

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Prompt and sensitive handling of rape cases

Police must be held to account if they are prejudiced

RIGHTS organisations have been protesting the insensitivity and sometimes discrimination shown by law enforcers when dealing with cases of sexual assault and rape. Five such organisations have filed a writ petition to seek justice. This has led the High Court to order the government to make sure police accept rape complaints instantly and provide required services to the victim without prejudice. The delay in recording the case of a brutal gang rape of a young Garo woman on May 21 and in sending her to a victim support centre, has brought to the fore that women and girls from minority communities are even more vulnerable, not only to sexual assault but also to non-cooperation of law enforcers. The court's rule demands an explanation from the government regarding this delay. The rule also asks the authorities to provide reasons why they should not be directed to take action against the police responsible for the delay and compensate the victim.

The High Court has further asked the petitioners to suggest names to form an experts committee to review the law for prevention of sexual harassment and violence. These are positive developments in the backdrop of a state of helplessness felt by victims who often have to see their rapists/assaulters go scot free. This happens because of innumerable reasons, the most important one being the unhelpful, often hostile attitude of the law enforcers in the way they treat victims. This only hinders proper investigation and bringing the rapists to book.

We applaud the rights organisations and the High Court for putting pressure on the government to make sure law enforcers are prompt and sensitive when dealing with cases which the victims file under tremendous physical and mental trauma.

Why humiliate a teacher?

Lessons need to be learnt

THE High Court has ordered a judicial probe against the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) and the executive magistrate of Bhandaria of Pirojpur for their humiliating treatment of a teacher. We are appalled to learn that representatives of the local administration can put a college teacher through such a traumatic experience, an assistant professor no less, who was on official duty at an HSC examination hall. The teacher as an invigilator was well within his rights to ask for the identity of any 'unfamiliar' person entering an examination hall. That the man was made to kneel down and apologise in the principal's office is an abuse of office in the worst possible manner.

That a simple matter like this can lead to such highhandedness, where a local administrator feels it necessary to call the UNO and ask for police backup, is unheard of. How is it that certain government officials feel they can put a teacher through such avoidable embarrassment by making him kneel and beg for forgiveness on a petty matter. We laud the High Court for ordering a probe into the matter and certainly hope the facts will be unraveled about why such discourteous behaviour was displayed. If such gross misuse of authority goes unchecked, it will hurt the image of the government.



RUBANA HUQ

KNOT SO TRUE
I was originally planning to write on our Finance Minister's comments on the readymade garments industry being strong enough to return favours to the government. I am certain that he sees no dearth of growth in the sector and senses that all ready-made garment factories are making tons of money, evading taxes and siphoning money overseas. What he said does not surprise me, as that must be his perception. What worries me is the possible impact of his "perception" that may impact the budget and in the process hurt the industry, which has four million workers, out of which three million are women.

Looping women into any argument is easy and serves the purpose. That is why in most cases reference to women support and expedite any cause. Your columnist seeks your pardon in doing the same. But then again, most of us hold erroneous perceptions, give the same references, and practice the same evil. The most recent example of evil is of the gang rape that happened in the microbus. That is when I changed this week's topic from being one about the RMG sector to telling her story.

When I saw her, tragedy was already twenty-four hours old. She had a tiny frame; possibly did not weigh more than 40 kilograms and had a smile. Your columnist had difficulty spotting her as she came in with another woman, slightly bigger than her, looked shaken up and did not smile. Surprisingly the one with the smile was the one who was raped in a moving microbus for one and a half hours by five men. In no time, I was relearning the language of courage from her. Commonly referred to as Garo, this tiny girl in front of me would perhaps rather have been referred to as *chick mandi* (hill tribe) or *achie* (mountaineer). For someone who has to interact with the mainstream of the society on a regular basis, for reasons of earning her livelihood, she lives in Dhaka, removed from her original setup of being part of a matriarchal society where she is taught to take her mother's surname and value her mother's descent.

For over thirty minutes, she narrated with precision how she had tried to break the glass of the microbus, how they had violated her by taking turns, how they had squeezed her face in order not to let her scream, how they had told us that they were *bhodro* (decent) boys and finally how after the fourth culprit, the fifth one, being the driver, had finally parked the car and satiated his ugly desire. She also added that she had recognised one rapist who had visited her workplace and had come in with two foreigners (of which, one was an African) and asked her details of her residence. The girl happened to even know his name, as while they were engaged in the dirty act, a phone call

officer for having taken her case as she had earlier been rejected in two other stations. The girl, who was subjected to a mountain of shame at night to have gone to the police stations from 4:00 in the morning and then to have found her safe haven at Bhatara, spelt an incredible tale of resilience.

While Bangladesh marches ahead with the female net enrolment rate in the primary education being 98.1 percent, where the net enrolment in secondary education stands at 63.6 percent, where 57 percent of all women above 15 years of age are all economically active, where 20 percent of the national parliament seats are held by women, where 80 percent of our RMG workers are women, where 49.4

percent of the total population are women, how can Bangladesh afford to be put to shame when, according to Ain-o-Shalish Kendro, equally shameful statistics of 208 women being raped, 117 cases being filed, 4 having committed suicide and 29 having died, surfaces in the public sphere?

A recent World Bank development update reveals that raising the Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) to the current level of male participation of 82 percent implies adding 2.5 million female labourers every year which would boost the potential GDP growth rate by about 1.8 percentage points, leading to 7.5 percent growth by 2021. When we say so much, predict so much, pin so much hope on women,

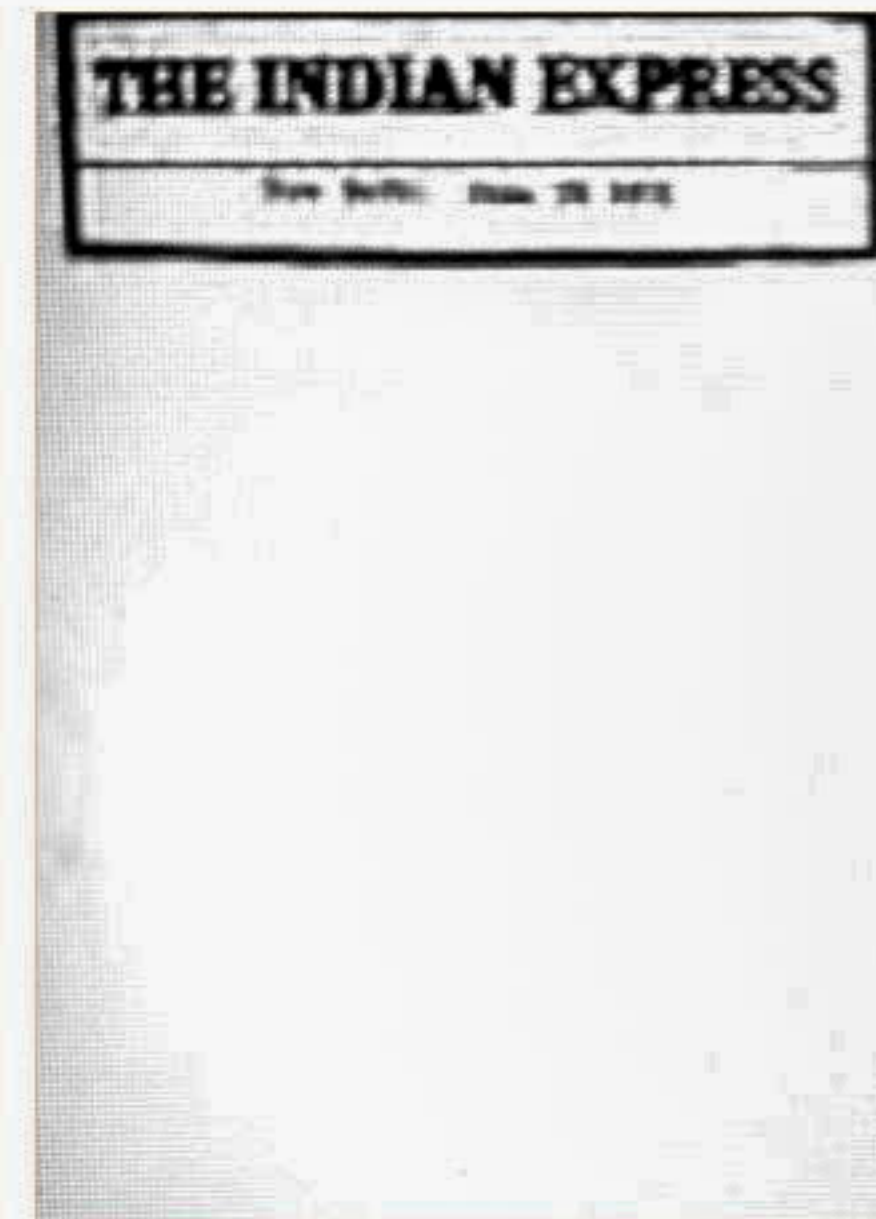
where is the safety net at the bottom of the hill when every time a woman like this 21-year old decides to take a leap of faith and share her story with the rest of the country? Apart from simply complaining of inaction on unresolved issues, apart from occasionally voicing our protest, why can't we all come out of our homes every week on a Friday, take time off from our families and hold a candle vigil for every woman who has been sexually assaulted so far? Can the language of our protest change and reach the most isolated woman in every family who is subjected to even passive aggressive behaviour on a regular basis? Can this become our ultimate campaign where all women decide to leave their homes and step out on the street right in front of their house and just light one single candle in respect for all the women in this country on a weekly basis? Can we take this campaign beyond just the educated and the aware section of citizens and make it a national language of protest for all?

Our voices must change. Our tears must not dry up. In Greek mythology, Philomela, whose tongue was cut off, wove a tapestry and shared her story of being raped by her brother-in-law Tereus and reached out to her own sister Procne. Let no Philomela ever lose her tongue in this land of ours; let there be a Procne in each of us so that all of us come together in one heart when we punish our own sons, husbands and brothers for bearing the mark of sexual assaulters.

Our time has come to reinvent the discourse on protest. Maybe we need to refer to history to learn lessons, yet again. On June 26, 1975, India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency which lasted for a little less than two years during which elections and fundamental rights were suspended, news and media were censored and more than a hundred thousand Indians were arrested. The most powerful gesture of protest was demonstrated by Indian Express on the June 28, 1975, where the daily protested by leaving the editorial section blank. A blank space carried the strongest voice...

Today, your columnist too replicates the same stance by requesting the daily to leave the highlighted section of the piece black and blank.

The writer is the Managing Director, The Mohammadi Group.



had come through and his name was called out. Quite ironically, his name evokes images of whiteness and purity.

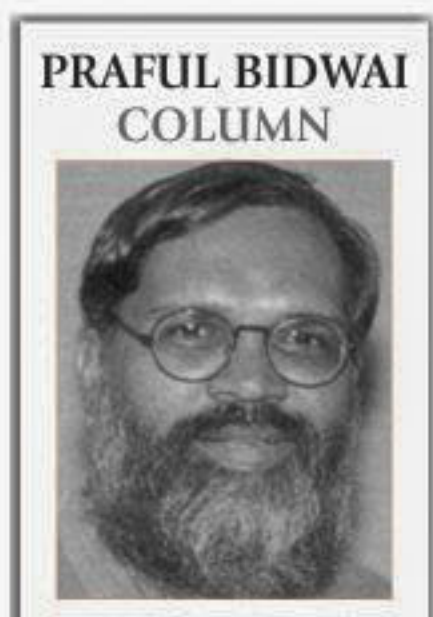
In a landscape, where according to the Bangla daily, *Pratham-Alo*, out of 5,321 women, only 41 got justice in the last fourteen years, how much will this frail 21-year old benefit from a one-stop crisis centre? Your columnist has no answer. To be honest, the reason why I rushed to the police station that night was simply because I had to see for myself that the girl was safe there. Contrary to my assumption and perception, the Officer-in-Charge there was a decent man who had ensured that the girl was well taken care of and got a safe place to stay in the thana along with her sister and dad. Your columnist had reasons to thank the

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IN SERVICE OF CORPORATES & HINDUTVA

Modi's disastrous first year



PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

WHEN Narendra Modi arrived in New Delhi to be sworn in as India's Prime Minister, he flew in a private aircraft of the Adani Group - not a commercial flight or chartered plane. On landing, he was greeted with the communal-military slogan *Har Har Modi*.

The two events showed where Modi's future loyalties would lie: with Big Business and Hindutva,

which he piously served in Gujarat through the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom and crony-capitalist deals.

Over the past year, he has showered favours on both, and antagonised many people who voted for him. His honeymoon period has ended, but he hasn't fully understood that.

This was proved by Modi's statement in Shanghai to an Indian audience: "Earlier, you felt ashamed of being born Indian, now you feel proud to represent the country..." In Seoul, he added to this the religious motif of "sins" (committed in past life).

Modi thus gratuitously insulted Indian citizens. Terms like "shame" and "sin" reveal a deep inferiority complex. The boast that India's "mood" has changed dramatically in a year is meant to cover up inferiority - the way Hitler and Mussolini did through military aggression and by making the "trains run on time"!

The first-year balance-sheet of Modi's government is overwhelmingly negative. India has socially regressed, economically become more unequal, and politically got further polarised.

India's social regression is evident in rabid communalism, attacks on democratic rights, intolerance of dissent, Hindutva takeover of educational-cultural institutions, spread of male-supremacy, insecurity among the minorities, and neglect of human development.

Ghar wapsi, attacks on churches and calls for depriving Muslims of voting rights are just the crassest forms of communalism. The government's indulgence

of them means it's open season to malign non-Hindus, and build a cult around Gandhi's assassin Godse.

The message is amplified when those charged with Gujarat's communal "fake encounters", including BJP president Amit Shah, are discharged without trial; but the state's full might is used against secular campaigners like Teesta Setalvad.

There have been savage cuts in social sector budgets: 20 percent in health, 29 percent in mid-day meal schemes, 17 percent in education, and 51 percent in women and child welfare.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act had its worst-ever performance under Modi, with 40 percent less employment created than two years back. Only three percent of families got the promised 100 days of work, and 70 percent of wages were delayed—to disastrous effect in a year of agrarian distress.

Modi's shamelessly pro-rich, anti-poor *suit-boot-ki-sarkar* is cajoling capital to invest. But investment isn't forthcoming. 52 percent of India's top 500 companies are excessively indebted, 14 percent of bank loans have gone bad.

Modi cannot diagnose this, and believes that to stimulate investment he must dismantle environmental regulations, allow unbridled diversion of agricultural land to industry (hence the land ordinance), and allow hiring-and-firing of labour.

Thus industrial-project clearances have been ruthlessly "fast-tracked" without scrutiny, violating forest and coastal-zone regulations.

Worse is to come: abolition of pollution-control boards, self-certification of environment-related information by project promoters, and automatic clearances for roads through forests. But environmental regulations don't obstruct industry: 94 percent of proposals are cleared.

Land has become a super-contentious issue. The UPA's land law was to give agriculture-dependent people a stake in determining their fate. The NDA's ordinance undermines this. It's fiercely opposed by numerous parties. A land agitation could turn

politically explosive.

The government is sitting on lakhs of acres, but hasn't distributed it. The ordinance will give private capital land and what lies under it, especially minerals - a huge racket.

The planned dismantling of labour protections will destroy the right to form unions (the minimum membership has been raised from 7 to 100). Employers can freely lay off workers or close factories with 100 workers; 90 percent of all units. The factories Act will be undermined, compromising safety.

Modi is running India's most over-centralised government ever. This is creating insecurity among bureaucrats and ministers; RSS men disguised as "officers on special duty" spy on them.

Modi has introduced venomous confrontation into politics. Several Sangh Parivar outfits have turned against the land ordinance.

Going by all recent elections, by-elections, and local-body polls, the enthusiasm for Modi seen a year ago has vanished. The BJP couldn't repeat its Lok Sabha vote-share performance even in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The edge it established in parts of West Bengal, including Kolkata, has eroded.

What's becoming manifest is the effect of the thinness of Modi's original support. He won 31 percent of the vote, but 52 percent of the Lok Sabha's seats. His support was highly concentrated in a few states - thanks to planned communal violence, and caste-and-class polarisation.

Another factor was his multi-billion-dollar election campaign, which hyped up Gujarat's "development". A CSDS-Lokniti poll asked people which state they thought was India's most developed: 64 percent answered Gujarat, only four percent said Maharashtra, and even fewer cited Kerala, India's most socially-developed state.

This illusion, based on the search for a messiah, is disintegrating. The "56-inch-chest" man is turning out a hollow caricature. Modi's troubles are set to worsen.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

COMMENTS

"Malaysia finds mass graves"
(May 25, 2015)

Tarek Mollah

How can we believe that border agencies and immigration officials of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia knew nothing about it? A disgrace to mankind!

Maung Maung

Are the governments of the respective countries failing to give them jobs? Why are they leaving their homelands?

"Govt working to reduce poverty: PM" (May 22, 2015)

Ekbal Hossen

But the situation seems opposite.

Deshi Man

But PM, we, the general people, are suffering from poverty, unstable prices and unemployment.

Saleh Chowdury

How can anyone expect so called eradication of poverty from a government that is in power through illegal means i.e. sans people's mandate?

Wasiuddin Jahin

I'd question government's definition of poverty.

Syed Najmul Hussain

It's true; poverty has been reduced over the years. It's quite evident when we visit our villages. But for that, the increasing remittance, NGO activities and booming garment sectors have played more of an important role than the government agencies. However, if the government really wants to reduce it further, it must make its administration free of corruption, introduce pragmatic programmes and implement it through sincere and efficient officials. Most importantly, undue interventions of party cadres, MP's and ministers must be reined if at all they wish to accomplish the task.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Poor Bangladesh!

The song "Bishaw kobir sonar Bangla, Nazruler Bangladesh, Jibonanander rupashi Bangla, rooper jey tar neiko shesh" often comes to my mind and I feel very sad because the beauty depicted in the song does not exist anymore. Murders, rapes, robberies and kidnappings rule the day. Even law enforcement officials are becoming involved in crimes.

Prime minister Sheikh Hasina has asked us to remain alert to prevent the rise of the evil force. But is not the evil force already at work? We feel helpless and we do not know how we, as a nation will overcome this situation.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Rebel poet's birth anniversary

On May 25, 2015, Bangladesh celebrated the 116th birthday of its national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam. He was born with a free will and a revolutionary spirit that led him to speak out for the freedom of the subcontinent from the colonial rule. His poetry advocated Indo-Islamic renaissance and his music with deep spiritual upheaval motivated the youth of his time to raise their voices against fascism. His works were based on the philosophy of humanity. Nazrul was also a child prodigy who compiled a number of folk plays for his travelling theatre troupe. His poem 'Bidrohi' deeply moved the literary class of India. The great poet left behind a great legacy for Bangla literature.

Rubab Abdullah
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