

## Gang-rape in the capital

*Track down and punish the perpetrators*

THERE are no words to describe our outrage at the horrific news that a 21-year-old indigenous woman has been gang-raped on the streets of Dhaka. As she was waiting to catch a bus after finishing her work, a group of men, one of whom she could identify, forcibly shoved her into a microbus and sped away. The barbarians, who had been stalking her for several days, carried out the crime in the moving vehicle, threatening her with sharp weapons when she tried to protest. The incident, which is unnervingly similar to the Delhi rape two and a half years ago, brings to the fore, once again, just how unsafe the streets of Dhaka are for women and girls.

Incidents of sexual violence like this happen all too often in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country. Last year alone, 626 women were raped and 208 women were gang-raped, according to Ain O Salish Kendra. As inhabitants of this city, we may raise our voices in collective outrage from time to time when such appalling stories come to our notice, but within a few days, we forget these victims and absolutely nothing changes. It is shameful that, as a nation, we have failed, time and again, to take any serious measures to address the burning issue of violence against women; even the Pahela Baishakh incident could not wake us up to the vulnerable status of women in this city. Instead, the apathetic attitude of our state institutions, particularly law enforcement agencies, has given a general license to offenders to carry out their crimes with impunity.

We demand that the culprits be arrested immediately and exemplary punishment be meted out. The government must also take urgent steps to make the country safe for women, particularly indigenous women, who remain among the most vulnerable to sexual violence.

## Public power companies offloading shares?

*A step in the right direction*

AFTER a hiatus of nine years, the government has formed a panel to review ways certain state-owned power companies may off-load shares in the country's bourses. By what has been reported, this panel will furnish its recommendations in 30 working days on the best way forward. It is high time wholly government-owned power companies that have been cash-strapped for years on end raise requisite capital from the stock markets instead of waiting for handouts from the exchequer. The raised capital would pave the way for such companies to take on various power projects that would only aid in alleviating the power crunch the country experiences on a regular basis.

Besides the obvious raising of much needed capital, a public offering would make these companies much more accountable. In the event ordinary shares were offered to the public, the management would be liable to answer shareholders' queries in their annual general meetings. It would have a profound impact in the manner in which government-owned entities are run.

Transparency and accountability are two essential elements in good governance and even if the public offering is a minority one, it would let the general public have some say about the way state-owned enterprises are run.

It is interesting to note that originally 26 state-owned companies had been selected for the disinvestment by the State back in 2010. Presently, only two companies are being thought of. Regardless, every little bit helps and we welcome the initiative.

## COMMENTS

**"Costly trial ends in traffic chaos"**  
(May 19, 2015)

**Syed Najmul Hussain**

This is another example of how muzzy these people are. Before identifying the root causes of the problem and thereafter taking comprehensive plans of action, they always prefer to resort to instant makeshift measures, creating further pandemonium (but making a fortune for the authority out of such a melee). Disgusting!

**Saleh Tanveer**

Before introducing large scale changes like that, the government should have done some pilot projects in various parts of the town to see how well this works. Then you go for a bigger area and so forth.

**Aakash Usha**

May be we are not ready for this. The authorities should increase the number of traffic police at least by three times. They should prevent any kind of vehicle parking at road sides, clear footpaths, construct more foot bridges, finish the construction works faster; 60% traffic problem will be solved.

**Shahnawaz Khan**

The idea was good but the system of implementation was wrong because the drivers are still not respectful about the traffic lights. We have to promote such features and get the drivers used to it and then it might work. It should not be implemented in the whole city at the same time; it should be segmented and practiced at different places. It's a long term process.

**Lal Shobuz Potaka**

The traffic control department should have some clear concepts about it first. They sometimes behave like they themselves do not know the rules. The VIP culture of breaking traffic rules should be strictly dealt with.

# Boatloads of human misery

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

FOR full two weeks or thereabouts in April the media in the west, particularly the US, were ablaze with news of hundreds of migrants drowning in the Mediterranean while attempting to cross illegally to European shores. These were people fleeing war torn areas of Syria, and other African countries desperate to land in any country that would give them asylum. They were in boats that were hardly meant to carry passengers, but these desperate people who were packed like sardines did not care how risky their journey would be. All they cared was the hope for a place safer than their wretched countries and equally woeful existence. Among those who survived was a Bangladeshi who had thrown himself into this hapless lot, but luckily escaped death. I did not follow his plight as this was not reported in the press, but I guess he was handed over by local authorities to our diplomatic mission in Spain.

Refugees fleeing from war torn or famine stricken areas to neighbouring countries or even further is easily understandable. Syria as we know is no place for normal living with a civil war going on for last three years and the country fractured into parts, some of which are under control of a draconian military force. Flight of refugees from Africa is a phenomenon that has been ongoing since a large number of countries in that continent went from one conflict to another, and humans were disposed of like animals in those conflicts. What bogs the mind is when people from countries that are purportedly stable seek such desperate means as crossing the seas in dangerous vessels, all in the hope of making it to a liveable place.

The Bangladeshi survivor of the Mediterranean ship wreck is a small example of the desperation of our own nationals to leave their country in search of a better existence. There have been many more like him who have tried, some successfully, to take a life threatening journey across the continents to earn a living. But the story of the thousands now hitting the headlines who have been caught between life and death on the high seas of South East Asia is at a different level. Although a large number are reportedly refugees from Myanmar, the Rohingyas, the rest are from Bangladesh—good and proper.

And this takes us to the nub of the problem. The flight of the Rohingyas is understandable as in the case of Syrians or Africans leaving a war zone. The Rohingyas are not accepted as citizens in their own country, and they have been hounded for years. For them any place is better than their home because they cannot call their country as home. They will go to any lengths, take any risk, and take whatever course they can to leave their country. What is the driver taking such life threatening risks for the people who have a country, and most likely a home? Is it the lure of higher income, better living, or just simply a more secure life?



**A Rohingya migrant eats food dropped by a Thai army helicopter off the island of Koh Lipe in the Andaman sea. (Christophe Archambault/AFP)**

We know that the lure of higher income and living standards are the traditional attractions for people leaving for industrialised or oil rich countries. Our people go to extraordinary lengths to go to countries in Middle East and Europe, and perhaps Malaysia. They pay hundreds of thousands to brokers who arrange their employment and travel. But who would like to board a rickety fishing vessel and leave for unknown destinations knowing that this could be their final journey?

The story of hundreds of people, mostly of Bangladesh origin, now marooned in the high seas of Indonesia and Malaysia should be in the conscience of the countries adjoining the seas, but most importantly of Bangladesh. It is possible that the current floating people would be rescued and given some temporary shelter. It is also possible that some, notably the Rohingyas, may get asylum. But the remaining Bangladeshis will be repatriated. They may like it or may not, but at least they will not die like those hundreds who reportedly died in the jungles of Thailand earlier. But will these stop future flights of desperate Bangladeshis?

There are now attempts by the government to track human traffickers and arraign them before law. Human traffickers exist and do their business because there are

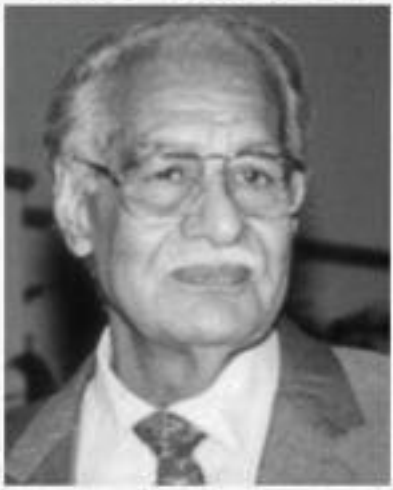
clients who are desperate to leave their country. And why do they want to leave the country? It is not always a better employment opportunity or higher income; it is also because there is no employment in the country where he lives. It is also because there is no way to have a subsistence income.

In Bangladesh we live in a paradoxical society. In one hand we have impressive statistics that show a growing national income, steadily rising exports, and impressive flow of foreign earnings. What these statistics do not show are the pathetic state of our rural economy, rising unemployment of rural youth, and growing disparity of rural and urban income. Our planners spend time more on industrialisation and supply of energy for industry and less on erasing the menace of rural poverty and the desperation of our unemployed youth. Stopping a few human traffickers from doing their business will not stem the flow of desperate people seeking desperate means to leave the country. If we really mean business we have to focus our planning and strategy on employment and income opportunities of our rural mass.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

# General Musharraf's outbursts

**BETWEEN THE LINES**



KULDIP NAYAR

I have not been able to make out why General Pervez Musharraf, who is under house arrest on charge of treason, has made a public speech on the Kargil war which I watched on a television channel. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif must be under pressure from the army to allow Musharraf to propagate an account which is not factually correct.

Surely, Nawaz Sharif remembers how he was removed through a coup staged by General Musharraf. Yet, the Pakistan Prime Minister sought US President Bill Clinton's intervention on July 4, the US Independence Day, when Clinton was too occupied, for the safe passage of the Pakistani soldiers. They had been hopelessly surrounded by the Indian forces at the Kargil heights. President Clinton telephoned then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to request him to let the Pakistani soldiers go without any reprisal.

In fact, President Clinton in his book, My Life, recorded the event in these words: "Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan called and asked if he could come to Washington on July 4 to discuss the dangerous standoff with India that had begun several weeks earlier when Pakistani forces under the command of General Pervez Musharraf had crossed the LoC which had been the recognised and generally observed boundary between India and Pakistan in Kashmir since 1972. Sharif was concerned that

the situation Pakistan had created was getting out of control and he hoped to use my good offices to resolve the crisis."

The President also recalled in the book that "Sharif's moves were perplexing because that February, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had travelled to Lahore to promote bilateral talks aimed at resolving the Kashmir problem and other differences. By crossing the LoC, Pakistan had wrecked the talks."

Still, Musharraf has the audacity to say that Pakistan had "caught India by

*The problem with Musharraf is how to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of Pakistanis.*

the throat" at Kargil. He claimed to have raised a "second force." This is the first time that Musharraf has admitted about the "second force," the motley section of non-state actors, including the terrorists and infiltrators.

This has been New Delhi's allegation all along. But Islamabad was denying it. Musharraf's speech is meant for the Pakistani audience to rehabilitate himself in his own country which blames him for the debacle in 1999. His claim that he had got India "by the throat" is

without any evidence and out of the sneering remarks he evokes in his country. The Indian commanders of those days have vehemently denied Musharraf's claim. His purpose is to deny the facts and put the blame on the Pakistani politicians to assert that they have converted a military victory into a defeat.

The fact is that Muharraf's antics made Pakistan face a humiliating defeat. True, he was able to station the infiltrators on top of the Kargil heights. But the Indian forces, after heavy losses, turned the tide and captured not only the Kargil heights but also thousands of Pakistani soldiers.

Yes, it did take us much too long to gear up to it. The plan on the offensive by our army was not ready till America had mooted a proposal for the withdrawal of the intruders. Although at a disadvantage, the Indian forces showed grit and fought bravely. The air force coordinated well. India had cleared two-thirds of the occupied territory when Pakistan asked the intruders to return home. There was miscalculation on the part of Pakistan's top brass that it could demarcate another LoC to its advantage.

Just as New Delhi never gave out how much territory it lost, Islamabad too did not tell about its reverses. The Tiger Hill had been recaptured by India when Pakistan briefed the media that the mujahadeen control on the Tiger Hill was intact. Had the Pakistanis been kept informed on the reverses, their feeling of humiliation would not have been as deep as it is today.

The problem with Musharraf is how to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of Pakistanis. They know how he embarrassed the army with the ignoble defeat at Kargil. And they have not forgiven

him. Thank God, the Pakistan media has not been taken in by his claim. He continues to be in the dog house and his latest diatribe has been noted without any comment of support.

But this is not the dominant discussion in Pakistan today. The denial of passport to Syed Shah Geelani, a separatist leader, is catching up all the attention. It is being argued that he should not be forced to spell out his nationality because he is a subject of Jammu and Kashmir, a "disputed territory."

Geelani has changed in the last few years. Earlier, he felt little hesitation in pronouncing his nationality as Indian. Some years ago when I used to meet him regularly, he never raised the issue. Even though he belongs to Jamiat-e-Islamia, he wore his nationalist credentials on his sleeve. Why has he tilted towards Pakistan is something that requires a deeper study. He is generally not a person who is swayed by emotions.

What India has to look into is the reason for his tilt. Maybe, there are many Geelanis in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Why have they not changed in the last 70 years when Kashmir acceded to India? Is it religion? If this were so, the Kashmiri Muslims would not have been greatly upset when there was a proposal to have a separate colony for the Kashmiri pundits.

"They are part of us," the Kashmir Muslims would say and they would "live in our midst" as they used to do earlier. Kashmiriyat is a product of Sufism which is a synthesis of religious values of Islam and Hinduism. Maybe, after the accession, India has forgotten those values. The need is to refurbish them, not to get lost in parochial ideology.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Law-breaking students

A few days back, I was walking with a colleague down the road 11 of Banani from Gulshan-2 to reach Kakoli bus stand. As we reached the intersection where road 11 converges with the main road between Kakoli and Mohakhali, we saw that the other side of the road leading to Kakoli was jammed with traffic. However, the other side which leads to Mohakhali was quite free. At that moment, in front of the traffic policeman, a decrepit double-decker bus carrying Jagannath University students forcefully got into the wrong side and was heading for Kakoli defying all oncoming vehicles. I raised my hands to gesture at the double-decker driver as to what he was doing.

Instantly the students inside the bus waved back at me through the open windows with funny gestures, implying that they simply don't care about intruding into the wrong side of the road. I went to the standing traffic policeman and asked why he allowed the double-decker to get into the wrong side. He replied helplessly that these double-deckers carrying students do not care to break into the wrong side any time of the day. In the mornings they do it rampantly. In fact the students force the bus drivers to do that and they simply don't care what the standing traffic policemen have to say.

This is the reality of the buses carrying the students of Dhaka University and Jagannath University. Does it mean that the law enforcers are helpless about students breaking laws?  
Shazzad Khan  
Gulshan-2, Dhaka

### Migrant boat crisis

Thousands of migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar have reportedly been rescued from sinking boats off the coast of Indonesia while thousands remain adrift in the region. Several thousand refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar - fleeing either poverty or persecution - are believed to be adrift on boats in the Andaman Sea in what has become a spiralling humanitarian crisis. In recent days, about 2,000 landed in Malaysia and Indonesia, but both countries then said they could not accept any more. But amid international pressure, these countries have finally decided to give the boat people temporary shelter.

The governments of the respective countries should take immediate measures to solve this humanitarian crisis as soon as possible.  
Ted Rudow III, MA  
Palo Alto, CA, USA