

Passage of law on domestic violence

Now, let us go for its effective implementation

THE enactment of the Domestic Violence (Protection and Prevention) Bill 2010 into law by the Jatiyo Sangsad is a measure of how seriously the nation takes the issue of violence in the home. For decades altogether, violence in the household, owing fundamentally to the male-dominated structure in Bangladesh, has been a sad feature of life for countless women and children. And yet there have not been any outlets, at least up to this point, for the victims of such violence to take measures to prevent their falling prey to mental and physical torture. The absence of relevant laws to ensure the dignity of women and children within the confines of families was felt acutely. In recent years, however, the rise of social organisations, including a very significant number of women's bodies, and their spirited campaign to ensure safety in the home for women and children has emphasised the point that without women and children feeling secure within their families, it will be difficult for society to reach its cherished goals of advancement.

So far, to our regret, we have heard of children being denied the rights and privileges their very status as children entitles them to. As for the sufferings women, at all levels of society, are subjected to, we have known of the violence inflicted on them, overtly or covertly, in family situations. Now that the law against such violence is here, we expect conditions to change for the better for all women and children in the country. However, we must also serve the caveat that no law is any good as long as it is not implemented fully and decisively. And for that to happen, it is critically important that the machinery be there, ready and equipped to swing into action every time someone decides to tamper with the law.

That said, there is now also a very important need for the authorities as well as social organisations to spread the message of the new law far and wide through a dissemination of it. That can be done through the media, print as well as electronic. In the villages, where domestic violence occurs with a fair degree of regularity, teachers, imams of local mosques and village elders could be tapped as resource persons responsible for enlightening people on the various aspects of the new law. In both rural and urban areas, efforts should be expended toward convincing victims of domestic violence to expose their tormentors, for only toughness of this sort can make a difference.

We welcome the law. Its provisions of penalties for those guilty of causing physical and mental violence to women and children in the home should be a deterrent to any would-be offenders. But, we repeat, the strength of the law will depend on how widely it is taken recourse to by victims and its effective implementation.

Jatrabari factory fire

Another wake-up call to relocate chemical-laden premises

TUESDAY'S inferno at a Jatrabari chemical factory that claimed seven lives including critical burn injury to four is yet another instance of how insensitive we are as a people towards human life. It appears, the devastating Nimtoli blaze and some similar cases of smaller fires that followed were not enough to bring either the authorities concerned, or the operators of these factories dealing with flammable substances to their senses. And it is this inexplicable collective indifference to the gaping problem that has been responsible for the latest lethal fire at Jatrabari.

The government appears to have been very active for a while calling for relocating the warehouses and workshops of combustible chemicals to a safer place. The industry minister in early August had told the chemical warehouse and factory owners in Old Dhaka to shift their businesses to any safer place by the 17th of that month. Meanwhile, nearly two months have already passed. But nothing seems to have moved during all these days. In the circumstance, there is little reason to be surprised that the boiler at a chemical factory at Jatrabari has exploded into fire burning the bodies of seven victim workers beyond recognition.

Thanks are due to the promptness of the fire service department that its fire-fighting crew could douse the fire soon enough to prevent it from spreading to neighbouring structures, some of which were packed with chemical substances.

The fire fighters noticed stacks of containers with different kinds of chemicals used in making rubber solutions for shoe soles. The chemicals were combustible. So, it had always been a matter of not how, but when the chemical factory would burst into flames. What happened at the factory styled Lily Chemical Company, brazenly flaunting its signboard beside the Jatrabari main road, on Tuesday afternoon was therefore fated to take place today or tomorrow.

We don't know how many more fire accidents of similar nature are awaiting us at different crowded places in the city.

We would like to believe that the authorities concerned are not just sitting on the highly sensitive issue of chemical warehouses and factories at crowded places in the capital city. The government must take immediate steps to identify through a comprehensive survey such chemical factories and warehouses operating within the city. Based on the survey, they should expedite the process to relocate the warehouses and factories to a safer place.

We want to be assured that the Jatrabari chemical factory fire is the last of its kind.

The pandemonium in Pabna

Either these officers violated their terms of service by going to the press, in which case they should have been fired. Or, they were within their rights to do it and should have stayed in Pabna, as a stern warning for the rest of the country so that nobody will mess administration for political mileage.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

NOW you see it, now you don't. One week the government officers in Pabna cry in front of reporters. Another week the prime minister's adviser denies those men ever shed any tears. So what do we make of those tearful faces we saw in the news? The honourable advisor has a plausible theory to tide us over. Those images were cooked up to embarrass the government, he said. In the same breath he also claimed it was the media which played up the whole thing.

My first reaction was to take a deep breath. Then I thought of something ridiculous. Could it be that what the adviser said was yet another sleight of media's hand! If the media could project normal people as crybabies, it might as

well have a reasonable man done up to sound incredibly insane. Then my mind like a downward spiral fed on itself. Certain things played up to play up other things.

It played up in my mind that prime minister's health adviser declared in Gopalgonj to give all jobs in community clinics to his party men. Then it also played up the prime minister's concurrence with this view while addressing her supporters in New York. Those clinics were abused during the BNP regime, so they wouldn't be safe in the hands of BNP men, she argued.

It played up couple more things amongst other things. The student and youth fronts of the ruling party have assaulted government officers in other districts as well. The general secretary of the ruling party disowns its student wing

but his chairperson graces their Iftar function as chief guest.

These play-ups also played up a few positive stories. The landslide victory of the ruling party in 2008 is one, which was extensively covered by media. Some newspapers, including this one, lauded the government for its first-year performance and rated it high on most counts. When the prime minister won the MDG award in New York last month, all newspapers carried the news on the front page.

Then I chewed on the question why the media should gang up on the government in Pabna. The adviser definitely got carried away with his conspiracy theory. Maybe he didn't realise that what happened in his home district has made history. Maybe he did not realise it was unbearably pathetic when the very people responsible for running the district had to run for their lives in their own sphere of authority.

The media went because the entire spectacle was newsworthy. Not because people chased people. Not because people scuffled with people. Not because glasses were shattered or furniture were smashed. It was newsworthy because, as I said before, it has made history. For the first time in this country the media like the

rest of us watched the horror of a nation helplessly struggling with its split personality. For the first time Dr. Jekyll of national interest has been so starkly defied by Mr. Hyde of petty party politics.

Lest it has not crossed the adviser's mind, that one incident in Pabna had dented people's confidence in the administration. I say it because long after the regime finishes its term, long after any of the political parties ceases to exist, we would like this country to go on, and we would like this country to be run effectively. Irrespective of who made them cry, whether it was their fear and embarrassment or, as the adviser said, a conspiracy to play down the government, the fact remains that it was an ugly sight to watch a bunch of bureaucrats weep.

Where was the adviser before those government officers called the press conference? Why did it take him ten days to get to the flashpoint? Didn't he know there was going to be a press conference? What does the service rule say about aggrieved officers talking to press? Who talked to them during the six days between when they were roughed up and when they sobbed in public?

These questions answered should leave only two possibilities. Either these officers violated their terms of service by going to the press, in which case they should have been fired. Or, they were within their rights to do it and should have stayed in Pabna, as a stern warning for the rest of the country so that nobody will mess administration for political mileage.

Instead, those government officers have been withdrawn, sent home with tails between legs. It is no consolation that their assailants have gone to jail. Criminals always do. But the scare of their crime will continue to find their victims. Next time a judge reads a verdict, or a magistrate gives an order, he or she is going to think twice. The public servants will not wish to be treated like servants in public.



Government cars vandalised by party activists.

Environmental protection is self-protection

The truth is that we need to protect the environment first and foremost because we have to protect ourselves. Environmentalism has more to do with the preservation of the human way of life than saving the planet, which is way beyond our capability. People should face the truth that we should protect the environment not because it is a noble thing to do but because it is the wise and practical choice for ourselves.

EDITORIAL DESK; THE CHINA POST

AS human beings, we are not known for our modesty. Hamlet famously called man the beauty of the world and the paragon of animals. In the Chinese Classic of History, human beings are described as "the soul of all things," the most soulful of all beings.

As currently the most successful species on Earth, it is natural for the human race to rule the world and every species that lives in it the way we see fit. However, in our most human-centric perspective, we often naively equate our fate with that of the planet. That's why even when people are advocating for good courses such as nuclear disarmament or environmental protection, they often use phrases with pompous and messianic overtones such as "Save the Earth."

The planet Earth is about 4.5 billion years old, the human race about 200,000. The planet is expected to exist for another 7 billion years until it is probably devoured by the expanding sun as it enters its red giant phase. Even if the planet ceased to exist today and if its 4.5-billion-year history is compared to the life of a 80-year-old person, human history occupies about 1.3 days of the Earth's life, shorter than a common cold. The human being is only a part of the Earth's history and the planet will most probably survive after the human race is gone.

Not only will the Earth survive, but life will also outlast the human race should it destroy itself.

The history of the Earth has always been the story of survival after destruction. Scientists estimate that over 98% of the species that have ever lived on Earth are now extinct.

According to paleontologists Jack

Sepkoski and David M. Raup, the planet has experienced five major mass extinction events, most recently 65 million years ago when the dinosaurs were wiped out. Nevertheless, life sustained and actually thrived after them. We are the living proof of that.

The truth is that we need to protect the environment first and foremost because we have to protect ourselves. Environmentalism has more to do with the preservation of the human way of life than saving the planet, which is way beyond our capability. People should face the truth that we should protect the environment not because it is a noble thing to do but because it is the wise and practical choice for ourselves.

A worldwide analysis published in the journal Nature recently puts 80% of the global population under "water threats," meaning they have no secure source of fresh water. While traditional water conservation practices such as building reservoirs and dams help provide water to people in the developed world, they do not help address the core issue and will probably make the matter worse.

The article calls for developing nations to employ a combination of these "concrete and steel" methods and eco-friendly options such as wetland protection to conserve water, which can be as effective and actually cheaper than dam-building in some situations.

One of the problems is that we have long been accustomed to the seeming effectiveness of human ingenuity, so it is hard to realise the effectiveness of the "natural" way. To many, a reservoir looks more reassuring than a piece of wetland. After the explosion of scientific and technological advancements since the industrial revolution, the belief that technology can and is the best solution



The future of the Earth is in our hands.

to solve anything has taken a strong hold in the modern human psyche.

Now is the time to appreciate the fact that environmental protection is not a movement for the animal lovers or the good-willed but the essential step for the human race to continue its way of life. The outcome of not paying attention to the environmental consequences of our actions will result not in some catastrophic events in the far future. Environmentalists used to be dismissed as doomsayers for predicting disasters for the next generation due

to the damage we have done. The truth is even they can be too optimistic.

The consequences of our actions are upon us today. They happen not in some far-fetched way but in the most basic fashion. They occur both globally and close at home. The water-threat report as well as the fire at the Nanya Plastics plant Sunday are the proof that the very air we breathe and water we drink can be at stake.