

Beaten and blinded by husband

Clamp down on dowry related violence

THE horrific report of a young housewife's eye being gouged out by her husband and in-laws as part of their ongoing torture to extract money from her family, is a chilling reminder of the widespread prevalence of dowry related violence. Despite it being declared illegal, many women fall prey to their husband's or in-laws vicious attacks when they fail to meet their demands for dowry. In this case Shukhi, the hapless victim was often brutally beaten up by her husband for this reason. Her family, in fact had paid three lakh taka to help him go abroad for work. But this was not enough for him and his family. When he permanently returned from abroad, he and his family continued to physically torture Shukhi for more money.

The way her attackers - her husband and his siblings-tied her up and maimed her with a mobile phone tester-can only be described as barbaric and psychotic. But the fact is that there are hundreds of such men encouraged and assisted by their families who think that they can get away with such diabolic acts. One reason is that these criminals are seldom arrested and meted out appropriate punishment. Domestic violence, moreover, is still not seen as a crime by society at large. In some cases, it is even encouraged by misinterpreting religion.

For the sake of Shukhi, who may lose her eyesight completely, and for thousands like her, it is imperative that the law enforcing agencies make sure that all her attackers are arrested and given the harshest punishment for their crime. There must be a social movement supported by the government to stop the practice of dowry and a vigorous enforcement of the law that prohibits it.

Hospital care during Eid holidays

Even critical patients denied service

WHAT a team of our correspondents did was to take time out of Eid holidays and visit three top government hospitals, two in the capital and one in Chittagong. What they found out may not have been surprising by past standards. In fact, it has only confirmed what's pretty much public knowledge about hospitals performing too nominally for any public good during holidays.

Of course, doctors ,specialists , nurses and other ancillary hospital staff would celebrate Eid with a fervour that befits their high calling .We understand that the hospital management and the heads of departments draw up duty rosters, placing members of other communities on duty during Eid holidays. But this cannot by itself be sufficient to cope with all the ward duties, let alone handle emergencies. Take the case of Fazlul Haque. Having been run over by a bus, his right arm had to be amputated; but instead of being moved to a post-operative unit, he was kept at the general ward.

All this underscores the need for adequate, fail-safe contingency arrangements to be planned out and put in place in hospitals during vacations. After all, the OPDs are shuttered down. That is all the more reason why authorities must ensure that critical cases are not turned away or otherwise neglected at grave risk to their lives.

For, just as illnesses don't go on vacation so mustn't the ethical obligations of senior management of hospitals be sent on holidays.

COMMENTS

"FOR RAJON'S SAKE"

(July 16, 2015)

Saraa Naz

I have to agree with every word of the writer. These types of incidents outrage us but this is not shocking. It is an everyday incident in Bangladesh. If this video had not gone viral, would we really have known about Rajon? Not at all.

Malcolm Arnold

Nelson Mandela stated that "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." This statement reveals the true face of our society.

Suez Yousuf Shojib

Such practice has been developed from the culture of impunity and lack of responsibility.

"Protesters demand Rajon killers to hang"

(July 15, 2015)

Tasnuba Afroze Runa

Yes, I also want capital punishment of the perpetrators who have killed that innocent child.

Rezwanur Rahman

Police said 20-25 persons saw the murder, but none came to save the child. Can you believe it?! We demand that they are all brought to book by the government.

LAND IS PRICELESS

adivasi lives are not

THE SOUND & THE FURY

SUSHMITA S. PREETHA

PURTI Munda, the forefather of Mahasweta Devi's *adivasi* hero, Chotti Munda, had lamented how, wherever he goes, however remote the place, someone appears right away – “Whites-Bangalis-Biharis” – to snatch away his land, and along with it, his peace of mind. He had bemoaned how, every time, he is evicted from his home and in its stead, a big settlement grows, causing his Mundari world to shrink and shrink till it is no more. He had wondered why he couldn't ever get what he wanted – a small village, a place to call home.

I take a close look at the Santal elder sitting near me, and wonder if this is how Purti Munda, burdened with age and a lifetime of bitter experiences, would have looked like. He certainly sounds like him, as he recalls three generations of oppressive rule for his people. “I've lived through British rule, Pakistani rule and the rule of the Bangalis in free and independent Bangladesh. I've lived through many promises of freedom, but I am yet to know what it tastes like,” regrets the grandfather of three from Dhanjuri village in Dinajpur. “None of them cared about us, only our land, which they took, over decades, under the patronage of successive governments.”

He was an affluent farmer once, he says, with land he could call his own, and a family he could feed, before it was snatched away him from, piece by piece, by influential land grabbers. Now, with his only son, a day labourer, earning meagre wages that is barely enough to feed his family of five, he doesn't know where his next meal would come from. “It's not only that they stripped me off

my land,” he says, “they stripped me off my dignity.”

For the millions of *adivasis* living in Bangladesh, be it in the hill tracts or on the plains, land grabbing and forced disposessions have become everyday realities. The stories of eviction, especially in the plain lands, are disturbingly similar. You may have lived on a piece of ancestral land or *khas* land since your birth, but one day, your Bangali neighbour comes and tells you it's his land. You protest indignantly, but your cries fall on deaf ears as, more often than not, your neighbour has the means to obtain documents from the Land Office to “prove” his claims. You go to the police, the elected representatives, lawyers and influential people in your locale to plead your case, but they smirk at you, dismissively. When you refuse to move out of your home, your neighbour comes to give you a “grand farewell” with a bunch of goons, destroying your home, and beating you and your family. If you still refuse to accept your fate in silence, false cases are filed against *you*, and when it's your word against that of the privileged Bangali, there's only one way the tide of justice can run.

But this is the case if you're *lucky*. If you're not, your whole village may be wiped out, like it was earlier this year at a Santal village in Parbatipur, after a fight broke out between the Santals and Bangali land grabbers when the latter wanted to forcibly occupy the former's cultivable lands. A Bangali man was killed with an arrow fired in self-defence (as ruled by a parliamentary caucus after the incident) during the clash; subsequently, after 19 men had already been arrested by law enforcers for this killing, several thousand Bangalis attacked the Santal village and burnt down their houses, abused women and girls, destroyed all property, uprooted tube-wells and looted food grains, cattle, etc. No action, of course, has yet been taken against the Bangalis who launched this communal attack. Although a case has been filed, the villagers of Chirakutpara

preserve no hope of ever getting justice for the violence unleashed upon them.

But this too is the case if you're *lucky*. If you're not, you may be shot or stabbed to death in the middle of the day for daring to defy. In Kachua village in Nawabganj, three members of a single *adivasi* family have been killed by land grabbers since 1975 – father, Fagu Soren in 1975, elder brother, Gosai Soren in 2011, and younger brother, Dudu Soren in 2014. Land grabbers had seized 33 acres of land when the family took refuge at a camp in India during the Liberation War and made false documents to substantiate their claim.

censuses and land surveys are up for sale, with those with money and power able to buy themselves a place on the map with incredible ease.

The plain land *adivasis* have long demanded that a Land Commission be formed; but despite assurances from the Awami League in its election manifesto(s) that a Land Commission will be formed in its tenure, no initiative has been taken in the last six and a half years to address land-related concerns of the *adivasis* in the plain land.

There is no denying that we have a terrible record of protecting our minority populations, especially when

Women in tears after Bangalis vandalised and looted their homes in a village in Parbatipur.

PHOTO: STAR

Dudu had once said, refusing to give up the legal fight for the land, “I will give my life, but won't leave the land for which my father died. I will also die, but won't leave our land.” And so, like hundreds of *adivasis* like him who die in land-related disputes, he met his “fate” – for land is priceless, but *adivasi* lives are not.

In the land of the Bangalis, *adivasis* know better than to hope for justice – for their land, or for their lives. Law enforcers, justice system, elected representatives, government officials, local politicians – all serve the interests of the Bangali land grabbers. Even

their land is at stake. In fact, over the years, we, the privileged majority, seem to have gotten quite good at driving people off their lands, having honed our skills from decades of grabbing vested properties of our Hindu population. We have even learnt to fuel communal tension to enable the smooth transfer of land from the minority to the majority. And we have become *really* good at turning a blind eye towards the oppression of those amongst us who are powerless and marginalised.

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The writer is an activist and journalist.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

China's Brittle Development Model

AWAKENING INDIA

SHASHI THAROOR

AFTER gaining independence from Britain in 1947, India was something of a poster child for the virtues of democracy – in stark contrast with China, which became a Communist dictatorship in 1949. Until the 1970s, it was widely argued that, while both countries suffered from extreme poverty, underdevelopment, and disease, India's model was superior, because its people were free to choose their own rulers.

With China's economic boom, however, the counterargument – that a repressive political system is more conducive to development – has gained currency. But while China's recent performance has been spectacular, India's model may well stand up better in the long run.

The conversation changed after 1978, when China surged ahead of India economically, causing many to conclude that India's chaotic democracy was holding back its people. After all, if China's leaders want to build a new six-lane expressway, they can bulldoze any number of villages. In India, widening a two-lane road could incite popular protests and be tied up in court for years.

That old debate has now taken a new twist with the publication of a new book by Daniel A. Bell, a professor at Beijing's Tsinghua University. Bell argues that Chinese authoritarianism – specifically, its “political meritocracy” – is a viable model of governance, possibly even superior to the democracy of India and the West.

The economist and philosopher Amartya Sen famously demonstrated that famines do not occur in democracies with a free press, because their governments cannot ignore the suffering. Bell points out that China has also avoided famine, at least since the Great Leap Forward, and has done better than India on malnutrition. This, he asserts, proves that a government does not have to be democratic to serve its people effectively.

In fact, Bell argues, China's merit-based system for selecting and evaluating officials guarantees better leadership than democratic elections, which often lead to victory for ignorance and prejudice. Despite some weaknesses (notably complacency and corruption), China's system ensures orderly governance and

development. Democracy does not necessarily do that, so the “politically relevant question,” Bell says, “is whether democratic elections lead to good consequences.”

India debated this question 40 years ago, when then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency. She suspended civil liberties, locked up opposition leaders, and censored the press, based on the belief that democracy had impeded India's development. The issue was resolved in 1977, with an election that defenestrated Gandhi and restored democracy.

But the “bread versus freedom” dilemma remains: Can governments deliver economic growth and prosperity while respecting their citizens' rights and freedoms? The dysfunction of Indian politics in recent years, with its fractious coalitions and disrupted parliament sessions, has made that question seem more relevant than ever.

I am not convinced that Bell's answer is the right one. Rapid industrialisation and development have lifted millions of Chinese out of poverty, but often at the cost of great human suffering. China may have grown at breakneck speed, but it has broken a lot of necks in the process.

One might like to contrast India's sclerotic bureaucracy with China's efficient one, India's red tape with China's red carpet for foreign investors, and India's partisan politics with China's Party hierarchy. But there is no doubt that India's pluralist democracy has enabled it to manage its diversity superbly, giving all citizens the sense that they have a strong stake in their country – and a real influence over how it is run.

In fact, it is India's large population of poor and disadvantaged citizens – not the elite – that lends Indian democracy its legitimacy. The poor turn out to vote, because they know that participating in elections is their most effective means of letting the government know their demands. When they are frustrated with their government, they vote against its leaders in the next election, rather than launching revolts or insurrections. When violent movements do arise, the democratic process often defuses them through accommodation: Yesterday's militants become today's chief ministers – and tomorrow's opposition leaders.

By contrast, if China's system faces a fundamental challenge, its only response is repression. That may have worked so far, but every autocratic state in history has reached a point where repression was no longer enough to ensure order and progress. If China encounters widespread popular unrest, all bets are off. The dragon

could stumble, while the elephant trundles on.

Moreover, Bell's perception of China's meritocracy may be too optimistic. Given that the Chinese system is rigidly bureaucratic, permitting only gradual ascent up the career ladder, it is impossible for a young and relatively inexperienced but dynamic and inspiring leader – like, say, US President Barack Obama – to emerge. China would not choose gifted leaders who were failures in their youth, like US Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt or Abraham Lincoln. Rebels and non-conformists who have flourished in Indian politics – leaders like Mahatma Gandhi or Jawaharlal Nehru – would never have gotten started in China's system.

Beyond China, Bell cites the success of authoritarian systems like Singapore and Taiwan. But these countries probably would have been at least as successful without authoritarianism. The methods they used to promote growth and development are consistent with democratic principles, to the point that many formerly authoritarian states in East Asia managed to carry out successful transitions to democracy, without derailing their development.

Finally, Bell's view can be refuted by a simple observation: No population that has gained democratic rights has clamoured for a return to dictatorship. That alone should be enough to prove that democracy is a strength, not a weakness.

China's system may have enabled its rapid economic rise, but its dependence on a top-to-bottom consensus means that it functions well only in a predictable environment. India's system, by contrast, requires consensus on only one point: that everyone does not always need to agree, so long as they agree on how to disagree. In an unpredictable world, that gives India an undeniable – and invaluable – advantage.

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The writer, a former UN under-secretary-general, is a member of India's parliament for the Congress party and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org Exclusive to *The Daily Star*.

Corrigendum

In the article titled 'Iran's re-entry to the comity of nations', published on Page 6 of *The Daily Star* on July 21, 2015, due to an inadvertent editing mistake, Barack Obama was mentioned as prime minister instead of president. We regret the error.

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

Treat rescued Myanmar Army men well

We have learnt from media reports that two members of Myanmar Army were rescued on July 14, 2015 in Bandarban by Bangladesh army and border guards. It is suspected that Myanmar's separatist groups might have captured them and brought them inside Bangladesh territory.

Anyway, it may be mentioned that a few days back, Nayek Abdur Razzak, a member of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) was abducted by Myanmar's Border Guard Police (BGP). Though he was returned after a few days, it was clear to all that the BGP men did not treat him well. We hope Bangladesh Army and the BGB will handle this professionally and treat the rescued Myanmar Army men well so that the BGP can learn a lesson from us.

Mobarak Ali
Gopibagh, Dhaka

Modi's visit and our expectations

On June 6, 2015 Indian PM Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh. We were hoping that many unsolved issues would be solved. But we were disappointed because the problems regarding Farakka Barrage, Tipaimukh Dam and water sharing of Teesta River weren't resolved. We do not know if they are ever going to be solved.

Bangladesh is a small country with 16 crore people and it is besieged with so many problems; political unrest, natural calamities and all sorts of crimes. Now

the great danger that is Rampal Power Plant is looming overhead. It is a joint venture of Bangladesh and India. Experts at a meeting wanted to know how the National Thermal Power Company (NTPC) of India could obtain the clearance for the Rampal project when the same Indian company was not allowed to build a coal based power plant on the Indian side of the world's largest mangrove forest. We fervently request the concerned authorities to look into the matter and save Bangladesh from destruction which is inevitable if the Rampal Power Plant is built.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong