

Death of yet another stalker's victim

When will the societal slide be stemmed?

YET another person has lost out to the evil power of the eve teasers. This time the victim is not actually the direct object of the stalkers but one who had dared to express his objection to their misdeeds. And yet again it is a teacher. Mizanur Rashid, a teacher of Chemistry at Lokmanpur College of Bagatipur upazilla in Natore succumbed to his injuries a fortnight after being deliberately crushed under the wheels of a motorcycle driven by the hoodlums he unsuccessfully tried stop from harassing college girls.

In fact such deaths are not new. Regrettably, over the last several months there have been many instances of fathers, brothers, uncles or colleagues of the victims being subjected to physical attack by the eve teasers. And Mizan is not the only teacher to have died after being assaulted by eve teasers. Only in March this year a teacher of Sylhet Women's College had met Mizan's fate. The prime suspect in that case is still at large and his associates are on bail. One of the accused in Mizan's killing has been arrested and we have been assured by the DIG that the absconding suspect would be apprehended soon. It will be sooner rather than later we hope. We would also hope that all the offenders are brought to justice and meted out exemplary punishment.

However, this is an issue that cannot be eliminated altogether by means of law alone. The phenomenon has come to be ingrained as a malaise in some segments of our youth. Teasing of women is seen by some as a chivalrous act, a grossly convoluted perception which has resulted in the death of many young girls. And the society at large appears quite helpless to prevent its recurrence or even stand by those that raise their voice in protest. This problem, we want to assert, is not a cut and dry issue where meting out punishments would see an end to it.

While it is necessary to put the offenders through the process of law quickly and made examples of, and as much as it is necessary to provide vigilance over sensitive areas, the problem, as it has evolved at present, needs the collective response of the society. It will be necessary to involve all sections of the public, particularly the youth, who should be used to sensitise the younger generation about the evil consequence of eve teasing and stalking. A common front must be organised in the towns and villages with the elders and respectable persons of the locality in the lead. Unless the issue is addressed urgently it may lead to a serious societal dissonance.

Cheated workers doubly shortchanged

Agencies defrauding them must be penalised

THE swelling ranks of repatriated Bangladeshi workers has been common knowledge. What we also know is that redoubled efforts on the part of the government to reopen some of the closed employment options in Middle East and South East Asia are not also meeting with desired success. This is one set of realities that we are faced with and are trying to overcome.

There is another set of circumstances in responding to which we have disconcertingly failed, even though they are domestic in nature and therefore well within control. The case in point is denial of justice to returnee workers who, having been defrauded by recruiting agencies, filed specific allegations against them with the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) but with little or no remedy in sight as yet.

Arriving back home in a penniless condition with a backbreaking burden of debt they had contracted on a false promise of a job abroad, or otherwise left pauperised through sale of family property, their knocks at the doors of BMET and Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), have hardly met with success. In fact, they are pushed further into a state of desperation as their compensation claims from the agencies who extorted high fees from them at best yield fractional payment and at worst, non-payment. Something around half the number of complaints in a given year would be settled but the money actually returned to the victims falls far short of the amount originally given.

BMET has the power of delicensing agencies found guilty of omissions and commissions in terms of paying back dues to the victims but this authority is seldom used. Moreover, underpayments are never mitigated. It is surprising that even in a case where an agency would be delicensed and the Baira advised to pay up the victims drawing on the frozen security money of recalcitrant agency, there is no guarantee that compensation would be received by the seeker.

In the essence, there is no mechanism to really punish the defrauding agencies with a deterrent effect. At the same time, we find no effective counseling arrangement either in Baira or BMET for preventing those who are on point of leaving the country on the basis of dubious job offers from being cheated. The BMET's laws and rules should be given teeth and its logistical and other demands met.



Re-energizing family planning programmes

Family planning programmes, in most cases, suffer from a lack of coordination and integration with the major development plans and their supporting policies at the level of policy planning, and from a lack of coordination with other community action programmes at the implementation stage.

MOHAMMED ABUL KALAM

FAMILY planning programmes are organised in order to reduce the fertility rate of the population of a society. From a purely economic point of view, a reduction in population growth is regarded as a factor which contributes to economic development through an increase in per capita income. Therefore, family planning programmes have been, in most cases, initiated as an integral part of national development policy.

Although political leaders make a strong commitment to the country's development policy, there is often a discrepancy between this and a genuine commitment to the population and family planning programmes. Such discrepancy arises from socio-cultural factors as well as from the political implications entailed in a change in population constituents.

In fact, no deliberate effort has been made by economists or management experts to integrate family planning programmes into the development plans in terms of identification of specific projects, resource allocation, priority determination, and coordination with other supporting policies and action programmes.

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In Bangladesh, planning of family planning programmes covers only the official statement of programme objectives in terms of national demographic goals, and the determination of the overall targets of family planning acceptance.

There is no management planning that is

conducive to programme implementation through the provision of guidelines for managers and administrators of family planning programmes at every level regarding specific actions to be undertaken in terms of what to do, how much to do, what is required, how to secure the desired performance, how to cooperate etc.

In Bangladesh, family planning programmes are specified into primary functional categories such as contraceptive services and supplies; information, education and motivation; training of family planning personnel; research and training; administration etc. According to information in the plan documents of the programmes, however, elaboration of these activities into further sub-functional categories is not made and, thus, managerial strategies for achieving the programme targets are hardly demonstrated. The lack of specification at the planning stage does not help in guiding the administrator in management planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Programme management is another important area that calls for urgent attention. Management development support, services, studies on reorganisation issues and structural changes are necessary. Supervision and management support teams are critically important to ensure administrative efficiency. Support for the development of a financial system that suits the need of a dynamic programme should be considered.

Delay in release of funds, delay in sanctioning expenditure, cumbersome accounting and reporting procedure, and inefficient monitoring lead to a weak financial management system. The weaknesses have to be shed off and a system has to be developed to suit the current and emerging needs of the programmes.

The problem of overpopulation has been, and still is, one of the critical bottlenecks to economic and social development. Most of the programmes for population and family planning have hitherto been predominately influenced by bureaucrats and medical practitioners, who tend to conceptualise them in terms of their own disciplines.

The activities involved in the implementation of family planning programmes are much more complex and require a deliberate input from management concerned into the programmes with emphasis on actual achievement of results. Identified crucial elements related to problems of management pertain to the level of policies and others to programme execution.

There are some management problems at the national level and some at the field level. Similarly, there are management issues affecting the supply side of the programmes, and those concerning the demand dimension. It is being increasingly recognised that population concerns of the country so far have been handled by the policymakers, with occasional assistance from experts in the field. However, management as a specialised perspective and discipline has yet to be incorporated in policy formulation and programme execution.

However, management issues at the policy level which must be addressed include appropriate steps to make population concerns a priority area through allocating resources and personnel; strengthening institutional and personnel structure, among others, by devising appropriate mechanisms of family planning programmes, and coordination with various multi-sectoral agencies; placement of senior officials in key policy making and executive positions, avoiding too frequent turnovers; streamlining administrative and financial procedures for expeditious operations; manpower planning for the programme; defining the modalities of NGO operations in light of gaps in the official programmes; planning and management of external funding and donor relations, keeping in view the crucial needs of the programmes; and the like.

So, close observation of management system of family planning programmes is necessary to explore some management problems and issues related to the improve-

ment of administrative and managerial capabilities in implementation of the programmes and fertility decline. Attention should be paid to the identification and analytical clarification of the features common to problems and constraints in the overall process in the family planning programme administration and management.

There can be little doubt that one of the most pressing problems for the developing countries of the world today is that of curbing population growth. Bangladesh is now firmly committed to a policy of population control. The reasons for the failure vary from country to country but in Bangladesh, organisational, administrative and managerial factors, such as lack of proper management techniques, inefficient system for family planning activities, lack of proper evaluation and feedback, lack of coordination, bureaucratic inertia, inconsistent administrative and management structure, problem with organisational setup, lack of specification of tasks and objectives, loosely integrated with development plan, top-down process of family planning delivery system, etc., have contributed to the poor results achieved. Answers to these problems are needed to translate various policy options into programme strategies in order to accelerate programme performance.

There have been numerous studies in Bangladesh on contraception use, and also some studies on social, demographic and statistical aspects of the population problem. Those have received a great deal of attention and thus have been the subject of much study and research. Unfortunately, the organisational, administrative and managerial aspects of the problem have not received the same attention.

There is no doubt that the organisational, administrative and managerial problems are of fundamental importance in the successful implementation of any family planning programme as well as fertility decline and should, therefore, receive urgent and earnest consideration of the government.

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The point missed between hyperbole and ridicule

The culture of obedience aborts proper discussion, for everyone around the table is eager to do just one thing: discover what the leader thinks, or wants, and then find a rationale that takes the participant to the same conclusion.

M. J. AKBAR

THE question begs to be asked. How the Congress changed its view of Jaya Prakash Narayan after 35 years, or has the Congress changed its view of Rahul Gandhi after 35 months?

An official spokesman of the party has, after all, compared Rahul Gandhi to a national hero, a veteran of the Congress Socialist Party, the leftist group that became a power within the party in the 1930s, and a freedom fighter whose last fight for freedom was to liberate India from the censorship, suspension of democracy and Emergency which Mrs. Indira Gandhi imposed in 1975 upon the country in order to save her prime minister's chair.

The Congress line on JP, as he was popularly known, was unambiguous: the *Khadi*-clad Gandhian was alternatively a "fascist," "anarchist," "anti-national," and whatever else came into the mind of the Congress leaders after they had read yet another polemical tract written by forgotten Bolsheviks.

The Seventies were a decade when it was still fashionable to be of the leftist persuasion.

Mani Shankar Aiyar, one of the brightest minds in Congress, would not have been assigned to the doldrums: he would have been an intellectually vigorous colleague of Mohan Kumaramangalam and D. P. Dhar, rather than a mere nominated Rajya Sabha MP.

That was a time when "CIA" was a dread acronym, an organisation accused of assassinating unfriendly world leaders, not a building block of an allied security system whose chief could get an appointment with the Indian prime minister whenever he sought it. It was an age when Palestine was an ally of India, rather than Israel. Anyone who opposed this "politically correct" left was therefore ipso facto a "fascist" et al.

The "anti-national" bit was added not only because JP had the temerity to challenge the rule of a woman who had been equated with India (the Congress president in 1975 famously said "Indira is India") but because JP in a public speech had come close to asking Indian soldiers to reconsider their oath of loyalty to a government that had become venal. As you can see, that was a tempestuous era.

One presumes that Rahul Gandhi has

none of these JP-type political characteristics, at least in Congress eyes. No Congress spokesman would even dare to think of Rahul as a fascist, and even if his political views are a trifle fuzzy they are hardly authoritarian.

There will of course come a time when a Congressman will claim that "Rahul is India and India is Rahul" without getting sacked, since sycophancy is eternal, but that is still into the future. So the spokesman must have been, at some internal level, comparing Rahul's popularity to JP's. But that too is a radical departure, since JP's appeal was always dismissed as false.

The spokesman's enthusiasm for historic parallels has, apparently, been snubbed into silence since it was clear to the high command, a single-person unit consisting solely of Rahul's mother Sonia Gandhi, that the hyperbole had opened Rahul up to ridicule. But while this is sensible (it always makes sense to cut your losses while the balance sheet is still manageable), the corrective is missing the point.

JP's place in the history of Indian democracy is not going to be determined by political social climbers. The problem is not what the spokesman said but the impulse that made him say what he did. He was indulging in public sycophancy because he believed that this was the shortest route to promotion.

This disease is not limited to the Congress; most parties have created supra-human icons out of their leaders. This is because the life of the party is about as long

as the life of the leader; one-man, or one-woman parties does not cross the lifetime of their creator.

But the Congress is 135 years old. It was the torchbearer not only of the freedom movement but also of the values that have become enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Those values eroded, inevitably, and it is no longer the "central fact" of Indian politics, to use a phrase coined by Jawaharlal Nehru. But it remains a dominant force, and its implosion will leave vacant space that will not be easy to fill.

The paradox is that its opponents might do less damage to the Congress than its sycophants. The culture of obedience aborts proper discussion, for everyone around the table is eager to do just one thing: discover what the leader thinks, or wants, and then find a rationale that takes the participant to the same conclusion. This is not a meeting of minds. This is decision-making in a hall of echoes.

Rahul Gandhi has some way to go before he finds a working strategy: philosophy is passé these days, so it is unfair to ask him to get one. A good way to initiate the process is to use the door. A door is not only an entrance but also an exit. He should keep it open for independent thought, and show the door to sycophants.

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