

Yet another gang rape of teenage girl

Time to act is now

We are appalled at the news of yet another gang rape of a teenage girl in the capital, only a week after a similar horrific incident took place in Mirpur where a Class IX student was allegedly raped by three youths. In this instance, the 17-year-old employee of a shop was allegedly raped by one of her colleagues and his two cohorts in Uttara as she was returning home from work at night. The trio reportedly forced her into an under-construction building, threatened her with death and raped her before she jumped off the building two hours later in a desperate attempt to save herself. The incidence of gang-rapes in the country seems to have reached an alarming level. On May 21, a Garo woman was gang-raped in a moving microbus in Uttara by five men; on May 27, a girl was gang-raped on a boat by four people in Gazipur's Kaliganj upazila; on June 4, a woman was gang-raped in front of her husband by armed assailants in Jagannathpur of Sunamganj who broke into their hotel room; on June 10, a policewoman was gang-raped allegedly by her former police husband and his cohorts in Khilgaon. The stories of horror go on.

In how many of the instances, we ask, were the perpetrators brought under the purview of justice, even though the victims clearly identified the rapists? How much emotional, legal and other support was provided to the victims? What concrete actions have we taken, as a state and as a society, to address the rising trend of violence against women?

We can no longer ignore this perverse epidemic that is rotting away at the core of our society. Action must be taken, and now, to make this country safe for women and girls.

Cyclone passes with relief

Material loss has to be recouped

We breathe a sigh of relief that the main strength of Komen did not make landfall on Bangladesh soil. That coupled with effective cyclone preparedness by authorities and volunteers helped avert major loss of life in the coastal belt. Yet the incessant rain and rise of water levels due to the influence of Komen cyclone have resulted in severe damage to crops and shrimp cultivation in the coastal belt. Going by what has been reported in print media, Chittagong division has suffered overflowing of waters along flood prevention embankments. This has adversely affected internal river transportation networks and marooned thousands in different areas.

Some 50 villages in Teknaf, Moheshkhali, Kutubdia, Pekua and Chakoria upazilas of Cox's Bazar and 10 in Nohakhali's Hatiya were flooded after several thousand metres of flood protection embankments there were washed away due to high tide and rainfall. We are informed by officials that some 60,000 people are affected in Pekua alone. As the weather situation improves the full impact of Cyclone Komen can be assessed for damages on man and material.

The major challenges, once the rains have receded, will be to get essential food commodities and medical aid to the affected pockets of stranded communities in various areas. Farmers, particularly the export-oriented shrimp cultivators, will require cash incentives to recuperate their losses. Needless to say, beyond loss of livelihoods, we are looking at the loss of habitat for thousands of people and authorities should be prepared for their earliest rehabilitation.

COMMENTS

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(July 31, 2015)

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Sepal Nath
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Babul Ahmed
How many times will elections be held under the current government?

▼

Shah Alam
In the present perspective, the concerned constitution needs amendment to help facilitate a free, fair and credible election.

▼

Mohammad Ansar Uddin
Democracy will be ruined. Please take a good decision for the people of Bangladesh, and not for the party.

SHIFTING THE BALANCE AGAINST ISIS

Turkey joins the US to fight ISIS

FROM A
BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

THERE has been a significant development in the war against IS. Turkey has joined the US-led coalition. Turkey has so long been sitting on the fence as far as containing IS on its borders was concerned. Despite criticisms, Ankara was reluctant to join the US-led Operation Inherent Resolve, which began in August 2014. Though a strong NATO ally, Turkey also did not agree to let the US Air Force use its airbases to attack ISIL positions inside Iraq. There were allegations that Turkey allowed ISIL sympathisers and terrorists to cross over the borders from Syria. But all that changed on July 20 when 32 people were killed by a suspected IS suicide bomber at Suruç district bordering Syria. The incident shook Turkey. On July 24, Turkish F-16 fighter jets launched air strikes against IS held positions inside Syria, reportedly killing 35 militants. Turkish jets also bombed Kurdish positions in Syria and Iraq. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said at a press conference that the operation was not a one-off move and would widen gradually based on security needs of the country. "The operations ... will continue for as long as there is a threat against Turkey," said Davutoglu. Police, so far, have arrested over 1000 suspected ISIL and Kurdish terrorists in raids after the suicide bombing incident. Turkey thus opened two war fronts – one against IS and the other against the Kurds. Turkey's strategic shift comes following an agreement reached between President Barack Obama and President Tayyip Erdogan on July 23, 2015. Turkey has also given permission to the US Air Force to use its airbases for attacks on ISIS. American fighter jets have so long

been operating from its aircraft carrier based in the Mediterranean. Coalition fighter planes and drones will now fly from bases closer to enemy positions in Syria and Iraq. The bombing of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) hideouts inside Syria and Iraq is puzzling. PKK and Kurdish Peshmerga are fearless secular fighters as opposed to IS. America supported the Peshmerga with huge arms supplies last year, when Erbil and Mosul came under ISIS attack. America looked upon Peshmerga as its ally on the ground against IS.



On the other hand, Ankara has been engaged in negotiations with PKK for a political solution to the Kurdish autonomy issue. Kurds, who constitute 20 percent of Turkey's population, have been fighting for autonomy since the early 1980s. More than 40,000 people have died over the past decades. The 2013 ceasefire with PKK is now dead. What is baffling is that Turkey has gone after PKK, despite the fact that Turkey, the US, and PKK are on the same side fighting IS. Turkish media has welcomed the

attacks on PKK. However, when an outraged pro-Kurdish party organised a "peace march" in Istanbul, it was quickly banned by the police. Turkey evidently is concerned about PKK's strength and resilience in fighting ISIS. The fear is that if PKK can push back IS from Syria, it can try to establish its own autonomous territory in South East Turkey. Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu accused the PKK for the killing of several Turkish policemen. On July 28 President Tayyip Erdogan said that Turkey cannot continue the peace process with Kurds amid attacks by Kurdish militants on

It is widely believed that President Erdogan's turnaround is linked to domestic politics. Erdogan was elected president in August 2014. Turkey held parliamentary elections in June 2015. Erdogan's Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP), with 258 seats, fell short of majority in the 550-seat House. A new government could not be formed, as no single party succeeded in getting the majority of 278 seats. No coalition has emerged either. The government of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, sworn in August 2014, continues. Since the parliament failed to produce a new government, President Erdogan can legally call for fresh elections. There is another angle – the Pro-Kurdish party, People's Democratic Party (HDP), entered the parliament for the first time in June 2015, with 13 percent of the votes (82 seats). If, at the next elections, HDP can be pushed below the required 10 percent threshold, the HDP will cease to be represented in the parliament. Erdogan hopes that his hard-line policy towards ISIS and the Kurds will raise AKP's popularity in the next elections. Erdogan will show that he is determined to crush terrorism in Turkey. The redoubtable Erdogan has always wanted to amend the constitution and introduce a presidential type of government with more powers. To change the constitution, he requires two-third majority in the parliament, which he was denied in the last election. Many predict that Erdogan is planning to call for fresh parliamentary elections in November 2015. However, the US welcomed Turkey's decision and NATO provided strong backing to Turkey's war on terrorism. Turkey's entry into the fray will undoubtedly give a new complexion to the US-led alliance but will also strengthen the coalition air power against IS. However, to defeat IS, the coalition will have to put boots on the ground.

The writer is a former ambassador and secretary.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

It's time to ban the bomb

THE WORLD
IN WORDS



HANS BLIX

There is little hope of any change for the better unless the Security Council's permanent members conclude that their own security requires resuming détente among themselves and launching serious disarmament negotiations, as promised.

THE nuclear agreement between Iran, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council plus Germany, and the EU, comes at a historically propitious moment. Seventy years ago this month, the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki opened the darkest chapter in the long history of humanity's wartime horrors. Fire, bullets, and bayonets were now joined by nuclear radiation – a silent, invisible killer like gas and biological agents. After World War I, the international community adopted the so-called Gas Protocol, to prohibit the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons. Likewise, the demand to ban any use of nuclear weapons has been strong and persistent since the end of World War II. But the states possessing nuclear weapons have always opposed such a ban, arguing that it would not be credible. Instead, they have recommended a step-by-step approach, eventually leading to a ban on the possession and production of nuclear weapons. After all, the same approach brought about today's strict limits on biological and chemical weapons. Yet 70 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the gradualist approach has clearly failed. During the Cold War, the total number of nuclear weapons worldwide climbed to more than 50,000. Many, including hydrogen bombs, had explosive yields that were orders of magnitude higher than the bombs dropped on Japan. Some measures were agreed to reduce the nuclear danger: bilateral arms-control agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union, restrictions on the testing of new weapons, and – above all – the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The aim of the NPT,

signed in 1968, is the universal elimination of nuclear weapons: non-nuclear-weapon states commit not to acquire them, and the five states that officially possess them (the US, the United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia) commit to disarmament negotiations. But the overall threat has never diminished much. To be sure, the first part of the NPT has had some success: Since the treaty entered into force, only four states – India, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan – have developed nuclear weapons. South Africa eliminated its nuclear weapons and became a party to the NPT, while Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan transferred their nuclear arsenals to Russia. Two states – Iraq and Libya – were stopped from developing nuclear weapons, and now Iran, a party to the treaty, has committed to abide by important restrictions on its nuclear programme. And yet the commitment of the five nuclear-weapon states to disarm has had very limited results. Nuclear stockpiles were reduced – mainly for economic reasons – following the Cold War, to less than 20,000 nuclear weapons worldwide (still enough to destroy humanity several times over). And the 2010 New START agreement brought welcome upper limits to the number of nuclear weapons deployed by the US and Russia. But no serious disarmament negotiations have been pursued since. Moreover, it was once hoped that NATO's small number of non-strategic nuclear weapons sited in Europe could be withdrawn to the US, as they were widely considered militarily useless. Doing so, it was suggested, could lead Russia to remove its own tactical nuclear weapons. Neither action has been taken. Likewise, the hope that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), adopted in 1996, would become binding has not been realised. A moratorium on such tests exists, and an impressive monitoring machinery has been created, able to register not only weapons tests, but also

earthquakes and tsunamis. Yet, because eight countries, including the US and China, have failed to ratify it, the CTBT occupies a legal netherworld: it may be said to be in operation, but not in force. Rather than nuclear disarmament, the world is witnessing an upgrading – and, in some cases, expansion – of nuclear arsenals. There is little hope of any change for the better unless the Security Council's permanent members conclude that their own security requires resuming détente among themselves and launching serious disarmament negotiations, as promised. They have shown their willingness to act to restrain other states from acquiring weapons of mass destruction; now it is time for them to restrain themselves. Of course, just as some states refuse to join the conventions that ban cluster bombs and landmines, the nuclear-weapon states will not join a convention banning their arsenals. Yet the existence of such a treaty could serve as a constant reminder of what is expected of them. For that reason alone, it should become an international priority. During the Cold War, many people feared that mankind might commit suicide abruptly, by waging a nuclear war. Today, more people may worry that humanity will suffer a more prolonged death through global warming. But the nuclear peril is still there, and groups like Global Zero deserve our support in their efforts to raise public awareness. It has been said that Hiroshima and Nagasaki created a taboo against any further use of nuclear weapons. Let us hope so, but let us also demand that the taboo be made legally binding.

The writer, former Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, was 1st Executive Chairman of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission from 2000-2003. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org Exclusive to The Daily Star

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

New clue to solve MH370 mystery!

Recently a flaperon - a moving part of the wing surface – from a Boeing 777 has been found on the French Indian Ocean island of La Reunion, which is believed to be a part of the missing Malaysia Airlines plane MH370. The plane was mysteriously disappeared on March 8, 2014, with 239 people on board. This discovery has created a strong hope towards solving the mystery. It is reported that the plane piece

will be taken to the city of Toulouse, the hub of Europe's aerospace industry, where experts will examine the flaperon. If the investigation yields a positive result, it will help solve the mystery of MH370's disappearance. While extending my heartfelt sympathy to the relatives of the missing flight MH370, I sincerely wish the investigators' success. Professor M Zahidul Haque Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University Dhaka

Death lurking everywhere!

We have never felt so unsafe before. Every day, news of murders reach us. People of different professions, belonging to different age groups, are falling victims to horrible crimes. Housewives, children, and even babies are not being spared. Even the womb of a mother is not safe anymore. An unborn baby girl suffered bullet injuries while in her mother's

womb during a Jubo League factional clash in Magura on July 23, 2015.

We have lost all hope. It seems there is no chance of improvement of this horrible situation, because the activists of many factions of Awami League are becoming more audacious, while a section of the law enforcement agencies is getting involved in criminal activities as well. Nur Jahan Chittagong