



HUMAN RIGHTS *advocacy*



RIGHTS *investigation*



GENDER EQUALITY

Women are still left out of decision-making process

YASMIN RIMI

WOMEN in this male-dominated society have always been left out of the mainstream. The men in the families have made decisions for them. Few women can decide what is good or bad for them. What is true at the family level is also good at national level. Women lag behind men in all aspects of the society.

In national politics women have yet to get proper recognition. The demand that the number of reserved seats for women in Parliament be increased and the seats be filled in direct votes by women has yet to be accepted by the government. Only five women were directly elected in the 300-member Parliament in 1991 elections; only seven in 1996 and six in 2001. It's thus clear that women have little voice in the country's legislature.

The position of women in the political parties is also weak. That in turn makes their position in the government ever weaker. A handful of female ministers in the Cabinet seem to be helpless.

In 1991, the size of the Cabinet was of 39 members; except the Prime Minister, there was only one woman in the form of a state minister; in the 1996 Cabinet there were only two female ministers among the 38 Cabinet members, except the Prime Minister; the current 60-member Cabinet has only two female members besides Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Women thus account for only five per cent of the cabinet.

Says Mahmuda Islam, a professor at Dhaka University and a social thinker, "The number of female ministers is negligible. On the other hand, they have been given the charge of ministries that deal with the traditional roles of women in our country like household activities or affairs related to mothers. For example, Women and Children Affairs Ministry, Social Welfare, Cultural Affairs and Primary Education."

The number of women in government jobs is far fewer than men. There are even fewer women in the higher administrative jobs. There is a provision of keeping aside 10 per cent of government jobs for women, a system that has remained unfulfilled.

According to a 2000 report of the Establishment Ministry, among the 49 government secretaries 48 are men and only

one woman; in the posts of additional secretaries 54 men and one woman, in the posts of joint secretaries there were only five women among the 275 officers and only seven women among 659 deputy secretaries of the government.

Women are subjected to discrimination and gender bias in government jobs. Many do not get jobs even after fulfilling all the necessary conditions.

This has greatly undermined the concept of equality between men and women," says Dr. Mahbuba Nasrin, a teacher of Sociology at Dhaka University. "Equal opportunities for men and women could lead to decline in violence in the society," she believes.

"She says women are not allowed to make decisions. They are treated as inferior human beings. Men dismiss women as less intelligent. They are not treated as human beings, but considered as mere women."

Given opportunities women can prove their talent and worth in politics. In the UP elections, female candidates canvassed for votes as strongly as the men did. Some 50-70 per cent female voters cast their ballots.

A survey conducted by Khan Foundation has, however, revealed that women can play a greater role in the society if they are elected in direct votes competing with men. Direct polls are better for women's empowerment, according to the study. The survey further showed that 82 per cent of female UP members were not satisfied with their jobs.

"We have been elected in the reserved seats for women. Yet we are not called to attend important meetings. We are not allowed to deal with or sign important documents. The male members keep us away from work saying that there has not been any manual for female members," complains Minara Begum, a female ward member at Chiniapur Union in Narsingdi district.

While literacy among women has increased in the past few decades, women are still few in higher education. Still women are trying to go ahead.

According to UNDP, more Bangladeshi women take part in economic activities in Bangladesh than its South Asian neighbours. In 2003, it was 55.9 per cent in Bangladesh. In India it was only 25.7 per cent, Pakistan 15.2 per cent and in Sri Lanka 47.4 per cent.

Says Mashuda Khatun Shefali, Executive Director at Nari Uddyog Kendra, "In this male-dominated society, women are subjugated by men. That's why women can't fully utilise their abilities or talent. But we must not forget that women make up half the country's population. We will not be able to reduce poverty unless we are able to allow women to work."

According to Tasmina Hossain, editor of Ananya magazine: "The subjugation of women by men starts at family level. Girls are always told about Dos and Don'ts. Thus they lose their natural talent and initiatives. They become mentally crippled and their self-confidence declines. That's why their talent of leadership does not always flourish."

-NewsNetwork

Colombian villagers want own peace deal



THE latest victim of land mines in this tiny fog-shrouded hamlet atop the Andes mountains is Luisa Fernanda Ceballos Valencia, a 45-day-old baby. Luisa Fernanda's grandfather, Manuel, stepped on a mine and lost a leg as the family entered the town last month. When the baby's mother, Nancy, came to the rescue, she also stepped on a mine and is now in a wheelchair. Little Luisa Fernanda is recovering from shrapnel wounds.

The plight of the Ceballos Valencia family isn't unusual in this town of 600, four hours east of Medellin. In the past two years, 60 people have died or were injured by land mines sown by insurgents battling for control of this region. But rather than waiting for a national peace deal between the government and rebels, the residents of Aquitania are taking their safety into their own hands. Just as they negotiated an end to a nine-month siege of their town by leftist rebels, this week they will try to persuade them to unilaterally de-mine the area. With the help of local officials and a land-mine group, they hope to come to an agreement. If successful, the organization that's working with the residents hopes it's an approach that can be exported to other towns in Colombia. "The goal is to talk with everyone," says Alvaro Jimenez, head of the Colombia Campaign Against Land Mines, which is affiliated with the Geneva-based International Campaign Against Land Mines. "It isn't necessary to end the war in Colombia in order to attend to the needs of the communities."

Colombia has the third highest number of land-mine victims in the world (812 last year), according to the government, behind Angola and Afghanistan. Thirty-nine percent of its victims are civilians rather than soldiers. It is the only country in Latin America where mines are used; the Colombian government is complying with international obligations to destroy its arsenal, but the leftist rebels known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) - are increasing their use. President Alvaro Uribe has launched a major offensive against the FARC that has them retreating to the jungles, sowing land mines as they go. "When you analyze the success of Uribe's democratic security strategy, the only subject that doesn't show favorable results is the subject of land mines," says Mr. Jimenez, who adds that the number of land-mine accidents in 2005 was already on track to exceed those of 2004. Antioquia has some reason to believe the rebels will agree to de-mine the area. In an unprecedented move

last December - as part of national peace talks that have since failed - the ELN agreed to remove explosives around Micoahumado, a town which shares the title with Antioquia as having the most mine victims this past year. The ELN removed 71 mines, yet refused to de-mine the town's soccer field and part of the highway because it was too dangerous. A major problem with de-mining in Colombia is that the only people who know exactly where the mines are members of armed groups who may have died in combat. The Micoahumado deal has also run into trouble because Uribe's government frowns upon local governments negotiating with insurgents. They see it as undermining the national peace strategy. "We don't want to damage the community's process," insists Luz Piedad Herrera, the head of the Vice President's Observatory on Landmines. "Nongovernmental groups can come in to verify, but they can't negotiate with the groups." In Aquitania, citizens are moving ahead with plans to broker their own deal. On May 13, the Campaign Against Mines and local officials will meet with the community to start the process. The hope is that despite continuing conflict in the area, the armed groups will agree to de-mine farming and recreation sites, schools, and areas near water sources. They hope the outcome will be successful because Aquitania already has experience with striking a peace deal. In March 2004, the FARC was fighting against right-wing paramilitaries and it banned cars on the dirt road from Aquitania to the nearest highway. After food supplies ran out, villagers negotiated with both sides to guarantee safe passage via mule to get supplies. "Here at one time there wasn't even a kilogram of salt," says Jose Ignacio Ramirez, president of the town council, who was part of a group of villagers who decided they'd had enough. "We organized some people from the community and some leaders from the farms. The paramilitaries had also issued threats," he says. "We talked with both groups." In December, transport resumed and the villagers went back to work. But soon land mines were placed along the route from town to the farms outside the village where people work. Though the Army removes mines - 25 were deactivated last month, says the local commander - they are quickly reseeded by the rebels. Marta Montoya, a teacher in the village, is skeptical the FARC will voluntarily remove mines. "These are their weapons," she says.

Source: CS Monitor.

LAW *week*



Trial of Ctg arms haul case begins

Trial of the sensational Chittagong Arms case began at the Chittagong Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court. The first investigating officer (IO) of the case Ahadur Rahman, also the then Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Kamaphuli Police Station, gave his deposition before Judge Anwar Hossain.

During the hearing, nine pieces of firearms and ammunitions, each of the items of the arms recovered on April 2 last year, were produced as the evidence before the court for the first time.

Members of Bangladesh Army, the present custodian of the recovered arms, produced the evidence before the court. Thirty of the 43 accused were present during the hearing. Twelve of them sought bail but the court granted bail to five -- Bazal Ahmad, Akber Ali, Dilder Hossain, Sanowar Hossain and Ezhar Mia. Nineteen of the accused, including the five, are now on bail while 12 are in custody. The court fixed August 7 for the next hearing. -- *The Daily Star, July 7.*

Arrest warrant against 2 editors for running story on Pintu

A Dhaka court issued arrest warrant against editors of two Bangla national dailies minutes into a ruling BNP lawmaker filed two separate defamation cases against the newspapers for publishing reports that linked him and his family members with the Jubo Dal leader Sagir Ahmed killing.

Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, lawmaker from Dhaka-8 constituency, filed the cases against five persons including the editors and publishers of Prothom Alo and Janakantha.

Besides issuing bailable warrant of arrest against Prothom Alo Editor Motiur Rahman and Janakantha Editor and Publisher Mohammad Atiq Ullah Khan Masud, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullalhel Baki issued summons upon Prothom Alo Publisher Mahfuz Anam and Janakantha Advisory Editor Toab Khan and Executive Editor Borhan Ahmed.

Accompanied by a few hundred of his supporters, Pintu went to the courthouse in a procession and filed a case against the editor and publisher of Prothom Alo and another against the rest three. Although there is prohibition imposed by the High Court on processions and rallies on the court premises, they entered the court area in procession, halting court proceedings for about an hour. -- *Prothom Alo, July 8.*

Vested quarter harasses ASK for anti-Rab stance

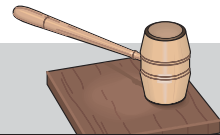
After threatening Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), over telephone for questioning the Rapid Action Battalion's "extra-judicial killings", a vested quarter is now propagating against the organisation by putting up posters at different parts of the city.

These posters, displayed mainly in the city's Central Road and the press club areas, criticise the ASK and human rights activists for objecting to the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) drives against criminals.

"Where were they [ASK and human rights activists] when people died, were raped and mutilated by terrorists?" the posters read. Terming the human rights activists "danobadhikari" (monsters), the posters say, "If supporting the rapists, murderers and extortionists is manobadhikar [human rights], then we say 'no' to it."

Earlier the ASK held the publication ceremony of a book titled "Rab: Curbing Terrorism or State-run Terrorism." The ASK book is mainly a compilation of articles by different persons expressing concern over the "extra-judicial killings" by the Rab. The book also contains investigative reports, newspaper clippings and statistics of the number of the extra-judicial killings by the Rab. -- *The Daily Star, July 8.*

LAW *watch*



UNHCR helps 100,000 Afghans to repatriate this year

JACK REDDEN

More than 100,000 Afghan refugees have returned from Pakistan since UNHCR's voluntary repatriation programme for 2005 started in March. The pace of returns is expected to increase, with camp closures planned in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Of the total of 101,224 returnees processed by the time the last truck

departed on Tuesday, almost half - 48,967 - had been living in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province. But the Afghans came from all over Pakistan: 27,168 from Balochistan, 13,627 from Punjab and Islamabad, and 11,462 from Sindh.

The UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme began in 2002 and has now helped nearly 2.4 million Afghans to return from Pakistan, the largest repatriation operation in the world. The UN refugee agency estimates up to 400,000 Afghans could go home from Pakistan during this year.

The repatriation programme is governed by the Tripartite Agreement

government also said it intends to soon after close all other camps in the FATA region.

The residents of the camps, including about 30,000 in North Waziristan, will be offered a choice of voluntary repatriation through UNHCR or relocation to another existing site chosen by the government.

All Afghans in Pakistan who wish to repatriate are eligible to receive a travel grant of \$3 to \$30 per person,



UNHCR, established that just over three million Afghans - refugees and other categories - live in Pakistan. The current rate of repatriation is similar to returns in 2003, when 104,092 went home by the end of May, but behind the pace in 2004 when 141,666 Afghans went home in the same period. A total of 343,074 repatriated in 2003 and 383,598 in 2004.

However, the pace of repatriation is likely to pick up in the next month because the government of Pakistan has announced that all refugee camps in North Waziristan, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, will be closed by the end of June. The

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UNHCR Pakistan

LAW *news*

Biosafety: international meeting to adopt binding rules on trade in GMOs

Representatives of 119 governments are expected to adopt binding rules on the documentation that has to accompany genetically modified agricultural commodities, such as wheat, maize and soya, when they are transported across borders. These rules will ensure that only approved GMOs enter the territory of the respective Parties. The documentation requirements are the most important point on the agenda of the Second Meeting of the Parties (MOP2) to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, which will take place in Montreal, Canada.

At the meeting, the European Commission, which is negotiating on behalf of the EU, will push for documentation requirements that are clear, meaningful, practical for establishing themselves. Those repatriating go through an iris recognition test that ensures they cannot receive assistance a second time. They receive their grants after arriving in Afghanistan.

In all, more than 3 million Afghan refugees worldwide have returned home under the UNHCR voluntary repatriation programme that started in early 2002.

- building activities in developing countries,
- ! The operation of the web-based information exchange portal
- ! Established by the Protocol, the so called Biosafety Clearing House,
- ! Public awareness and participation,
- ! Rules of procedure for the Protocol's compliance mechanism.

MOP2 is being preceded 25-27 May by another meeting in the framework of the Protocol, which is devoted to the development of rules and procedures on liability for damage caused by GMOs. This is the first step in a negotiation process due to finish by 2008.

The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety is the only international treaty governing the cross-border transport of genetically modified organisms and a supplementary

agreement to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. The rules set out in the Protocol are intended to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and protect the public from the potentially harmful effects of GMOs. The Protocol entered into force on 11 September 2003 and currently has 119 Parties, including all Member States and the European Community.

The Cartagena Protocol is incorporated into EU legislation through a wide range of laws. The cornerstone of this legal framework is Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms. It is supplemented by a Regulation on the transboundary movements of GMOs, which was adopted in 2003.

Source: Europa International.

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