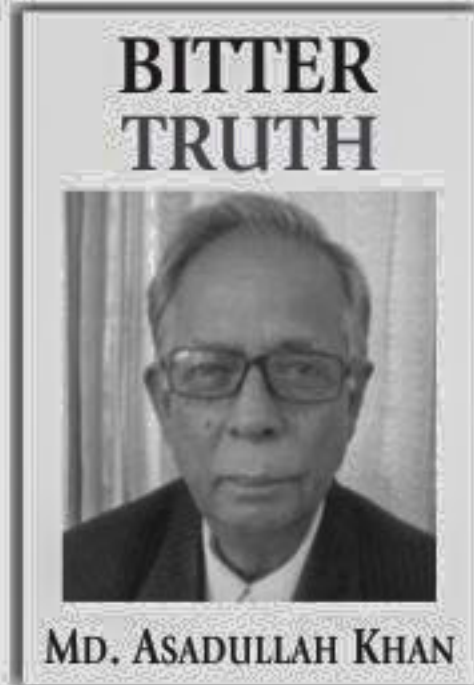


# Tearing up our soul



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

**L**AST Friday morning, a chill ran down the spine of the nation as we learnt of the gang rape of an indigenous woman inside a running microbus in the capital's Kuril area the previ-

ous night. People are inclined to believe that if the perpetrators of sexual abuse against women in the past days were booked and awarded exemplary punishment, the situation would not have come to such a sorry pass and the country would not have to witness repetitions of such ghastly incidents. Almost a year has rolled by, yet the perpetrators of a gang rape of an Adibasi leader in Chapai Nawabganj could not be brought to justice. This is inconceivable in a society we call civilised and cultured.

The country seems to be caught in a frightening coil of fear and trauma. On July 28, last year, three young men raped a 13-year old in Lohagara, Narail. The family learned about the incident after the trio released a public video of the act on August 5. Such dastardly crimes are act of barbarism that make mockery of human values, fundamental rights and legal protection.

Different human rights watch dogs revealed a staggering figure of rapes, acid attacks, murders and other crimes that took place in different places of the country in the last one year. In the recent past, newspaper reports revealing the sexual abuse of young female students of primary schools around the country left us shaken and disgusted. The litany is relentless and gets more frightening with each passing day. The optimistic expectation of justice being served quickly evaporates when people see a law enforcement personnel committing the same crime he has sworn to prevent or when a teacher sexually abuses his student either in the safe sanctuary of their home

## Collapse of under construction building

### Create a separate Building Code enforcing authority

**T**HE under construction National Bank building has exposed the systemic failures that involve lack of oversight of construction, capacity of Rajuk in enforcing the Building Code and the obligation of the construction firms in following the Code.

While we appreciate the personal involvement of the DCC North Mayor in the matter, the issue goes beyond a mayor's writ and his own involvement in post disaster operations. The collapse of the proposed building at the very seminal stage shows an abject lack of supervision up and down the line including that of Rajuk's. And one would have thought that much more than the normal safety measures would have been taken by the construction firm and its engineers given not only the weak nature of the land the building was being built on but also that there was a large hotel next to the under construction building.

For Rajuk to register case against the bank and the construction firm is like shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted. But we hope that the errant parties would be held liable for this disaster. It is the regime of impunity that induces people to violate rules and regulations. But our experience of such cases is that none actually responsible for such disasters—the authority granting permission, the construction firm or the enforcement authority, is ever held to account except perhaps the owner. One has to look at Rana Plaza and Spectra, for example.

As for the enforcement of the Building Code, clearly Rajuk is incapable of ensuring its compliance and thus a separate enforcing authority should be set up immediately.

## Short-changing the poor

### There must be some antidote

**A** former deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank, at a recent press conference, revealed some disturbing facts about poor management of poverty alleviation programmes financed by the government. Funds allocated for the poor are being pilfered at different levels before those can reach the target groups, according to the official.

Ambitious programmes to alleviate poverty in Bangladesh often do not deliver the desired results for lack of clear vision and absence of commitment that goes beyond rhetoric. Inefficiency at the administrative, technical and political levels are barriers to the implementation of such programmes. Numerous studies show that the persistence of poverty in Bangladesh originates less in the lack of resources than in poor governance. While we have become accustomed to such practices, it is abhorrent that the benefits of the programmes to help the poor are being hijacked by the very people whose job it is to deliver to them.

The former central bank official also pointed out that there is no specific budgetary allocation for alleviating poverty of people living in chars or shoals—some of the poorest of the poor, while funds disbursed to unions do not reach them at all.

Corruption is corroding poverty alleviation programmes from the inside. Furthermore, objectives and goals are not well defined, a fact that often makes such lofty programmes fail. The problem, however, goes far beyond the realm of management. A coalition should be built with all the stakeholders genuinely committed to eliminating those factors that stand in the way of serving the poor to address this issue.

The statistics are equally grim across the country: sexual crimes against women are on the rise. According to Ain-O-Salish Kendra, 123 women have been raped this year between January and March. Of them, 15 died. Last year, 626 women were raped and among them 208 were gang raped. Of them, 64 died and 13 committed suicide

In a spectacular stand by a court on May 26, Minhaz, a former teacher of Holy Crescent School and College in the city and rapist Shipon of Manikganj,

*In the present scenario, the law puts the burden of proving the guilt on the prosecution. Unfortunately, this well recognised principle of preventing the misuse of power leads to investigators being bribed, witnesses suborned and material facts altered.*

confidence in the citizenry of the country. The figures expose the ugly underbelly in a so-called cultured and progressive society. Analysing rape, social scientists say that rape is always more than just that, further adding that the blame of the crime is pinned on the rape survivor and the attitude of all members of the society towards them is rather cold and insensitive. Perpetrators try to control women through these sexual perversions that they think serve as a weapon to generate fear in their victims. It is dis-

heartening that we punish women for taking their own decisions, for earning their own living, and for choosing to move out of the 'control orbit' that men have drawn for them. Men and women who are far removed from the scene but remain silent on such issues also shoulder the blame. Rapists videotaped their ghoulish act in Narail and Puthia and later uploaded the video on social media. Tragically, there were no protests, no condemnation from political leaders, influential members of the society or the community against this dastardly crime. Silence, thus, has to be recognised as an abetment to crime. Unfortunately, one singular cause that cripples the process of rape survivors' prospect of moving beyond the trauma is the nonchalant attitude of the police. The protectors of law in effect violate the law when they refuse to record their complaints or accuse them of 'loose morals.' Some of the corrupt police officials even destroy vital clues that are essential for booking the culprit.

In the present scenario, the law puts the burden of proving the guilt on the prosecution. Unfortunately, this well recognised principle of preventing the misuse of power leads to investigators being bribed, witnesses suborned and material facts altered. Rape trials, till date, remain lopsided and fraught with loopholes providing escape routes for the accused. The fact remains that trials are heavily loaded in favour of the accused. The last vestiges of decency have thus abandoned us in the midst of beasts in the garb of humans.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star. E-mail: aukhandk@gmail.com

## READERS RESPOND

### "Gang rape in microbus" (May 23, 2015)

**Tarek Mollah**  
I cannot imagine the psychological ordeal the victim is going through!

If this event was in case of a politician, agencies would have jumped into action. Nonetheless, police acted on the complaint and sent the victim for medical examination. Timely approach is needed since the animals are increasing in numbers these days. Apprehend the culprits quickly.

**Anik Khan**  
How can punishment be ensured? If the IGP of police calls it "dustumi?"

**Saleh Chowdury**  
In a country where the prime minister, speaker and leader of the opposition are women, it's very unfortunate that rape has become an epidemic there.

**Shafiqul Islam Shawon**  
If police want, they can arrest those culprits within 24 hours. But the fact is, we didn't forget the sexual assault that occurred in Pahela Baishakh.

**Abrar Ahmed**  
This needs to stop immediately. Rapists should be

handed over to civilians.

**Sarah Alvisse-Mosbergen**  
How sick can a mind get!

**Wahid Hossain**  
That's extremely heinous. We want swift arrest of those hyenas and proper justice for the victim.

**Wishper Eshan**  
Shame, shame. These guys are worse than animals.

**Moshiuzzaman Isan**  
The culprits must be immediately identified and brought forward for trial.

**Md Al-Amin**  
These rapists are wild beasts. The culprits must be brought to book and should be served an exemplary punishment.

### "Gang-rape in the capital" (May 24, 2015)

**Farkad Sanji**  
The situation is getting out of control and nobody is taking any necessary steps.

**Ahmed Farhad Salim**  
Laws alone cannot stop these heinous crimes. Education is the key. We need to root out the socio-psychological causes which create these monsters. Rather than fighting the criminals, we need to fight the crime.

**Durdanto Hriday**  
The only identity of a rapist is that he is a rapist. Rapists do not belong to any particular cultural/ethnic group. Nor do they belong to the human race.

**Dipak Karmaker**  
We have failed to create a safe environment for our women. Only heaven knows when in the world our women will be treated as equal to men.

**Sadeq Hasan Mridha**  
What the heck are our law enforcement agencies doing?

**Shah Alam**  
The culprits should be awarded capital punishment.

**Faysal Zakaria Vivevs**  
What are we becoming? A land of rapists?

**Lal Shobuz Potaka**  
Law and order situation is getting worse day by day. All kinds of crimes including rape are on the rise. The law enforcing agencies should be more vigilant.

### "Gang-rape of Garo woman pre-planned: Police" (May 26, 2015)

**Shah Aziz**  
What an ordinary and cheap statement (often they use)! It's a pity!

**Mehdi Azam**  
Ok now take action against those criminals; we can't only have press briefings.

**Abu S Rony**  
And obviously the planners were Jamaat-Shibir men!

### "Steps needed against illegal migrants too: Says PM" (May 25, 2015)

**Muntaha Chowdhury**  
Punish the sexual assaulters before punishing these unfortunate people.

**Sandra Basgall**  
What they need is to get out of poverty, not more punishment. They are

already being punished for being poor.

**Ahmed Farhad Salim**  
The current MP of Cox's Bazar has been accused by many as one of the leading human traffickers. This issue needs to be addressed and investigated.

**Sohrab Khan**  
Previously, we saw it written on the ticket of Saudi Arabian airlines: "death penalty for drug traffickers". But there was nothing about the punishment of drug users. Their government tried to rehabilitate them in different ways. But our honourable PM declared punishment for both the traffickers and the victims. The traffickers are the criminals, they should be punished severely. On the other hand, instead of punishing the victims, government should try to rehabilitate them.

**Sohel Rana**  
Create job opportunities rather than punish them.

**Nakib Ahmed**  
These people go abroad due to poverty. I think the PM needs to understand this.

### "An insensitive remark" (May 26, 2015)

**S.M. Tofazzel Hossain**  
As a worker in a trafficking victim support centre, I would have been happy to hear a different comment from the PM.

**Sohel Nadir Khan**  
She insulted those unfortunate people by her remarks.

**Rabeya Rahman**  
Was the speech an extempore? If it is a written statement containing the offensive words, then the speech writer is responsible. Yet I would say, the points were not systematically placed in the speech and the remark is an aberration. Otherwise it is a good speech. I read it twice.

**Aakash Usha**  
If anyone wants to go abroad for a better life, he/she should take the legal path.

## TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE IN BANGLADESH SILOS OR PUZZLE?

**SALEEMUL HUQ**

**O**VER the last decade, Bangladesh has spent over half-a-billion US dollars on hundreds of projects to tackle climate change. Thousands of people within and outside government have started to climb up the knowledge ladder from the first rung which was to understand the nature of the risk to each locality and each stakeholder group. The country is now well on the way to moving up the second rung to actually figuring out solutions to tackle climate change and starting to find ways that work.

As learning to tackle the problem of climate change is a learning-by-doing process, now is therefore a good time for the country to take stock of what we have learnt so far in order to plan the next phase of our collective and individual actions in the next phase of plans and activities.

My analysis of where we are at the moment, and what we need to do next, is that we have many hundreds of activities, some good and others less good, has three elements:

Firstly, we need to evaluate the effectiveness of what we have done so far before we move to the next phase of actions.

Secondly, we see many, separate and unlinked, activities already done, many of them quite good, but they are all taking place in parallel and in silos which do not connect with each other.

Thirdly, we have an opportunity now to move from a set of parallel silos to making the different pieces of work to actually connect to others and make them fit with their closest neighbours so that they become part of a bigger puzzle.

It is essential that the pieces become bigger than the sum of the parts. This will require several things to happen; starting with sharing information on where the climate funds spent so far went. Then we need to have a credible independent evaluation of how effective the activities were. Finally, we need to be open to admitting mistakes, so that we do not repeat them.

We cannot hope to achieve everything overnight or even in the next few year, but nevertheless, if we have the vision then we can work together to make it a reality.

The writer is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh. E-mail: saleemul.huq@iied.org