

SUNDAY POUCH

One gang-rape incident is one too many

Mass awareness with matching police action imperative

TWO gang-rape incidents have been reported recently. In Tangail, a teenage girl was tricked by one of her recent acquaintances who said they were going to attend a wedding. Similarly, in the Savar case, it was again a female friend who led the victim to believe they would be visiting an ailing relative.

Thanks to the prompt police action that in both cases the rapists and their accomplices could be nabbed shortly after cases were filed with the police, followed by necessary medicare arranged for the traumatised victims.

All this gives reason for the parents and guardians to be watchful of the so-called friends and acquaintances of their daughters. Basically, young women themselves should also beware of such people.

It cannot be gainsaid that wide media coverage of these two recent gang-rape incidents has played a crucial role in expeditious police action.

In fact, many of the incidents do not ever see the light of the day. All because of fear of social stigma. Besides, social influence of culprits proves to be an inhibition. Little wonder, police action is either wanting or not prompt enough.

So, to combat this degrading behaviour against women, side by side with the alertness of law-enforcing agencies, a mass awareness campaign against it has also become the need of the hour. What we actually need is community involvement in resisting the menace.

But in any case, the cycle of impunity will have to be broken through appropriate legal action against culprits.

Since the perpetrators have been arrested in Tangail and Savar, legal processes against them should be initiated and completed as soon as possible.

Seizure of birds and animals

Meaningful action is called for

THE seizure of as many as 160 rare birds and ten monkeys at Shahjalal International Airport speaks of the unending predatory instincts of certain elements not only in Bangladesh but also elsewhere in the world. In the past, there have been instances of rare animals and birds being smuggled out of Bangladesh, together with artifacts of immense historical value. To what extent the perpetrators of such mischief have been brought to justice is something we have not known. And this failure on the part of the authorities to keep people informed of the steps taken to punish such elements remains a chronic problem. We are regularly informed of poachers and smugglers of birds and animals being nabbed by the law enforcers. What happens after that is anyone's guess.

Coming back to the issue at hand, these monkeys and birds, we have been informed, were illegally imported from South Africa. There are now quite a few questions which arise from the incident. In the first place, if the import of such creatures is unlawful, on what authority did the individual in whose name the consignment arrived in Dhaka had them brought to Bangladesh? That leads to another question: when the monkeys and the birds were being taken out of South Africa, did the Pretoria authorities not notice the happening or did the Bangladeshi importer find a way out of his problems at the port of embarkation? And then comes the all-important question of the corrupt doings at Shahjalal Airport itself. These monkeys and birds were being handled by a clearing and forwarding agent at the airport, a fact which only reminds us of the many earlier instances of illegal activity on the part of personnel at the airport.

For the law enforcers, it is now imperative that the man in whose name the consignment arrived be apprehended. Furthermore, such acts are rarely those of single individuals. There is always behind them an organized gang or racket. It is from such a perspective that the authorities must go into action. That as well as an inquiry into the doings of corrupt individuals and groups at the airport

Baluchistan: Soft underbelly of Pakistan?



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

SINCE 2009, the US has been in difficulties with its important ally in South Asia, Pakistan.

Although the US has been pouring billions of dollars in "unrestricted funds" to fight terrorism, progress has been very slow. By many estimates, terrorism inside Pakistan has escalated. Moreover, the military, which is the driving force in the country, cannot see eye to eye with US policy in the region. The US is using drone aircrafts to unilaterally kill terrorists, which has also been causing collateral damage to life and property within Pakistan. So there is a serious disconnect between the two allies. Yet analysts report that instead of winning any war there, the military is doing well for itself. It has invested the money coming from the US in hotels, real estate, shopping malls and purchasing military hardware to fight its old enemy, India.

The US government is therefore incensed. But it can do nothing substantive. The Pakistan military has been successful in raising twin fears within the US establishment. First, it expresses apprehension that any suspension of US military aid would weaken the military and lead to more terrorist attacks. Second, with the weakening of the military, the Taliban could capture power and take the world to ransom by having their finger on Pakistan's nuclear trigger. The US is quite sold on this last possibility. So it continues to accept expense claims from the Pakistan military, though receipts are not provided, for combating terrorism. But the US is on the lookout to change its Pakistan policy.

Early in 2012, a small group of US Congressmen came up with two important recommendations. The first was that instead of co-opting the Taliban into the Afghan political system to reduce terrorism in neighbouring Afghanistan, it was a better investment to rearm the former Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. This group would be in a better position to tackle terrorism. The

second and more substantive was that the US should not try to normalise relations with Pakistan's strong military and its ineffective government. The reasoning goes that it should support the cause of the people of Baluchistan for a homeland.

The province of Baluchistan enjoys an important geo-strategic location. In a way it straddles Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its land area is large, being half the size of Pakistan. When Pakistan broke up in 1971 and Bangladesh was created, it was realised that ethnic identity of a people was more important than religious identity. The US has all this in mind while crafting its new Pakistan policy.

The people of Baluchistan have a long history of nationalist movement behind them. The movements could not get off the ground because Baluch

their land and their resources. But these assurances remained only assurances.

In 1963, a Baluch leader, Sher Mohammed Marri, resisted Islamabad's intention to set up military bases in Baluchistan. This led to an insurgency which came to an end, five years later. A ceasefire was accepted by the Baluchis on the condition that greater autonomy would be granted to them. But again this promise was not kept.

In 1973, another insurgency took place. This was to stop Pakistani government from exploiting natural resources of Baluchistan as well as for greater political and economic autonomy. It was sternly put down by the Pakistani authorities. Pakistan asked and also got the support of the then Shah of Iran. Pakistan used its air power for the first time to crush this revolt. About 5,000 insurgents were reported to have been

Musharaf's helicopter when he arrived on a short visit to Quetta.

The army was determined to crush the nationalist movement once and for all. However, with the rise of the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan as well as the deteriorating law and order situation in Pakistan's other provinces, the movement could not be stymied. As the attention of the Pakistan government was distracted, the Baluch nationalist movement gained momentum. In 2006, it was reported that the Baluch nationalist leaders had established a government in exile.

The US government has, however, been quietly monitoring these developments. But three events recently brought the US to focus closely on Baluchistan. First was a congressional hearing on Baluchistan. Second was the introduction of a Baluch self-determination bill in Congress and, third was the holding of a much publicised meeting of the Baluch National Front in Berlin in 2012. These events also focused international attention on the plight of the Baluchis.

Another development also encouraged the US to look closely at the situation there. The Baluch nationalist leaders now are mostly young, educated and networked. A 44 year old by the name of Allah Nazar Baluch is leading the movement. He has been successful in drawing the attention of the US Congress and the British Parliament. The leadership has in many ways inspired the Baluchis to work for their cause.

The big question is whether Baluchistan is likely to be the new soft underbelly of Pakistan. If so, then Pakistan must wake up to the challenge and stop further hemorrhage of its body politic. It must note what a wise man had once said: "Giving up doesn't always mean you are weak. Sometimes it means that you are strong enough to let go." Here, it means giving the Baluchis the political and economic autonomy to run their affairs before it is too late. Is it too much to ask in return for peace and development in South Asia?

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Is it too much to ask in return for peace and development in South Asia?

nationalist leaders could not decide whether they should lend their support for outright secession from Pakistan or just seek more autonomy from the central government in Islamabad.

The story of Baluchistan really begins in 1893, when the British in India drew the Durand Line and separated British India from Afghanistan. Before that separation, Baluchistan was an independent tribal union. So when Partition took place in 1947 the tribes residing in Baluchistan were given the choice of joining either Pakistan or India. The then Baluch leaders instead wanted independence. But their wishes were totally ignored by all the parties to the Partition. These leaders were virtually kept in the dark about their fate.

Suddenly, Baluchistan found itself as a part of Pakistan. But the national leaders of Pakistan assured the Baluchi leaders that under Pakistan they would be given political and economic autonomy. They would also have control over

killed. The infamous General Tikka Khan, who was in command and ordered the air strikes, became known as the "Butcher of Baluchistan."

When General Ziaul Huq took power he introduced a "policy of development" in Baluchistan. Peace was temporarily restored in the region. But the central government had its eye on Baluchistan's natural resources, including the estimated 19 trillion cu feet of natural gas and 6 trillion barrels of crude oil.

The latest insurgency in Baluchistan started in 2005, when a local female doctor was allegedly gang raped by security officers. Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti (who has expired) then demanded punishment of the rapists. In response, the army attacked Dera Bugti, the largest gas reservoir, in order to suppress those who were seeking justice. In retaliation, the Baluch insurgents fired rocket launchers at former Pakistani President General Pervez

| The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

How to talk to Iran

SEYED HOSSEIN MOUSAVIAN and MOHAMMAD ALI SHABANI

IF there are any two words in Persian that President Obama should learn, they are "maslahat" and "aberu." *Maslahat* is often translated as expediency, or self-interest. *Aberu* means face -- as in, saving face. In the nearly 34 years since the Islamic revolution in Iran, expediency has been a pillar of decision making, but within a framework that has allowed Iranian leaders to save face. If there is to be any resolution of the nuclear standoff, Western leaders must grasp these concepts.

Two examples illustrate this point. In 1988, after eight years of devastating war with Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Iran's first supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, accepted a United Nations-brokered cease-fire agreement, deeming it to be in Iran's *maslahat*. It was crucial that Iraqi forces had been pushed off Iranian soil, so Tehran could claim a victory.

Thirteen years later, after the 9/11 attacks, the United States overthrew the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which had sheltered al-Qaida, in a matter of weeks. American troops would never have made it to Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif with such speed had Iran's leaders not acquiesced to the toppling of their enemies to the east. But the George W. Bush administration squandered an opportunity for dialogue by spurning this potential diplomatic overture by Iran.

For thousands of years, Persian culture has been distinguished by customs that revolve around honour and esteem. Preserving one's *aberu* is tanta-

mount to maintaining one's dignity. There are almost no instances in modern Iranian history when *maslahat* has trumped *aberu*. The West has poorly understood these concepts. This was particularly true under President Bush, who rewarded Iran's tacit acceptance of the American invasion of Afghanistan by labeling Iran a member of an "axis of evil."

Following the 2003 allied invasion of Iraq, the Swiss ambassador to Iran reached out to Washington with an unofficial outline for a "grand bargain" with Tehran that would cover everything from Iran's nuclear programme to its support for militant groups in the region. Despite this bold step, Iran was left out in the cold. Vice President Dick Cheney is said to have dismissed the initiative, reportedly asserting that "we don't talk to evil."

We now know, thanks to a recent memoir by the former Iranian nuclear negotiator Hassan Rowhani, that the Bush administration reached out to Tehran a year after dismissing the proposal. Not surprisingly, partly because of the blow to its pride, the Iranian government rejected the offer of direct, high-level talks as insincere. In the nine years since, Iran's nuclear programme -- a major symbol of prestige for Iranians

-- has grown immensely. Things have gotten a lot more complicated.

The pattern of missed opportunities has persisted for more than three decades now. The result is that Barack Obama is the sixth consecutive president who has been led to view Iran as a threat rather than an opportunity. It is time for America to exit this vicious cycle and disregard irrational voices intent on sabotaging efforts to reach an understanding.

Understanding the Iranian mentality is key to grasping why the Iranians won't put expediency above dignity. The only way to stop the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme from spinning out of control is to offer the Islamic Republic a face-saving way out.

When Obama took office in 2009, he promised a real dialogue with Iran. Many in Tehran are still waiting for him to deliver on that promise. But how?

The foundation of post-1979 decision making in Iran is the pursuit of sovereignty within a framework that balances *maslahat* and *aberu*. We believe Iran would be open to new measures regarding the transparency of its nuclear programme, and would agree not to pursue any capability to enrich uranium beyond that needed to fuel atomic power plants, if its legitimate right to enrichment under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty was recognised and if an agreement to remove sanctions was reached.

Equally important is how a deal would be implemented. Decades of mutual, institutionalised hostility have

created a gulf of mistrust that neither side can unilaterally bridge. So getting the sequence right would be crucial to any accord.

While Tehran views a deal on its nuclear programme as being in its self-interest, Western leaders need to grasp that it would be devastating for Iran's *aberu* to take the first step solely in exchange for promises. The dominant discourse in Tehran portrays the 2004 decision by the former Iranian president Mohammad Khatami to suspend uranium enrichment on a voluntary, temporary basis as a failure because it resulted only in humiliating calls by the West for an indefinite suspension. The moral of this narrative is that placing *maslahat* above *aberu*, even temporarily, leads to nothing good.

In the coming months, Iran is expected to again engage with the so-called P5+1 (the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France, along with Germany). Obama and his team, including his chief Iran negotiator, Under Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, should reflect on the meaning of *maslahat* and *aberu*. Understanding the Iranian mentality is key to grasping why the Iranians won't put expediency above dignity. The only way to stop the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme from spinning out of control is to offer the Islamic Republic a face-saving way out.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 6

- 1921** Formation of the Iraqi Army.
- 1929** Mother Teresa arrives in Calcutta, India to begin her work among India's poorest and sick people.
- 1950** The United Kingdom recognizes the People's Republic of China. The Republic of China severs diplomatic relations with the UK in response.
- 1953** The first Asian Socialist Conference opens in Rangoon, Burma.
- 1960** The Associations Law comes into force in Iraq, allowing registration of political parties.
- 1992** President of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia flees the country as a result of the military coup.
- 1993** Indian Border Security Force units kill 55 Kashmiri civilians in Sopore, Jammu and Kashmir, in revenge after militants ambushed a BSF patrol.