

Violence against women and children

Low conviction rate should be addressed

A study by Brac University's School of Law has found that between 2009 and 2014, the overall conviction rate under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 in three district tribunals, including one in Dhaka, was only 0.86 percent. In other words, in around 99 percent of cases not a single conviction was handed. The study has identified numerous factors that need to be addressed in order to make this law effective.

False cases, lack of evidence, out of court settlements, weak investigation and case backlog are some of the main reasons behind this poor conviction rate, cited by the study. This means that while some unscrupulous people can file false cases, genuine victims of violence do not get justice. Often, the perpetrators have enough influence and money to take advantage of the loopholes of the system and go scot free. The study's analysis of a number of judgements and cases has revealed certain shortcomings in the trial process.

Obviously, major reform is required in our legal system in order to make that cases of violence against women and children are not dragged out over years and that the guilty are convicted with appropriate sentences. Gender sensitivity of the police, a robust investigation process that will be unaffected by influence or money, are also vital factors to ensure higher conviction rates for genuine cases. The archaic Evidence Act of 1872, moreover, that allows a man accused of rape to question the moral character of the victim, must be repealed immediately as proposed by the Law Commission, in order to make sure that the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 provides justice for victims of sexual violence.

Foreign trips galore

MRP issue hangs in the balance

AUDIA Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Malaysia are three of the largest destinations for Bangladeshi expatriate workers. Issuing machine readable passports (MRPs) for workers in these countries is of paramount importance if Bangladesh wishes to continue to hold its position as a major supplier of manpower to these large international labour markets. Yet, as an investigative report printed in this paper on May 28 has revealed, the top policymakers in charge of the MRP issue have been clocking up frequent-flyer miles to "inaugurate" MRP issuance in countries that are of less significance, particularly the USA, Australia and Canada. Talk about a lack of prioritisation! With no headway in making IRIS, the company in charge of rolling out MRPs for an estimated 3 million expatriate workers accountable, our policymakers are visiting Europe and North America as time is quickly running out for our foreign exchange earners.

Have we thought out precisely what will happen if the hundreds of thousands of expatriate workers in the Middle East are sent packing if they don't get their passports in time? Indeed, we understand it is not just top policymakers but even project directors who are flying off right, left and centre to inaugurate so-called MRP issuance in foreign missions, while the crux of the problem of resolving sticky issues with IRIS remains stuck in the mud. It would be less than fortunate if our hardworking expatriate workers are forced to return home and Bangladesh's annual earnings from remittances plummet from billions of dollars to millions in a short span of months.

COMMENTS

"Providing jobs for transgender community a welcome move"
(May 22, 2015)

Toufiqueur Rahman
I feel really irked and flabbergasted when mobs laugh at them. Of course they have the right to live around us and do something for their living with dignity. If you shun them, they will engage in unsocial works for filling up their belly. Time has already run out. However it's better late than never. People should fervently welcome the decision above political benefit.

Oishee Labina Hussain
If we start treating them like other human beings, they will reciprocate in kind.

Iftekharul Anam
I am not a fan of AL, but I respect this initiative somehow.

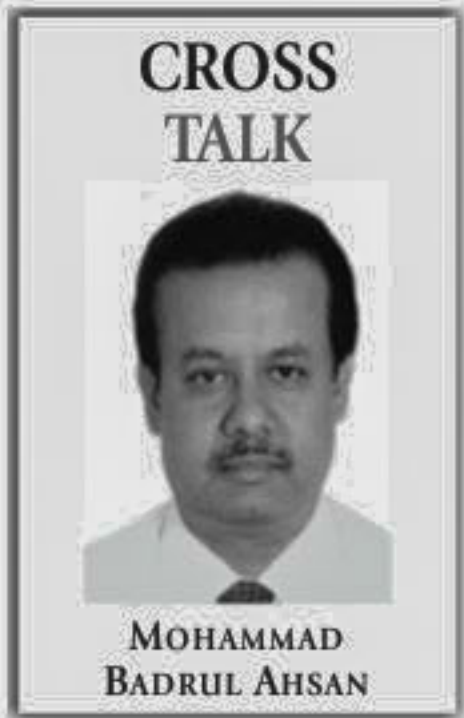
Afsana Hasan
They should be treated as human.

Hasna Begum
It is a very good decision of the government.

Tulshi Das Mahalder
The word transgender doesn't apply for them, it should be third gender.

Akku Chowdhury
They must be governed by independent and transparent authorities so that no more discrimination is faced by them.

Ibrahim Zaman
I wonder why the government took so long to realise that they deserve to enjoy every civic right, as any other citizen does. Taking birth with a physical disability isn't a crime. If there is a quota for the physically challenged people in our government jobs, why wouldn't the hermaphrodites be eligible to be considered under the same criteria? If you don't offer them jobs, they will continue to do what they are doing now, extorting people at the signal posts.



CROSS TALK
MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

As many as 8,000 refugees have been adrift in the Andaman Sea lately, some of them stranded for more than two months. Here are a few more figures to configure the context. This universe is 13.7 billion years old, and the Earth was born 4.5 billion years ago. Our ancestors have been around for about six million years; the modern form of humans evolved about 200,000 years ago. Civilisation, as we know it, is only about 6,000 years old, and industrialisation started in earnest only a couple of hundred years ago.

Now let's talk about the boat people. They remind us of the bone-chilling observation made by David P. Forsythe that at the beginning of the nineteenth century three-quarters of all people alive were trapped in bondage against their will, either in some form of slavery or serfdom. The stranded migrants are the newest victims of one of the oldest crimes. Slavery predates written records, proliferating 11,000 years ago after the development of agriculture during the Neolithic Revolution.

The difference between now and then is obvious. Modern slaves are no longer captured, bound and transported against their will. They willingly board the boats; actually they even pay to avail this opportunity. This much freedom of choice puts them between free men and slaves. In ancient Greece, this intermediate status was known as helotry.

Our migrant tragedy simply exposes that the human plight after thousands of years rotates on the same axis. Whether the enemies captured were forced into slavery in ancient Mesopotamia, or the Egyptians captured slaves by sending

expeditions up the Nile River, or African slaves were ferried to the plantations in the Americas and the Caribbean, the Rohingyas and the Bangladeshis floating in the sea must have inherited their miseries from those wretched ancestors. Alex Haley identifies that connection in *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. He writes: "Through this flesh, which is us, we are you, and you are us!"

The irony of our civilisation is that it has civilised everything but the human



Rohingya migrants stranded in Thai waters off the southern island of Koh Lipe in the Andaman sea on May 14, 2015.

flesh. It's through the torments of flesh that impulses still fiddle with reason and cloud judgment. Hunger growls, lust howls and greed prowls, while hypocrisy harnesses hatred, excuses enervate exploitation, and contention causes confrontation. The modern men are stirred by the genetic memories of their ancestors, while the flesh rules the soul.

Conscience is supposed to control that tension, but civilisation hides its failure. The whole thing is a smoke screen tantamount to the black market

or underground economy. The underground conscience thrives on double standards. It preaches what it doesn't practice.

Examples of this double standard are abound in history. The British Empire gobbled up other countries in the name of what Lord Curzon called "the greatest instrument for good that the world has seen" or what General Jan Smuts claimed as "the widest system of organised human freedom which has

ever existed in human history". The United States attacked Iraq in 2003 to find Saddam's weapons of mass destruction which didn't exist. The world's emerging superpower China keeps mum when the Rohingyas are being persecuted. Overall, large countries are more inclined to cultivate subservient rulers than forging ties with the people of small countries.

Turning from politics to economics, the picture is muddier. Multinational companies, tariff barriers, international

lending agencies, industrial carbon emission and other phenomena amply prove that the strong economies are evermore ready to exploit the weak ones. For example, small countries get beat up to comply with money laundering laws, when it's not clear how fat cats from these countries take their money to the developed nations to buy homes or invest in business. The OECD study claimed last week that the income gap has widened in the world as wealth is now even more concentrated in fewer hands.

Inside each country, smuggling, drug trafficking, gun-running, black money, bribery and prostitution are ravaging societies like the Visigoths ransacked civilisation. Morality muddled, ethics eroded and conscience crumbled, these societies are looking like front companies hiding dubious transactions. Our civilisation is providing cover to uncivilised intentions.

Studies show that modern hunter-gatherer tribes operate on egalitarian basis, suggesting inequality was an aberration that came with the advent of agriculture. Slavery too expanded since then. More deviations followed the Industrial and technological revolutions.

The mass graves in Thailand and Malaysia and the huddled bodies stuck in the boats once again established that human beings underneath their pretensions are seething with basic instincts. The waves in the sea that rocked those boats were sighs of ancestors coming from distant shores. This civilisation is a Ponzi scheme, forever looking for new victims to sustain the scam.

Human evolution is anything but the evolution of humans, because humanity hasn't been humanised although evolution evolved. Why hungry people defy death is implied in that contradiction.

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ABUL BASHIR

WHO does not like a pay increase? The new pay scale - the proposed increase in the salary of government employees - is likely to be implemented in the upcoming fiscal year beginning from next July. This is good news for government employees as the pay increase will enable them to increase their consumption and help them meet some of their unmet demands.

At the same time, there is widespread fear that the pay scale is likely to increase inflation which will reduce the purchasing power of money. Depending on the magnitude of the increase of inflation, the government employees may or may not sustain their current living standards by using the augmented income received under the new pay scale.

Against the above backdrop, the most important question is how inevitable high inflation is as an outcome of the implementation of the new pay scale. Honestly speaking, there is no clear economic reason for the new pay scale to push up the inflation. But in developing countries, many economic consequences arise out of non-economic factors.

Many experts on economy argue that the new pay scale will increase the money supply and hence fuel inflation. This will be the case only and only if the central bank finances the pay scale, which has never been the case in any country of the world, and should not be the case in Bangladesh either. The Government will finance the new pay scale either by collecting additional revenue from citizens or by borrowing from commercial banks and non-bank

financial institutions.

In case of the first form of financing, money simply changes hands, flows from the tax payers to the government employees. Even in case of the second form of financing, money simply changes hands, from lender to the government first and eventually to the government employees. In both cases, financing of the new pay scale would not increase the money supply, thus fueling inflation.

The total money supply of the country will not increase even if the government finances it through external borrowing. The government borrows from external sources in foreign currency and spends it in the domestic economy in local currency. Let's say that the government borrows \$1 from abroad - the central bank then pays the government a certain amount of taka against this dollar depending on the dollar-taka exchange rates. At the same time, the central bank withdraws the same amount of taka from the local money market to keep the overall money supply unchanged. This is why external borrowing will not increase the money supply in the local money market.

However, the increase in demand when it does not match a similar increase in supply, is a reason for an increase in inflation. In fact, this has been the main reason for inflation in Bangladesh in the recent years. The implementation of the new pay scale will increase the purchasing power of the government employees and as a result their demand for goods and services is likely to increase. From a simple point of view, this may increase inflation if our supply and marketing chain fails to meet this enhanced demand. But one has to be more analytical and take note of two things in analysing the nexus between

the new pay scale and demand-induced inflation.

First, while the new pay scale increases the disposable income of government employees, it would at the same time reduce the disposable income of others, i.e. the taxpayers or lenders to the government. Therefore, in terms of disposable income, the new pay scale will result in a zero-sum game in the economy; an increase of disposable income of some citizens (i.e. the government employees) and a concomitant decrease of disposable income of some other economic entities (lenders to the government).

Second, not everybody in a country has the same pattern of consumption. In plain words, not everyone spends the same amount of money when their disposable income increases by a certain amount. People vary in their taste, attitude towards life, and above all, in terms of the present situation they are exposed to. These differences, in turn, impact their consumption decision.

If those who experience an increase in disposable income and those who experience a decrease in disposable income have an equal propensity to consume, the new pay scale would not result in any increase of consumption at the aggregate level. For argument's sake, let us assume that the beneficiaries of the new pay scale have relatively high propensity to consume. In such a case, the overall demand for consumption would increase and if the supply and marketing chain of the country fails to meet this augmented demand, the new pay scale will fuel inflation.

The most important question in this context is how significant this inflationary pressure exerted by the new pay scale would be. According to media reports, the implementation of the new

pay scale would require about Tk 150 billion. How significant is this amount when juxtaposed to our total national consumption?

Our GDP (in current price) in the last fiscal year was about Tk 13, 509 billion. Total consumption accounted for about 77 percent of the GDP amounting to about Tk 10, 344 billion. According to the preliminary estimates, the GDP will grow by about 6.5 percent suggesting that total consumption in the current fiscal year would be about Tk 11, 078 billion. An augmented demand of Tk 150 billion, when compared to the country's overall consumption does not seem to really impact the inflation of the country significantly.

Unfortunately, inflation may still increase in July with the implementation of the new pay scale. But lack of proper management of a market-oriented economic system, as currently pursued in Bangladesh, will be the main reason for that. While this reflects a structural problem in our economic system, this also points to the responsibility of the government to properly monitor the market to prevent unjustified price hikes. True, people run business for profit. But profit should be an economic outcome, not the result of taking advantage of economic mismanagement.

The new pay scale will increase the living standard of the citizens of the country only if the government ensures that economic mismanagement is prevented. Otherwise, the intended benefit of the new pay scale will be dissipated and a large segment of the country will suffer an absolute decline in their living standards.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

l e t t e r s @ t h e d a i l y s t a r . n e t

Killing of a peacekeeper

It saddened me to know from newspaper reports that a Bangladeshi peacekeeper was killed in Mali on May 26 as armed men opened fire on a UN vehicle. The deceased soldier of the Bangladesh army was Nilkantha Hajong. Our army, as a part of UN mission, has been serving in different African war-ravaged countries to maintain peace in those regions. We deeply condemn this killing.
Shakhawat Hossain
On e-mail

'Development' of the government

The present government often claims to have developed the country. While I appreciate some development in the field of agriculture and communication, real development is questionable in other fields.

A large scale share market debacle occurred twice in the AL regime (1996 and 2009). Why? Is it because AL is a party of inept people who don't understand the share market? Or are some partymen cunning enough to manipulate the market whenever AL comes to power?

Consumption of drugs, especially yaba has increased manifold during AL's rule. Who are these people who benefit from such sky-rocketing 'development' at the

expense of our national health? We have come to know from media reports that in many cases, ruling partymen are involved in the drug business.

The government formulated a new education policy without consultation. The education minister often claims to have increased both pass rates and A+ grades. But the quality of education is questionable. Why is this?

Thousands of fellow countrymen are now stranded in the eastern Indian Ocean and many have been tortured and killed. They have left the country risking their lives in search of a better livelihood. If the country has 'developed' so much, why are so many people leaving their motherland?

MAS Molla
Life member, BAAS
Dhaka