke on life

Destruction of illegal rickshaws may be a disguised curse for the hundreds of rickshaw pullers made jobless, writes Navine Murhsid

A sudden decision changed their lives, turned their world upside down. More than 200 hundred rickshaws were bulldozed into pieces for having no or illegal licence plates. A mobile court was set up to identify such rickshaws and once accumulated, they were crushed to bits on the Dhanmondi Field, while the rickshaw pullers looked on helplessly.

There are around two lac rickshaws plying on Dhaka streets of which only 60,000 are licensed, according to a police sergeant who was keeping vigil on the Dhanmondi ground. Rickshaw pullers, however, claimed that there were 86,000 licensed rickshaws. Even if they are right, there are more than a lac of rickshaws that are not licensed. So does that mean that they will face a similar fate? At this point no one seems to know.

Even on the following days after the destruction rickshaw pullers and their children were present on the ground trying to take make sense of the rubbish; trying to find pieces of rickshaws that would fit together; or simply taking away bits and pieces that they could sell off in absence of the police.

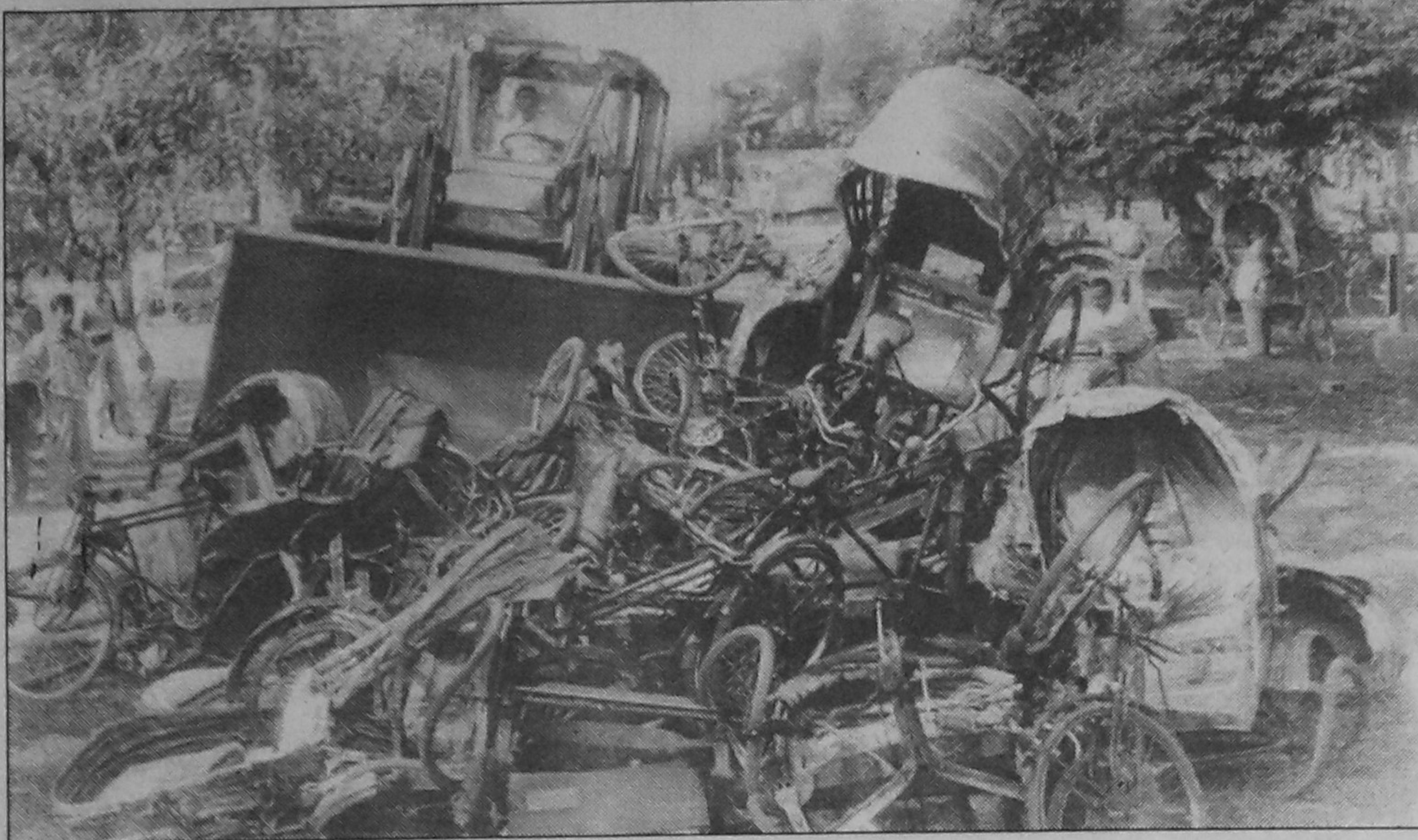
When contacted, the police officer in charge said that they were not supposed to look after that. "The property belongs to the Dhaka City Corporation and it is their duty to do whatever they felt like." He added, "We didn't break the rickshaws, the DCC did, the government did. It is not our responsibility. These have been sold off to someone and it is now private property. So, now it's not our duty to look after it either." So, is this private property on public land then?

Rickshaw pullers disagreed on the point of ownership.

These have not been sold to anyone. This heap belongs to the Dhaka City Corporation and anyone can take away these things. If someone really bought it, then where is he? Why has he left it here? questioned Jahangir, a rickshaw puller in his late thirties.

When questioned about the suddenness of the decision, the police sergeant present on the premises said that they had in fact sent out warnings not to drive in Dhaka.

"We told them (the rickshaw pullers) to drive on the outskirts, to move away from Dhaka but they never listened. There is undoubtedly a demand for rickshaws in Dhaka but there is a limit to which we can



Demolishing dreams of thousands

accommodate rickshaws. We have told them many times. It was not a sudden decision at all." He added that there are no rickshaw laws.

There are traffic rules for cars and other vehicles but nothing for rickshaws. Rickshaw pullers are not required to have licenses, but the rickshaws are. Even if they break rules, they cannot do anything about it. They can warn them, but cannot take any legal action.

"This was the only way that the DCC could stop rickshaws from plying on our streets in uncontrollable numbers," said the police sergeant who did not want to be named.

The rickshaw pullers alleged that they had to resort to illegal means because they were prohibited from using the proper channels.

"There are rich men who own rickshaws as well. They would get the licensed rickshaws and leave us with none. Then we would have to get li-

many who have up to twenty mouths to feed but have no income," said Patwari, another rickshaw puller.

There were many sorts of rickshaw licenses in the market. There were Mukti Joddha Licenses (Freedom Fighter Licenses), Awami League Licenses and many other sorts of licenses available. However, these licenses are fake and rickshaws with such seals have been bulldozed too. Rickshaw pullers were cajoled and often forced to buy such licenses since nothing else was available. They have paid a healthy amount to obtain them only to be put out of business. The licenses provided by the Dhaka City Corporation are the only original ones.

There are cases where someone bought a rickshaw just the day before the incident; there are cases where someone has been left without a penny. Rickshaw pulling brings food on a day-to-day basis. If the chain breaks down, the whole system of earning collapses. There are

many who have up to twenty mouths to feed but have no income. Today the rickshaw pullers believe that there is no one for the poor. They are bitter. Most of the rickshaw pullers have started to rent out rickshaws from those who make business this way. This means that such traders benefited from such destruction. Rickshaw pulling brings home about Tk 100 everyday. Of this, the rickshaw pullers have to give a Tk 50 cent each day. Those who have managed to rent rickshaws feel that they are in a better position because many others have become unemployed. There are hoards of people encircling the Dhanmondi Field as if to understand what happened to their fate.

The rickshaw pullers want compensation; they want jobs. They are willing to work elsewhere but there are no jobs for them. Their children are starving; their wives are quarrelling. No one can speak out because they are allegedly being

threatened by the police.

"If we say anything the police say, 'I shall arrest you on grounds of hijacking if you say a word,'" reported an elderly rickshaw puller in his late forties.

They are bitter and insecure. They do not believe anyone. They look at politicians as liars and cheats. They perceive the police to be thieves. They feel that they have been wronged. They feel that before playing with their fate like this, the government should have ensured some means of earning; some ways so that their children would not die of hunger. They are angry because they have been forced into illegality and have to pay a price for something they did not want to do in the first place.

An old man among the crowd of rickshaw-wallas commented, "They should have killed us with the bulldozer before they destroyed our rickshaws. That is our life." But the old man's words go unheard.

Information warfare

Advances in technology have often had momentous effects on warfare. From primitive weapons like spear, harpoon to modern equipment like tank, aircraft or nuclear bombs — all these technological innovations had transformed the nature of war, writes Sharmina Nasrin

IT is in the United States. With sudden disruption of its information and communication networks, the larger computerized systems have collapsed. A serious havoc has raged through its power plant and air traffic control systems; misrouted freight and passenger trains collide; funds from federal bank are being diverted electronically and some of the military's most sophisticated computer-controlled weapon systems are showing signs of electronic malaise. The FBI, CIA, Pentagon people from all of these agencies are busy to fight against the malfunctions, but the enemy, the source of disruption, is hidden.

Indeed, this is a potential scenario of warfare and possible security threat for the countries of the world for the 21st century which has come to be known as 'info war' or 'cyber terrorism'.

Advances in technology have often had momentous effects on warfare. From primitive weapons like spear, harpoon to modern equipment like tank, aircraft or nuclear bombs—all these technological innovations had transformed the nature of war. The latest revolution is the application of information technology as a weapon.

The information technology revolution is transforming warfare. No longer will massive dug-in armies fight bloody attritional battles. The traditional notion about warfare marked by two parties armed with heavy weapons—conventional or of nuclear threat and use of military force, fierce fighting, capturing territory, deterrence etc. has been changed. Instead, as we enter the computerized 21st century with the internetted modes of communication, nations are vulnerable to attacks in cyberspace with the threats of wrecking one's computing, financial, telecoms or air traffic control systems. In this mode of war, neither mass nor mobility will decide outcomes, instead the side that knows more, will enjoy decisive advantage. Information war is a com-

pletely new form of conflict that exists because of the burgeoning global information infrastructure. In fact, information is increasingly becoming a strategic resource that may prove as valuable and influential in the post-industrial era as capital and labour has been in the industrial age.

Information war refers to information related conflict between rival nations or between government and non-state actors like terrorist groups etc. It means disrupting information and communication systems through the infiltration of computer networks and databases. The relevant weapons might be computer viruses, microwave beams, or anything that can smash a satellite. On the battlefield the information warrior will aim to create an information gap between his side and the foe. He will attack the enemy's information gathering capacity and try to mislead his systems with decoys. When balance of power is not in one's favor then the weaker and smaller actor tries to turn the balance of information and knowledge in its favour. In contrast to economic wars that target the production and distribution of goods, and political wars that aim at the leadership and institutions of a government, info war would be distinguished by its targeting of information and communication.

Today technology is much more advanced and accessible. The difficulty is that the risk, despite the gains, is still very prominent. Now it is all too easy technically to penetrate the telecommunication and computer systems of nations or private organizations. The unauthorized access through computer hacking may cause systems and services to fall under the control of the intruder. These new technological capabilities called 'weapons of mass disruption', could not only transfer money out of bank accounts but also could turn off power grids or air traffic control systems, disrupt satellite services and destroy the ability to operate larger systems. Such cyber-terrorists could even introduce morphed images and

messages into a country's radio and television systems, spreading lies and inciting people to violence.

These unauthorized activities can be done through an innocent-looking source and thus it hides the tracks of the intruder. With all these, the threat of information attacks has already been unfolded. Countries like Iran, Iraq and Libya are reported to pursue information terrorism. And the main target states are the US and its allies. The US is vitally dependent upon information systems and networks in most important aspects of its life. Nearly everything it does from designing and guiding weapons to conducting economic transactions depends upon computer-driven information networks. Any clandestine assault on any of its information nodes will cause serious hazards for the country. Western governments worry that an information strike could crash their own computer networks. The US is trying to prevent and neutralize hostile acts in cyberspace. America's National Security Agency has already recruited hundreds of people to grapple with info war. Information war offices are even being set up in the Army, Navy and Air Force.

However, since sea changes are occurring in information systems, countries of the world can no longer provide protection from cyber terrorism. All the elements that make the modern society function could be at risk through this unconventional kind of attack. Though the magnitude and consequences of the problem are not yet fully understood, given the proliferation of satellites, massive databases, global computer networks and increasing dependence on these, cyberspace vulnerabilities is a matter of grave concern. Instead of traditional military security, nations now need to think of information or cyberspace security to survive in the 21st century.

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Islanders net rewards of Africa-Asia superhighway

A \$600 million undersea cable being laid between Asia and Africa is set to revolutionise telecommunications across a host of developing countries, Naseem Ackbarally reports from an island-nation which stands to be one of the main beneficiaries

MAURITIUS is preparing for its first wired link to the mainland thanks to a \$600 million undersea link that promises to end the days of crackly telephone lines and usher in fresh economic opportunities.

This small Indian Ocean island-nation stands to be a major beneficiary of the South Africa-Far East (SAFE) undersea cable, due to be completed by the middle of next year, which could see an end to its dependence on unreliable satellite and microwave links.

The 11,000-kilometre fibre-optic link — between Durban in South Africa and Penang in Malaysia — will offer high-speed and reliable telecommunications to a host of developing nations.

"I feel some sort of a revolution is going to take place on our island," says Jean-Luc Mootooosamy, an Internet enthusiast in the capital Port Louis.

He anticipates clearer connections when he telephones his sister in Switzerland and blazing speeds on future Internet connections, allowing him to send and retrieve e-mail quickly and to download pictures and documents.

Telecommunications Minister Sarat Lallah says, "This cable will not only provide secure uninterrupted connectivity of

Mauritius to other parts of the world during cyclones, but will also allow us to join the information superhighway and be part of the global information society."

Mauritius is well-placed to take advantage of his telecommunications boost. The country has 21.4 telephone lines per 100 people — ranking this tourist destination well above other African nations and on a par with most Latin American countries.

Mauritius currently depends on satellite and microwave links for international telecommunications. But signals often have limited coverage and can be disrupted or distorted by bad weather, including cyclones that sweep through the region from November to April.

Mauritian callers are frustrated by cracks, echoes and other interference on their telephones — particularly on long-distance calls. Connections to the African continent are worst, while overseas callers to Mauritius often have difficulty getting through and are greeted by a recording or a busy tone.

"Such a situation can go on for more than a day at a time, causing major disruptions in the island's flow of business," complains Gaffar Peeroo, a trader in this country of 1.2 million people.

The new SAFE cable will link with the West African Submarine Cable (WASC), which runs 17,700 kilometres from South Africa to Portugal. The two will provide an alternative to existing cable connections between Europe, America and Asia.

Other African countries to benefit from the link-up include Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Senegal. All have less than 1.5 telephone lines per 100 population except the Ivory Coast, which has a 'teledensity' of 11.5.

Megh Pillay, chief executive of Mauritius Telecom, says SAFE and WASC will put telecommunications standards on a par with the most advanced nations. The benefits will also help his firm, which is investing \$29 million in the scheme.

"This big telecommunications project offers numerous advantages to our company," Pillay says. "It allows Mauritius Telecom to have access to modern technology and to increase its revenues through traffic generated by a new market potential."

Forty international telecommunications firms have paid for more than 90 per cent of the project. A United States company has the contract to build the system. Design

work on the Mauritius segment is under way and installation is due to begin this June, with completion expected 12 months later.

It can transmit information 1,000 times faster than the satellite network, Pillay says. Fibre-optic cables carry information converted into pulses of light and transmitted through strands of glass only slightly thicker than human hair.

Sailesh Sempaul, Internet officer at the State Bank of Mauritius, comments: "We in the banking sector are very

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much interested by SAFE as it will no doubt help boost electronic commerce and the fast processing of foreign bank transactions.

"Today, there's congestion on the Net, particularly in the afternoon and at night. Mauritian have lots of difficulties getting connected at a time when Americans are on their feet. We have to wait for them to go to sleep — then we can get easy connection to the Net. SAFE should improve on that."

The new cable system should also improve the marketability of Mauritius as an offshore banking centre, says Telecommunications Minister Lallah.

"The project will facilitate regional access to e-mail, along with website development to attract buyers and investors and the opportunity to enhance inter-company telecommunications," he points out. "It will also make it easier and cheaper for social services to be provided across the continent through the use of applications such as tele-medicine and distance education." — GEMINI NEWS

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Mundas in misery

Munda is an almost isolated community and they hardly get any attention from the state. That is why an immeasurable discrimination exists between them and us, writes Sk. Mashudur Rahman

A good number of ethnic communities are found in our country. Every ethnic community is unique just for its norms, values, customs, activities etc. Anthropologists express their views that ethnic community is the pre-step of nation. But in reality, they are usually known as uncivilized and technologically backward section of the society. Most of the people do not know the uniqueness about their customs and traditions. Often they are neglected and victimized by neighbouring villages or countrymen. Many time even the state remains silent about their legality of their property right or other relevant issues. Munda is such a community whose history is known to a very few. This community is found mainly the southern and northern part of Bangladesh. People of our country are more or less familiar with the Munda community of the northern part, though those found in the Southern part are still beyond the notice of the common people. Southern Munda is found especially in Khulna and the coastal area of Sundarban. They demand that their original residence was in Rachi Zila of India. Moreover, about two hundreds years ago the Zamindar of this region brings the Munda in this particular part through a treaty. In fact, they are the first people who are to cultivate the vast area of southern part by cutting the jungle.

The people of Munda community speak in Nagri language among themselves and teach their children to speak in the same language. Never the less they speak in Bengali with the surrounding people. We find much similarity in Nagri language with Bengali, Hind and parsian language.

Munda community mainly follows the Hindu religions but they demand that they worship in the same way in which the ancestors of the Hill Tracts of Rachi Zila used to worship and this is revered by the leaders of the society. In the worship ceremonies 'Hen' is considered as a sacred symbol. Their major pujas are sham, karam, shayal and valuea. Valuea puza is adored before planting paddy. They believe that the production of the crops will be high through this worship. Sham-puza is held in the month of Falgun and chattr. At the time of worship song and dance are performed in every house. At the later part of the month of vadro, karam Puza is arranged. In this ceremony the invited persons take rice, dal with them from their homes. The purpose of this Puza is specially for the getting rid of dangers. The Puza, which they offer in the purpose to receive the New Year, is called Shayal Puza.

This community is divided into various clans such as vimrul, kachua, Ruapadma, Tuti, Votqua, Razua etc. marriage is not allowed within the same clan, often marriage is arranged within different clans because they assume that if marriage is held within own group, then it will need to



Some members of the Munda community

change the kinship terminology that prevailed before. This is the why if somebody denies this rule then he will be ostracized from the own group. But in this respect the society have a own system to bring him back his own caste. If the out caste Munda arrange a special feast where he invites ten Munda communities for a meal and serve them with meal of a sacrificed goat, then he can return his own community as a pure. They consider this system as a great device to control the society. They also mean that no Munda can dare to marry anyone outside their own caste thinking this punishment. As a result peace and discipline will prevail in the society.

No incantation is uttered in a marriage ceremony of a Munda community, it usually ends up with the formal ceremonies. One of the customs is that blood of little fingers from both brides and bridegrooms are kept separately on mango leaves. After that by wrapping those leaves, the wrap containing the blood of the bride is put on the neck of groom and the wrap containing the bride of the groom is similarly fitted to the neck of the bride. They believe that blood bond is thus formed. Then when the groom adorns the bride with vermilion, the social leaders of their society ask him whether he will be able to maintain his wife for ever. If he agrees with this statement, then he is permitted to adorn the bride with vermilion. Moreover, before the bride goes to the house of bridegroom for

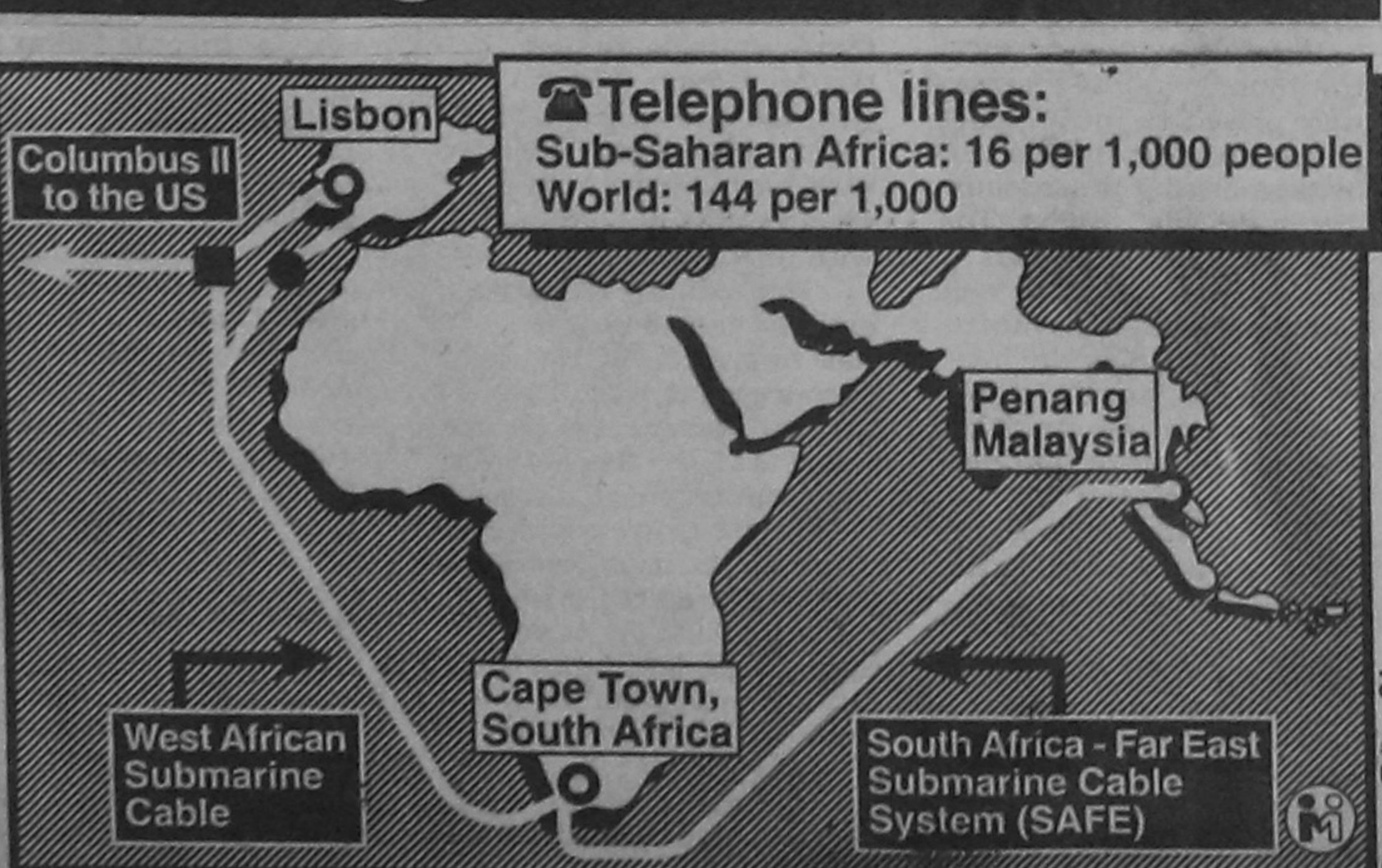
marriage, at first a white hen is sacrificed and then putting his left leg on the blood of the hen, he goes to bridegroom's house dressed as a bride. They do this with the belief that there will not encounter any obstacles. Usually the chiefs perform the rituals of the marriage. The southern part of Bangladesh is mainly a salty area. The shrimp fry is cultivated in this area in large scale for being salty. For this reason vegetables and paddy are merely cultivated, but they cultivate vegetable in the yards of their house. It is interesting matter that though they live near jungle, they do not depend on the jungle for their livelihood. Both male and female of the Munda community work in the field, but in agri sector the women perform their duty more perfectly than the males. It is noticeable aspect that when they go out as labourer, they usually go in banded together. A single Munda is never seen working as labourer. Form this view it is clear that the social ties of this community is very strong. The women do much more work than men, not with standing they do not want to get same wages as the men thinking that it hampers their prestige of men. The local lords and moneylenders are taking the benefits from their such values. The another way of their livelihood is that in the season of harvesting monsoon they go out with spade and basket. Afterwards they collect the corns of paddy from rates hole. In the meantime they also try to catch

the rat, because they are very fond of rat meat. Beside this, they like the meat of goat and pig. But now a day they mainly eat rice, fish and vegetable. In the rainy season, they face food crises and so they use the bulb of his flower, as food. Sometimes they collect wood and honey from jungle and sell in the local market. The male, female and children catch fish from canals and streams near of their residence and sell this in local market. Mentionable that the Munda community used to lead their life with simplicity and in riches from the very beginning. Later on the Bengali begins to establish their residence near the Munda community and tried to possess the land of Munda community technically. In this process, at present, the Munda society has reached at such a situation that they have not enough land to build their shelter. At present, they live beside the Wagda road and canal and are tortured and exploited by the elite's and money lenders in diverse ways.

Now Munda is an almost isolated community and they hardly get any attention from the state. That is why an immeasurable discrimination exists between them and us. So, various steps should immediately be taken to minimize this prevailing discrimination and to help them improve their living conditions and maintain their traditions, customs and beliefs.

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Dialling Africa



Source: Telkom SA