

Law to combat violence against women

Must be backed by massive public awareness campaign

WITH the cabinet approving the draft of a law titled The Domestic Violence (Resistation and Protection) Act, 2010 she hopes that the legal framework being envisaged is more focused and substantive than anything we have known by way of addressing repression on women. It should be only a matter of time before it is tabled as a bill before the parliament and passed.

At this point, let's make it clear that the power of good it can wield is fundamentally hinged on awareness and user-friendliness of the legal provisions contained in the law so that these get implemented. Therefore, the first priority is to mount a massive campaign towards making the public, particularly women, aware of the major features of the law, beckoning them to utilise them with a promise of legal aid to victims and detailing the procedures to seek redress. This will have the dual, preventive and remedial, effects. Law can only operate when a violation is reported, brought up to the police and goes to court. For all we know, by far a greater number of incidents of violence go unreported. How can we possibly address domestic violence if it does not come to light, if the victim is muted, or no one volunteers to furnish any information about an occurrence taking place, or on a long simmer.

Given these disquieting realities, it is of utmost importance that the government, local bodies, NGOs, women rights activist groups work together to create awareness on a sustained basis among the masses of the people about the existence of the law, availability of legal options and the ways to go about them. In all fairness, we grant that individually they are capable of disseminating information which they perhaps do in varying degrees. But unless there is an orchestration of efforts tailored to the characteristics of domestic violence in the urban areas and rural habitats, the existence of the law by itself can be of little help.

While we build up a massive awareness campaign on that level there is another reservoir of potential we must tap in on to carry forward the task. In this very important category fall schools, madrasahs, colleges, vocational institutes and universities where discussions should be held, the students engaged in discourses to motivate themselves to sensitise people around them about the provisions of the law.

Assault on Kachua land official

We are yet to see firm action which is promised often

ALL these reports of a deteriorating law and order situation have naturally been causing despondency among citizens. The latest that we have here is the organised assault by about 20 to 25 Chhatra League activists on the assistant commissioner (land) in Kachua upazila of Chandpur district simply because the latter tried to stop them from constructing a shop on government land. Md. Mostafizur Rahman, the official in question, was assaulted on the head badly in his office. It appears that in true lawless fashion his attackers also threatened his wife and children with dire consequences.

The question now is very simple and very stark: what are the authorities planning to do about it? For months we have heard the leading figures of the government informing the country repeatedly that whoever violates the law or takes part in criminal activity, no matter what his political affiliations are, will be dealt with under the law. Unfortunately, such platitudinous expressions of intent have not been matched by action on the ground. Now, when the authorities have little difficulty going after criminal elements from other groups and parties, it is intriguing to find that it has been unable to handle its own bad elements. In these past many months, reports of Chhatra League elements causing trouble in educational institutions and other places in various parts of the country have poured in. However, citizens are not aware of any exemplary action, if any, that has been taken against them.

We keep reporting these incidents and have been commenting on the disquieting trends relentlessly primarily because these are showing no signs of abating and also because we believe unless the government puts a brake is put on these they will neutralise, even jeopardise whatever good image it has otherwise acquired through some positive work.

Following this latest instance of Chhatra League-orchestrated violence, a leading figure of the BCL in Kachua has said if anyone in the organisation has been involved in the incident, he will be expelled. That is not good enough. We would like the government to know that unless it employs the normal methods of bringing offenders to book while dealing with the Chhatra League, all its promises and good intentions of meaningful governance will fall flat. If the rule of law is to be restored and upheld, it is important that the men who assaulted the land official be hauled up and made to face justice.

Beyond the fires in the hills

The fires in the hills must be doused swiftly. Those whose homes have been razed to the ground must have those homes rebuilt by the state. And those who have fuelled those fires, wherever they are and whoever they may be, must be tracked down fast if opprobrium is not to be hurled at us by the global community.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE sad, indeed mind-boggling, incidents in the Hill Tracts are a fresh new call for an ethical and moral dimension to be brought into Bangladesh's politics. Beyond the fires that have destroyed homes, beyond the demands for a judicial inquiry into who did what in the hills, beyond a swift punishment of the guilty, there lies a wide expanse of territory we need to cover in our dealings with those who have been part of the land for centuries on end.

And it is altogether fitting that even as Bengalis observe yet one more anniversary of the 1952 struggle for language, they go into a better and deeper understanding of the concerns that have assailed the various cultural groups which have without question laid proper and justified claim to those parts of the country they and before them, their ancestors have considered home.

Let no unnecessary emotion or unbridled parochialism come into the picture. The simple truth is that back in 1972, as we moved toward adopting a constitution for ourselves, the political and social rights and history of the Chakmas, the Garos, the Marmas, indeed of every indigenous body of people in Bangladesh ought to have been enshrined in that document.

That they were not has been cause for grief for all of us. That we have vociferously condemned states which have treated people, their own as well as not their own, with disdain without any thought to how we have been treating non-Bengalis in the hills and elsewhere has not only had a tinge of supreme irony about it but has also been a source of huge embarrassment for us.

History has never been kind to some tribes and some civilisations. And the bigger difficulty has been the deliberate inability or reluctance of those who could

have done better, who could have upheld the rights of indigenous groups and clans and tribes, to reassure these threatened people that their rights are safe in the territories they have inhabited since the earliest of their ancestors walked the earth.

Where the place of indigenous people in Bangladesh's political format is the matter, there is a simple fact that must today be recognised by the state and its operators. It is that these original inhabitants of the land must be brought into the overall scheme of things as part of an inclusive and liberal political society. To do that the majority population must ensure that the indigenous peoples are not run out of or marginalised in their own homes and villages, that they are not subjected any more to measures that in different forms and substance have already marred the quality of life and culture they have tried maintaining for centuries.

The Ayub Khan regime in pre-1971 Pakistan destroyed a goodly part of indigenous culture through the Kaptai dam in the early 1960s. And we in Bangladesh have not quite been able to inform these dispossessed people that they will be part of us, not through a denial of their heritage but by having that heritage enrich, in association with other traditions, the broad cultural matrix of the land. It is time to correct that wrong.

And we must do that through acknowledging, in unambiguous and unqualified manner, their place in Bangladesh as distinct and distinctive cultures co-existing with the broad Bengali culture. The concept of Bengali nationalism notwithstanding, it now becomes a matter of urgency that in addition to the nationalism question we accord to the indigenous peoples the rights and the recognition that were denied them in 1972. Much tragedy followed that denial. Much blood has flowed. That it needed a deal between the government and the leading lights of the Hill Tracts in 1997 for the conflict to subside, to end, speaks of the grievances of these



Where is home for her?

threatened cultures and of the grief we as a nation have trudged through.

There must be constitutional guarantees of the right to education for indigenous children in their own languages. And that education must be made a component of the overall national curriculum. Beyond education, it should be for the state to ensure a preservation and promotion of indigenous culture through a sustained and on-going program of a guarantee of cultural diversity in Bangladesh.

And doing that will entail taking the recognised spokespersons of the indigenous peoples on board and giving them the authority they need to carry their ideas to fulfilment. Tokenism will not do. But informing the indigenous peoples that they are free to choose their own ways of life and

live that life within the ambit of the broad Bangladesh state and without any threat of interference or intervention from extraneous forces will.

The fires in the hills must be doused swiftly. Those whose homes have been razed to the ground must have those homes rebuilt by the state. And those who have fuelled those fires, wherever they are and whoever they may be, must be tracked down fast if opprobrium is not to be hurled at us by the global community. For a nation, nothing can be more demeaning and more self-defeating than a failure to stand by those marginalised by circumstances of history.

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Streamlining remittance flow

Nowadays, the issue of cross-border migration to foreign countries is largely linked to the integration of global labour markets and easy transportation. Cross-border migration is to be considered in the context of social-economic development in a "global village."



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HISTORICALLY, migration has been occurring since the dawn of human civilisation. Nowadays, the issue of cross-border migration to foreign countries is largely linked to the integration of global labour markets and easy transportation. Cross-border migration is to be considered in the context of social-economic development in a "global village."

One thing that must be made clear is that people do not ordinarily move from their home country unless there are compelling reasons to do so. Migrants in foreign land face discrimination, alien culture, foreign language and a different way of life. They live far away from their near and dear ones and their emotional state is often deeply stressful.

Migrants send their earnings to their families. Remittances represent a lifeline for more than 700 million people in developing countries. The World Bank estimates that in 2008 remittances amounted to

approximately \$444 billion, out of which \$338 billion went to developing countries. To put the matter in the proper perspective, the total official development aid (ODA) from OECD countries in 2008 was approximately \$120 billion.

Remittances from Bangladeshi migrant workers crossed \$9.68 billion in 2008-09, contributing nearly 10 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. By 2015, it is expected to be about \$30 billion.

It is good to note the labour-receiving countries have realised that they have an obligation to facilitate the flow of remittance to labour-sending countries. The G-8 Conference on Remittances in Berlin in 2008 recommended action in several areas, such as:

- Facilitating remittance flows and deepening the development impact of those flows,
- Attracting remittances to bankable channels,
- Implementing general principles on international remittance services,
- Providing innovative payment instruments.

- Improvement in remittance data collection.

The 2008 UN Conference on Financing for Development in Doha dedicated a side event to innovative financing mechanisms and instruments and their contribution to development.

Both the above efforts are part of a global effort to facilitate remittance to developing countries, and the International

world. We will work to achieve in particular the objective of reduction of the global average costs,...generating a significant increase in income for migrants and their families in the developing world."

To spell out the above commitment and to devise an operational road map, Italy and the World Bank organised an International Conference in Rome in November last year. The conference adopted twelve action plans to lower the costs of remittances and to improve development in the labour-sending countries.

During the coming decades, the demand for workers in industrialised countries will increase. The UN Report prepared by the Population Division in early 2000 indicates that the population in Japan and in most countries of the European Union will decline because of low birthrate, while the average person in those countries will get older.

Over the next 25 years, the EU countries will lose 20.8 million from their working-age population, while the population of the elderly, those 65 years and older, will surge by half because of better health. According to the UN report, labour force in Germany will shrink from 41 million to 21 million and in Italy by 23 million to 11 million by 2050.

The report estimated that Japan, to keep its labour force constant during the next 100 years, would require an immigration program peaking at 900,000 a year in 30 years, falling to a longer term figure of about 700,000 a year.

It has been suggested in the report that substantial levels of immigration will be required to maintain the economies of industrialised countries. Young people from developing countries in Asia and Africa are likely to fill the gap.

The 1990 UN International Convention on Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMR), has not as yet received support from labour-receiving countries, including European countries. I would say that the sooner the EU countries become parties to it, the better will be the protection of rights and dignity of migrants in labour-receiving countries.

The subject of remittances is, in the final analysis, inseparable from the broader issues of easy mobility of labour, ageing population in many industrialised countries, and laws on international migration protecting the rights of migrants.

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