

## Indigenous families in helpless state

*Govt must intervene to uphold their rights*

INDIGENOUS people of Porsha upazila in Naogaon district have organised a two-day long march under the banner of Jatiyo Adibashi Parishad to protest attacks on them by land grabbers, which have left around three hundred members of the affected families without any shelter.

The attacks are reported to have been launched by a group of local musclemen led by one Nur Hossain Master. The attackers clearly had the sinister objective of driving away the poor, vulnerable indigenous people from their homes as they torched and damaged the houses, and mercilessly beat up the indigenous men, women and children.

What happened in Porsha is no doubt an example of the worst kind of oppression and violation of the rights of a small group of ethnic minority. It also show how these indigenous people end up paupers as their land is being grabbed regularly by influential locals having no respect for the law or the rights of fellow citizens. Matters really become critical when the local administration and law enforcers adopt a do-nothing stand or even help the land grabbers evict the helpless small ethnic groups.

The victims have alleged that the officer-in-charge of Porsha police station is abetting the attackers and they have also demanded his immediate removal. This is a serious allegation that needs to be gone into and appropriate step taken by the higher authority. Actually, that is where the problem becomes complex and the extent of gross injustice that the ethnic minorities are exposed to can be gauged without any difficulty. They live in a hostile social setting with the land grabbers pouncing on them from time to time. And their only hope is strict enforcement of the law. But if the law enforcers themselves appear to be backing the predators, where will these people go?

The Porsha incident indicates that the seminars and meetings arranged regularly in the cities to bring into focus the precarious condition of the indigenous people notwithstanding, the ethnic minorities remain vulnerable to impingements on their rights. However, the point is that at least the law enforcers should not support the attackers out to obliterate the very existence of the small ethnic groups. And the government should also be careful and considerate enough not to step on their land or homestead while implementing any project.

Speakers at a seminar held in the city on Sunday very rightly observed that the support of mainstream people is vital for protection of ethnic minority rights. Obviously, land grabbers take advantage of the sad truth that ethnic minority groups usually live in isolation and enjoy little or no legal support. So, the mainstream people, including human rights activists, have to come forward and take a clear stand with a view to preventing repetition of Porsha type assaults on ethnic minorities.

## Current state of Jamuna Bridge

*Repairing it must be the top most priority*

WE have been hearing about cracks on the Jamuna Bridge for quite sometime now. And we have been getting mixed reports about it. It is regrettable that governments over the last several years since the cracks were discovered have not let the public have definitive information in the matter nor acted on it.

One is not really sure as to what the extent of the damage is, or the degree of threat posed to the bridge, if at all. Neither are we aware of any action to prevent further damage. This is unacceptable given that the Jamuna Bridge is perhaps the most important infrastructure installation in Bangladesh.

It is also disquieting to learn that the bridge suffers from design and construction deficiencies which automatically raise the question as to why the authorities went ahead with the construction without having the flaws removed in the first place. There was a very high-powered authority, the Jamuna multi-purpose bridge authority, which was given the task to see to its design and construction. It should be for it to provide satisfactory answers to the queries on the bridge.

In the meanwhile the parliamentary committee on communications has held the construction firm, Hyundai of Korea, responsible for the cracks and directed the bridge authority to realise compensation from the company, and go for litigation should the firm not pay up.

Getting the contractor to honour its commitment and compensate for the cracks or solving the matter through the court is no doubt an important aspect of the issue. However, there are a few steps that we would like to highlight, which, side by side with pursuing the matter vis-a-vis Hyundai, the government should take urgently.

First, it must set up a committee to conduct an audit to assess the condition of the bridge. It must go to the bottom of the matter to determine how and why the cracks have occurred, the extent of damage and the current state of the bridge, and the risks that the cracks pose. The authorities should then initiate necessary repair work to arrest further deterioration. Secondly, and equally important, determine what are the design faults that the bridge suffers from, and how these can be rectified.

The matter must be handled most expeditiously for it is inconceivable that flaws and damage to a most vital key point installation can be left unattended in the way it has been so far.

## What change in a crime-infested society?

Therefore, change in a society full of wrong people in the right places will only remain a dream unless we act now. Will any of the theories of development be of any use in a crime-infested society?

SHAHNOOR WAHID

EDGAR Allan Poe, HG Wells, Washington Irving, Arthur Conan Doyle, Earle Stanley Gardner, Bram Stoker, Merry Shelly et al are known for their stories that delved in the world of the macabre, or crimes of most heinous nature. But the blood-chilling things they wrote about did not happen in real life. The ghastly characters they created did not live in real life. That is why those stories have always been considered classics, masterpieces.

But the days of the classics are long gone. The House of Usher has long been rendered into ruin. Things have undergone changes in this modern world that we live in. Meaning of life and living has changed. Playful imagination has been replaced by stark reality. Today, stranger things happen in real life. There are more hideous men and women in our midst than what those great writers could ever create with their imagination.

Today, there is an alarming slide in law and order in our society because of fast erosion of morals and values. The law enforcement sector remains painfully politicised. And it is shameful that health and education are now two highly commercialised sectors thanks to a host of corrupt people. The public transport system is infested with criminals. It is of no use banging your head on the wall about it. There is none to see or listen. The food sector offers more poison than nutrition to the people thanks to some criminalised traders.

Already a large chunk of the ever-increasing population has no work and, as a result, the jobless are being drawn into the crime world. A flawed economic system is creating more poor people than it should. The number of criminals will rapidly increase when our population reaches the ceiling of 30 crore. How big a police force and Rab shall we need to keep law and order?

It is the duty of the politicians, whether in government or outside, to think about these grave issues and work together to create a just, safe and orderly society. But most of them, unfortunately, directly or indirectly contribute to the sliding of law and order, morals and values. In the rural areas and also partly in the cities and towns the local goons of many MPs and chairmen keep law enforcers in their pockets and go about breaking laws with total impunity.

Instead of working together to implement an efficient population policy or traffic system etc., most politicians, whenever they get the opportunity, join hands to pass insinuating and devious remarks about the members of the civil society and the press. It happens when they find something "unbelievable" to write about the corrupt politicians. And whenever they do so, those politicians find all sorts of words to deny any wrongdoing.

But, think of it. The honest and respectable politicians never utter a word about the criminal activities of their own party men when such news items appear in newspapers. They keep on denying, but the whole world knows that many killers, muggers, snatchers, swindlers, tenderbaz, kidnappers and war criminals remain under the protection and security of some criminalised politicians, businessmen and members of law enforcing agencies. Lawlessness is the result of less law enforcement, when and where essential.

But why blame the politicians only? What about many of our teachers? The irony is, some rogue teachers are blackening the image of the entire community. Here is one example. Six teachers and three students of one college in Green Road area have been arrested for ransacking property of another college in the same area. Six teachers? Yes, you heard it right.

What about the slide in the morals of students of famous educational institutes



of the country? It shocks us when we hear that Dhaka College students are involved in kidnapping for ransom, and also collecting tolls from the local shops. And they openly fight with students of other colleges in the neighbourhood for the control of the million taka "baniya." It is crime, plain and simple.

Such criminal activities do get reflected in the overall performance of the students in competitive examinations. In this year's HSC examination, Dhaka College performed poorly. What a pity. So many glittering stars of this nation had gone to this college before going to Dhaka University or Calcutta University.

Now we see a new game of vendetta started by the known corrupt souls of the country who were sent to jails for committing palpable crimes, including amassing wealth beyond the comprehension of their fourteen generations.

They have come out on bails and now alongside some of the politicians, who were possibly wrongly implicated in some kind of corruption cases, have started to demand withdrawal of cases framed against them. Though they could not produce evidence of earning the wealth through legal means, yet they are using their political clout to get their cases

quashed. So, Altus and Faltus will soon be back with a bang but poor Ram or Rahim will never know why they were in prison.

Last but not least. We have a plethora of well-equipped intelligence agencies in the country. But with all the power and with all the gadgets, they could not track down foreign trained terrorists who have been coming to Bangladesh since the Russians left Afghanistan. They have been coming in the guise of religious leaders and staying in madrasas across the country. They have been traced out only recently, when the damage has already been done.

These foreign terrorists have been giving madrasa students training on terrorism to create a fighting force that would one day topple the democratic government and help attain their political ambition. They do not believe in the country's constitution and sovereignty. It is a major crime network that is working steadily to destabilise the state.

Therefore, change in a society full of wrong people in the right places will only remain a dream unless we act now. Will any of the theories of development be of any use in a crime-infested society?

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star. He can be contacted at shahnoorwahid@yahoo.co.uk

## Practice what you preach

It can be said that in Bangladesh many media houses offer poor salaries to their journalists. This is definitely against the spirit of social responsibility of the press. There is a saying that "charity begins at home," so social responsibility of the press should start from the offices of media houses.

DELWAR HOSSAIN ARIF

THE editor of the daily *Prothom Alo*, Matiur Rahman, in the inauguration ceremony of a media firm related with training and research of journalism, highlighted the ensuring of a corruption free and responsible media in Bangladesh. His point drew the attention of readers, academics and general people of Bangladesh.

Despite the fact that media in Bangladesh are very vocal in highlighting the news and opinions on corruption of different people and institutions, there is not much coverage on the corruption in the media sector. Accordingly, it is relevant to ask: Are the media out of circle of corruption in a country like Bangladesh, which ranked as the top most corrupt country for several years? Are the media faultless?

These questions have not been raised in our country only. There is worldwide concern about the issue, and the media themselves have been asking these questions. *The Guardian*, one of the largest, oldest and most reputed newspapers in the world, is the pioneer in this process.

The management of *The Guardian* believe that the most important asset for survival of the media is the trust of their readers and viewers. They also think that if the media do not ask questions about their own functions, and let the society know about it, they have no right to ask questions about the society.

As a mirror of the society, the media should start with seeing their own faces in the mirror. *The Guardian* authorities also think that most of the media perform their corporate responsibilities in the name of so-called social responsibility of the press.

It is an undeniable fact that most of the media of the world are part of big corporate business organisations, and they believe in social responsibility of the press in words only, not in actions.

The fact is that performing social responsibility through news and opinions depends on the perspectives of individuals. For example, something that is considered as socially responsible by some may be considered totally irresponsible by others. So, the management of *The Guardian* think that the media, to perform social responsibility in a real sense, should pay attention to some issues.

For example, as corporate organisations, the media should ensure transparency and accountability in the internal activities of their offices. As an example, it can be said that in Bangladesh many media houses offer poor salaries to their journalists. This is definitely against the spirit of social responsibility of the press. There is a saying that "charity begins at home," so social responsibility of the press should start from the offices of media houses.

The media should maintain transparency and accountability in publishing news. In each media organisation, there should be an editor who will deal with

complaints from readers. A report (Social Audit) should be published at the end of the year on the activities related to maintaining transparency and accountability within the media house.

An independent auditor will evaluate the activities of the media and submit a report, and the media house should publish it. If the media house has a website, then it should post that report on the site.

*The Guardian* has been publishing these social audits from 2003, which has drawn the attention of readers, media researchers and academics all over the world. It published its sixth report in 2008. With this social auditing system, the long debated issue of implementation of social responsibility of the press is going to end.

The media in Bangladesh can start the social auditing system following the steps of *The Guardian*. In this way, they can curb corruption in their organisations and ensure accountability. Overall, the media can earn the people's trust and praise, which are the main capital of media business.

Delwar Hossain Arif is an Assistant Professor and former Chairman, Department of Communication and Journalism of University of Chittagong, and is now pursuing higher studies in the US.

## 'Indispensable and imperfect'

Since US invaded Iraq in 2003 without UN support, the country's engagement with the world body has wavered between grudging participation and downright hostility. When he assumed office, President Obama signalled an immediate change in tone by appointing Susan Rice, a national-security expert who worked on terrorism and Africa during the Clinton administration, as the American UN ambassador. Rice spoke to Newsweek's Andrew Bast recently about Washington's new position and what it means for the world's most threatening challenges.

**Bast:** How have you changed the US approach at the UN since taking over as ambassador?

**Rice:** In implementing President Obama's commitment to engage with the rest of the world, we're trying to demonstrate -- in tone and in substance -- new form of American leadership, one that seeks partnership and cooperative solutions rather than confrontation for confrontation's sake. One that recognises that our national interests can often be best served by bringing other countries together to achieve the goals we seek.

**Is Resolution 1874, passed June 12, strong enough to contain North Korea?**  
It is the strongest package of sanctions in

effect against any country in the world today. The aim is to constrain North Korea's ability to pursue its missile and nuclear programs by taking away the revenue that it has derived in the past from arms exports, (by) inspecting vessels believed to be containing contraband cargo, and (by) freezing the assets of more North Korean companies and individuals. So this is a strong regime that we believe, when fully implemented, will bite in North Korea.

**The first ship that was targeted after the resolution has in fact made its way back to North Korea, correct?**

There was a ship of possible concern. We and others followed its progress, and it has indeed returned to North Korea.

**Will the Security Council be able to keep Iran from developing nuclear weapons?**

The ball is in Iran's court. The reality is that in April, the five permanent members plus Germany delivered a clear-cut proposal that offered Iran two paths: either end its illicit nuclear program and rejoin a responsible community of nations, or continue to pursue its nuclear-weapons program and find itself increasingly isolated. That offer remains in place, but as Obama and the other members of the G8 reiterated in Italy, it is not an indefinite or open-ended offer.

**Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has talked about a "new horizon" of peace-keeping. What is the future for the blue helmets?**

There are more UN peacekeepers deployed today than ever before around the world -- about 115,000 military, police, and civilians in some 16 operations. UN peacekeeping costs us about 12 cents on the dollar compared to what it would cost us to act if we did so by ourselves. It's a valuable tool, and it's one that serves our interests. But there are some real challenges at present. It is overstretched with this large number of deployments and the complexity of many of these operations, particularly in places like Sudan and Congo.

**As China emerges as more of an economic and military power, how do you see its role evolving at the UN?**

China is clearly playing a more active and multifaceted role at the UN than it was, say,

a decade or two ago. We take China's role seriously. We don't always agree. And where we differ, we try to see how we can narrow those differences. Where we are able to find common ground, as we've done of late with respect to North Korea, we can make important progress.

**Has the US paid all its back dues to the UN?**  
Congress just passed and the president signed legislation that included very substantial payments. So, for the first time in a while, we are in good shape and in a position to be meeting our obligations in full.

**Obama has called the UN "indispensable and imperfect." What makes the UN imperfect?**

It's a very accurate characterisation. The UN is playing a crucial role in peace and security in various different parts of the world, but it is imperfect on multiple levels. There continue to be instances of less-than-high-quality management, waste of resources, and in some egregious instances, such as the Oil-for-Food Program, outright fraud and corruption. Real progress has been made in recent years, but this will continue to be a challenge and an important priority for the US to help to reform the institution so that it is worthy of the resources we commit.

©Newsweek International. All rights reserved. Reprinted by arrangement.