

## GROUND REALITIES

## Violence in garments belt Its recurrence is worrying

THE garment workers again erupted into violence at the Ashulia flashpoint in Savar on Monday leading to pitched battles between police and workers and hours-long blockade on the Dhaka-Tangail highway.

In the backlash, more than a hundred garment units including the particular factory where the unrest started have suspended their production. It has made the workers' life uncertain as well as may have cast its shadow over RMG export from an entire industrial belt.

It may be recalled here that the government, following a severe and long-drawn workers' strike with attendant violence demanding minimum wage that about crippled the industry, had finally intervened and settled the matter three years ago.

The minimum wage set at Tk. 3000 from November 2010 up from a mere Tk. 1662, has been generally complied with. The three-year cap is almost coming to an end. Now is the time to start negotiating a salary raise through discussion among stakeholders.

However, we have to say that the violence breaking out from time to time points to some deeper malaise that will have to be addressed squarely given the seminal importance of this export earning sector.

Since all the factories of the Ashulia belt become directly affected by workers unrest starting from any single factory, the government needs to look into the matter seriously. The government should mount an investigation to find the root cause and resolve it one and for all.

Also, all other issues like the labour leader Aminul Islam's disappearance and murder, workers' rights and so on having a bearing on the overseas market of RMG products are clamouring for urgent attention and matching action from the government.

Let's not forget that the RMG sector faces the prospect of declining demand in our markets in the West. At a time like this, the government, garment industry leaders, management and workers must put their heads together to set their house in order.

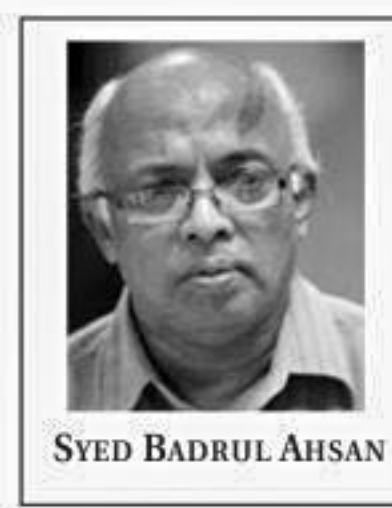
## Fallout from restive Rakhine Myanmar govt. should hold back its nationals

WITH sectarian tension spiralling out of control forcing the evacuation of UN personnel from the troubled Rakhine state, fears are brewing of a fresh exodus of refugees out of Myanmar and into Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Border Guards (BGB) intercepted a flotilla of boats carrying around 500 women and children on the Naf River that the two countries share. While we sympathise with the plight of the Rakhine people on humanitarian grounds, the forced eviction of these people from their ancestral homes by Myanmar authorities is not acceptable, more so because we are at the receiving end.

This is not the first time this has happened. The vast influx of people from Rakhine state into Bangladeshi territory occurred in the 1990s. Though progress has been made in repatriating some of those who had arrived two decades ago, the problem still remains with thousands stranded in Bangladesh. The latest upsurge in sectarian violence between Muslims and Buddhists comes as somewhat of a surprise, particularly in light of the fact that Myanmar is now in the process of moving from a country ruled by a military junta to democracy. The political dialogue that was initiated by the current regime, leading to Aung San Suu Kyi's release from house arrest and subsequent polls have ushered in new hope for the country and the region welcomes back Myanmar to re-join the fraternity of democratic countries in Asia.

Hence, when something as abrupt as communal violence erupts in the largest city in northwest Myanmar and Sittwe is placed under a state of emergency, we are certainly shocked by this return to the old ways that had caused the first great migration in the early '90s. Many of the Rohingya refugees have since been repatriated with quite a few thousand remaining to be accepted back in Myanmar.

The demand by the various ethnic groups is something that needs to be negotiated and settled in a peaceful manner if Myanmar wishes to be seen as a nation built on democratic principles where the various communities co-exist peacefully. Its neighbours cannot be expected to put up with the fallout from ethnic tensions indefinitely and so liberal-



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THIRTY five Bengalis, accused of conspiracy to break up Pakistan through declaring its eastern province as an independent state,

were produced before a special tribunal on June 19, 1968. The Agartala Conspiracy Case instituted by the government of Pakistan against Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and thirty-four other Bengalis remains a point of reference for students of Bangladesh's history. Much debate has ensued about the way the case changed the course of Bengali history and transformed the nature of politics and geography in South Asia, especially in the context of Pakistan and Bangladesh. There remains the opinion of those who have believed that the case effectively hastened the fall of the military regime of Field Marshal Ayub Khan. There are yet others who have held fast to the idea that when the Pakistan government decided to go ahead with the case and in fact gave formal shape to it, the state of Pakistan, by nature fragile, took an inexorable step toward decline in its eastern province.

The first hint of something going on in the Pakistani establishment came in December 1967, with reports of junior level Bengali officers of the Pakistan army, air force and navy being taken into custody by the government. It was not until January 6, 1968, that an official statement about the arrests would come from the ruling circles in Rawalpindi. Altogether about fifteen hundred Bengalis were placed under arrest by the authorities on charges of conspiracy to bring about the dismemberment of Pakistan. But as yet no formal charges were filed against any individuals, for the good reason that Pakistani military intelligence was frantically going around trying to convince a large number of those detained to turn approver and testify in court against those who would be formally

charged with the crime.

On January 18, matters became somewhat clearer. The Pakistan government informed the country that thirty-five individuals had been charged with conspiracy to break up Pakistan and turn East Pakistan into an independent state with assistance from the Indian government. At the top of the list was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, president of the East Pakistan Awami League and in detention since May 1966 under the Defence of Pakistan Rules. The implication was clear: Mujib had spearheaded the conspiracy. In stark terms, one of the more prominent of Bengali politicians had engaged in subterfuge and con-

spiration was Manzur Quader, who had once served as foreign minister in Ayub Khan's government.

The proceedings of the trial were presented in detail through the print media, which perhaps was one particular reason why the Bengalis of East Pakistan began to develop the notion that the whole show was aimed at humiliating not just Mujib but also an entire people. Such feelings gained ground when quite a few government witnesses turned hostile and told the tribunal that they had been physically and psychologically tortured into becoming approvers in the case. And then came the death in custody of one accused, Sergeant Zahurul Haq, on

were made clear in the early stages of the trial. When a western journalist asked him what he expected his fate to be, Mujib replied with characteristic unconcern: "You know, they can't keep me here for more than six months." In the event, he was to be a free man in seven months' time.

On the opening day of the trial, Mujib spotted before him, a few feet away, a journalist he knew well. He called out his name, only to find the journalist not responding, obviously out of fear of all those intelligence agents present in the room. Mujib persisted. Eventually compelled to respond, the journalist whispered: "Mujib Bhai, we can't talk here..." And it was at that point that the future Bangabandhu drew everyone's attention to himself. He said, loud enough for everyone to hear: "Anyone who wishes to stay in Bangladesh will have to talk to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Everyone eventually did. Bhashani threatened to lead a crowd of Bengalis into Dhaka cantonment if Mujib was not freed. An angry mob pounced on the residential quarters of Justice S.A. Rahman, who quickly flew off to West Pakistan. Events moved in unprecedented speed after that. On February 22, 1969, Vice Admiral A.R. Khan, Pakistan's defence minister, announced the unconditional withdrawal of the Agartala Conspiracy Case and the release of all accused. The next day, a million-strong crowd roared its approval when Tofail Ahmed, then a leading student leader, proposed honouring Mujib as Bangabandhu, friend of Bengal. On February 24, he flew off to Rawalpindi to argue the case for the Six Points.

On December 5 of that year, at a meeting to remember Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, Bangabandhu would inform Bengalis that henceforth East Pakistan would be known as Bangladesh. It was light unto the future. A nation was coming of age. A leader had arrived.

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# The case that changed history

*The Pakistan government informed the country that thirty-five individuals had been charged with conspiracy to break up Pakistan and turn East Pakistan into an independent state with assistance from the Indian government.*

spiracy to destroy the unity of the state of Pakistan!

The trial of the Agartala case accused began in the Dhaka cantonment on June 19, 1968, before a special tribunal comprising Justice S.A. Rahman, Justice Mujibur Rahman Khan and Justice Maksumul Hakeem. The last two were Bengalis and Hakeem was later to be independent Bangladesh's ambassador abroad. A galaxy of lawyers was on hand to defend the accused. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's legal team was headed by the respected lawyer Abdus Salam Khan. On hand was Sir Thomas Williams, QC, from the United Kingdom. Sir Thomas was, however, compelled to go back because of his constant tailing by Pakistani intelligence. Aaur Rahman Khan, a former chief minister of East Pakistan, was defence counsel to his brother, the CSP officer Khan Shamsur Rahman. Among other lawyers for the defence was Khan Bahadur Mohammad Ismail. The one prominent legal presence for the pros-

February 15, 1969.

With the country already seething in anger and with demands for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's unconditional release rising in crescendo for him to take part in a round table conference called by President Ayub Khan, the Agartala case looked doomed. For a while, the idea of Mujib going to the Rawalpindi talks on parole was banded off, until Mujib decided to ask for a withdrawal of the case and the unconditional release of all detainees. But all this was in early 1969, when Ayub Khan faced problems on the West Pakistan front as well. Having imprisoned Khan Abdul Wali Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in November 1968, he was now on the back foot trying to have them freed without any loss to his dignity.

The Agartala case marked the rise, in meteoric manner, of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the spokesman of the Bengalis. His courage of conviction where his principles were concerned and an abundance of self-confidence

# Bringing child sexual abuse out of the closet

RUBAYET HAMID

*"Mother, do you know what you sacrificed?  
Do you know the pain you allowed to happen by closing your eye?  
You said you had eyes in the back of your head,  
You saw that our dresses were too short,  
You saw when we held hands with a boy,  
But those eyes were closed when he took your innocent little girls"*  
A poem from a survivor.

IT is now widely acknowledged that child sexual abuse is a global contagion that affects the richest and poorest nations. Though the malice always existed in history, globalisation and its twin -- the internet revolution -- opened the floodgates and provided the perpetrators the comfort of anonymity and access. Bangladesh is no exception to this evil. Currently, about 20,000 children throughout the country are believed to have been forced into street prostitution. However, this is just the commercial face; what happens in homes, schools and public places is shrouded in darkness. This issue is also grossly under-reported due to the social stigma of exposure.

Child sexual abuse is commonly defined as "the form of child abuse in which an adult or an adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation, forces a child to engage in sexual activities, including indecent exposures of the genitals and touching them, physical sexual contact with a child, and using the child to produce child pornography and nude photography."

In Bangladesh's context, child sexual abuse is still a taboo and seldom gets openly discussed like child labour, trafficking, and exploitation in general. In the National Child Policy 2011 (which was revised for the first time after 1974), sexual abuse was given some attention under the broad heading of child safety. No specific section was dedicated for the sexually exploited, whereas children with disability, autism, belonging to the ethnic minority group and affected during

and post natural calamities were brought under individual articles.

There is also an enduring stereotype that the victims of child abuse are mostly girls. However, both anecdotal and empirical evidences have shown that boys are equally if not more vulnerable than girls. A joint study conducted by Save the Children and Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation in 2010 revealed that disabled children are usually at a higher risk of getting sexually harassed as they are unable to protect themselves and even at greater risk are those who are intellectually challenged since they are unable to make out the difference between good and bad touches and are often unable to articulate their concerns. Data from

the same survey suggests that in half of the cases, more than 90% of the abusers were family members and close relatives.

This provokes the question: "Is home the safest place for our children?" A seminal and shocking study in the Indian context, "Bitter Chocolate" by Pinki Virani, challenges this belief. She proves this by citing numerous examples where children have been abused in their own homes by their close relatives and family friends. Horrifying experiences were shared: grandfather abusing his own granddaughter, father exploiting the children while bathing them, male domestic help abusing toddlers etc. This is further supported by another survey conducted in 21 countries among which most were industrialised; 36% women and 29% men revealed that they had been victims of sexual abuse in childhood and most of it took place in their family circle.

A recent research in India reports that 53% of the children are victims of sexual abuse in some form or the other. A fact unknown to many, until recently revealed in the popular television show "Satyamev Jayate" by Mr. Aamir Khan.

It is of utmost importance that we take this issue more seriously and act accordingly as it can have dangerous

repercussions and affect the children adversely, whom we claim to be the future of the nation. Sexually abused children are susceptible to problems like depression and anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, suicidal behaviour, negative self esteem, alcohol and drug addiction, eating and sleeping disorders, vaginal bleeding, chronic pelvic pain, urinary tract infections, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and so on. Sex education, school based awareness raising programmes and targeted campaigns can be used as preventive measures. Rehabilitating affected children through recreational activities like play, art, drama etc., and providing group therapy and individual counseling will help. However, one of the biggest challenges that Bangladesh faces in this regard is the lack of professional skills, underscored by lack of institutions providing applied psychology courses, and dearth of professionals working on child psychology.

In 1990, Bangladesh ratified the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which is based on the four general principles of non-discrimination, best interest of the child, right to life, survival and development and right to participation. All or some of the above principles are violated when and/after any child is sexually exploited. The state, thus, cannot abdicate its primary responsibility to protect and advance child rights. It is time to acknowledge the voice of our future while promulgating laws and upholding them.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

June 13

**1917**  
World War I: the deadliest German air raid on London during World War I is carried out by Gotha G bombers and results in 162 deaths, including 46 children, and 432 injuries.

**1934**  
Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini meet in Venice, Italy; Mussolini later describes the German dictator as "a silly little monkey"

**1944**  
World War II: German combat elements - reinforced by the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division - launch a counterattack on American forces near Carentan.

**1978**  
Israeli Defense Forces withdraw from Lebanon. 1982 Fahd becomes King of Saudi Arabia upon the death of his brother, Khalid.

**2000**  
President Kim Dae Jung of South Korea meets Kim Jong-il, leader of North Korea, for the beginning of the first ever inter-Korea summit, in the northern capital of Pyongyang.

**2002**  
The United States withdraws from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

**2007**  
The Al Askari Mosque is bombed for a second time.