

Collateral of War and Peace

ADNAN R AMIN

FOR Bangladesh's global image, January 2016 was not a good month. Allegations of sexual abuse by Bangladeshi peacekeepers stationed in African countries have hushed the nation into a shocked, shamed, uneasy silence. The abuses allegedly took place in 2014, mostly near a camp for displaced people.

The Government of Bangladesh deserves a round of applause for instantly launching an investigation. On the other hand, three African countries failed to undertake any such measures and had the UN taking up investigations on their behalf. Bangladesh has been saved from that fate. Assistant Director of Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR) Directorate, Md. Noor Islam, has said, "If any involvement in this regard is found, we will show zero tolerance."

Note the above phrasing closely, dear reader. It underscores that these are still only accusations, until concrete evidence is found. While these are still only accusations, that must not preclude a conversation about the history and present status of sexual abuse by soldiers, especially during peacekeeping missions. Such an exploration will help us contextualize the environment in which the acts have been allegedly performed and the accusations, arisen.

Conflicts and sexual violence have gone hand in hand for centuries, if not millennia. In ancient Roman legal system, armies that entered a city by force were entitled to perpetrate mass rape. Legend has it that, circa 750 BCE, early Romans would abduct and commit forceful intercourse with neighboring Sabine women, in order to populate the new city. In Hindu mythology, the ten-headed King of Lanka, Ravana abducts and attempts to defile the virtuous Sita as an act of war. In pre-Islamic Arabia, sex with prisoners of war and slaves was common. In fact, it was not until the 14th century that European rulers directly criminalized wartime rape.

The French Army during expeditions in Morocco and Algeria and in the First World War ran and abused Bordels Militaire De Campagne, or mobile brothels. More than 200,000 'comfort women' were drafted by the

Japanese Army during WW2. Yet, only naïve and primitive discourse treats wartime sexual violence merely as a biological byproduct of fielding large armies on enemy turf. In the 1990s, a Medecins Sans Frontieres report stated, "In Bosnia systematic rape was used as part of the strategy of ethnic cleansing." This marked the beginning of a deeper inquiry into the nature of sexual violence during war.

Of course, no nightmare is as vivid in our minds as the systematic rape of Bangladeshi women during 1971. In an interview with Dr.

In the latest installment, ISIS fighters are perpetrating systematic rape of and trade in female 'disbelievers' - in multiple occasions, claiming that their version of radical Islam allows raping disbelieving women and girls. The minority Yazidi community especially has been subjected to inhumane humiliation and torture.

There seem to be at least four factors that create the conditions that facilitate sexual violence during conflicts. Firstly, there is the dehumanizing of rivals - painting them as

deprived of social and biological stimuli.

But most theories fall apart when applied to UN peacekeeping troops. They are trained and counseled to not think of people as inferiors. They have no need to use psychological warfare against natives. On the contrary, they are chosen from the best, receive basic orientation trainings and have high expectations riding on them. Yet in 1996, Graça Machel (Nelson Mandela's ex-



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Bina D'Costa, Dr. Geoffrey Davis (who performed thousands of abortions during the Liberation War) said of the Pakistan Army, "They had orders of a kind or instruction from Tikka Khan to the effect that a good Muslim will fight anybody except his father. [...] [They had to impregnate Bangladeshi women] so there would be a whole generation of children in East Pakistan that would be born with the blood from the West." Chilling as they are, the doctor's words are testimony to the terrible cost of conflict borne by the bodies and minds of women and children, as a systemic part of war.

sub-human through the use of wartime propaganda. Secondly, there is social devolution and breakdown of communities that arise out of conflicts and leave women and children (typically, non-combatants) vulnerable. Next, there is the strategic use of sexual violence as psychological warfare, with the intention of humiliating the enemy. In history, victors have been known to claim enemy women as 'booty'. Fourthly, there is the issue of having (largely male) combatants uprooted from their natural habitat and social facilities for extended periods of times, which leaves them

wife and former First-Lady of Mozambique) noted, "in 6 out of 12 country studied on sexual exploitation of children in situations of armed conflict prepared for the present report, the arrival of peacekeeping troops has been associated with a rapid rise in child prostitution."

A decade later, the (Prince) Zeid Report noted the involvement of peacekeeping personnel in sexual exploitation "in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the early 1990s to Cambodia and Timor-Leste in the early and late 1990s to West Africa in 2002 and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in

2004." The report observed that solutions undertaken were mostly ad hoc and attempted no systemic recalibration. The UN has since established a Conduct and Discipline Unit (CDU), while adopting a strategy of prevention, enforcement and remedial action. Around the same time, NATO troops were turning Kosovo into a major sex-slavery industry. Another decade later, UN troops in Haiti would be engaging in 'transactional sex' with women and minors in need of food and medication.

It is baffling that sexual violence against women and children are perpetrated by rival armies and peacekeeping troops alike. Not to mention that UN-related incidents are underreported due to fear of retribution, excommunication or mockery! It is possible that the presence of an armed force among a war-ravaged population creates the worst kind of imbalances. It is likely that economic inequality, within the microcosm of host communities, opens up avenues for exploitation. There are reported cases where the level of destitution is such that abused children prefer abuse or prostitution to starvation. Thus paved is the road to socioeconomic exploitation.

The situation is exacerbated by the complex arrangement through which the UN places troops in host countries. Under the UN Model Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), military members are generally immune from prosecution in the host country. The countries retain disciplinary responsibility for their own military forces. Now, it should not be surprising if Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) are reluctant to admit to wrongdoing by its personnel and therefore minimizing legal action. In a bizarre twist, the Zeid Report states that the TCC may not even receive entire inquiry reports - because the UN has a policy of not releasing documents that expose it to third party lawsuits. Sexual exploitation is thus sustained by the combined reluctance of victims, TCCs and the UN itself. As long as socioeconomic realities and enforcement weaknesses are not addressed, a lasting solution to exploitation and abuses may not be possible.

Adnan R Amin is a strategy and communications consultant.

Smart agriculture with smart technology

SHIFAT ARA

THE effect of urbanisation is two-fold. On one hand, it boosts development indicators such as economic growth, productivity and human development indexes and on the other hand, the intensifying of the tertiary industry results in more people shifting from the agriculture sector. This might result into a big threat for an agri-dependent country like Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, where agriculture is still a major source of income for 14 million farming households, lack of access to information, along with various other factors demand immediate attention. One cannot stress enough on the need for information regarding agriculture which is vital for farmers to make informed decisions.

The last ten years have been a decade of tremendous growth in information communication technology (ICT) in Bangladesh. Currently, the telecom network covers all 64 districts of Bangladesh and almost 84 percent of rural households carry mobile phones. This can be partially attributed to the availability of cheap mobile handsets and the oligopolistic nature of telecommunication industry that allows mobile phone users to enjoy affordable call tariffs and internet packages. Other than the telecommunications sector, growth is significantly realised through the availability of private sector owned ICT based services, union digital centres and internet cafés at the country's union level. In the context of service availability, what started with agriculture helplines by telecom operators, have expanded to SMS based services and government developed software that provides accurate agriculture information. Private sector agriculture input companies have also established ICT based services aimed at providing product specific and general agriculture information to farmers. The

agriculture input sector has effective networks of farmers across Bangladesh, and the ICT can enable these companies to reach out to them faster and more economically. This scenario is already evident as leading seed, aqua-chemicals and fish feed companies are adopting various ICT based mechanisms to reach out to farmers in order to ensure proper usage of their products. This has a two-fold benefit; firstly, this allows companies to present themselves in an empathetic light to

information seeking behaviour of farmers is required to design appropriate farmer-friendly ICT services - none of which currently exist fully in the industry.

Designing the right kind of services is one of the most critical elements to ensure its usage at the farmer level. Unlike many other sub-continental countries, one of the major limitations in designing ICT based services for the rural farmers in Bangladesh is the low literacy and technology adverseness. This

receiving phone calls. ICT services that involve engaging "call-centre" agents are therefore the way to go. There are currently plenty of services using this approach to give information to farmers, for example, agriculture helplines that benefit farmers by solving their queries on disease prevention, general agriculture practices, etc. Solutions provided for critical problems by these services are seen to have direct impact on farmers' incomes.



their farmers, and secondly, accurate and timely information enables farmers to enjoy higher yields and enables companies to retain their customers. These services are concerned with providing customer care solutions for farmers and is considered part of marketing initiatives in order to reach out to a wider scale of farmers; however, the input sector is only at a nascent stage of utilising ICT. Strong linkages between software developers and input companies with sufficient knowledge of

confines the type of services that can be designed for the said demographic. While farmers in Africa can benefit from smart text messaging giving them vital information on farming, farmers in Bangladesh are unable to enjoy that luxury. SMSs and other pull-based ICT services that require farmers to register/subscribe also do not work because of their complexity and because farmers are not in the habit of utilising their mobile phones for any other purposes than making or

Although various ICT services exist, their usage is limited due to lack of awareness. Carefully designing promotional activities for the usage of these services is therefore highly essential. It is a component that demands careful attention, but is more than often not prioritised. Unless these services are properly presented to farmers, they will continue to utilise existing and traditional sources of information in times of crisis, and reach out to ICT only when the need for information is

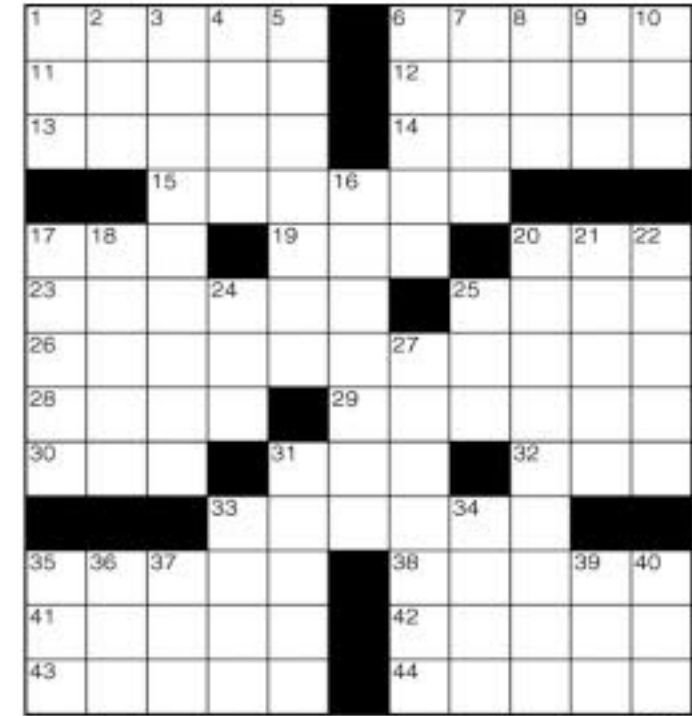
dire and traditional sources of information have not sufficed. Traditional promotional tools such as hype creation through music and drama, SMS alerts and recorded voice calls lead to short-term increase in the usage of ICT services but fail to bring about a lasting effect. Bringing about behaviour change at the farmer level will require campaigns targeted towards changing farmers' perception of technology. The goal should be to position ICT as a comprehensive and reliable source of agriculture information. This again is time consuming and highly expensive.

The growth of ICT in the context of Bangladesh is promising. For ICT to benefit the nation's 14 million farming households through agriculture information, it is essential to design ICT solutions that are user friendly and cost effective. Young farmers who will constitute the farming population in the future will be able to make use of a variety of ICT services due to their tech-savviness and better literacy than their preceding generations. The future of ICT for agriculture also holds telecom operators, agriculture content providers, software developers and various other market actors designing new services targeting farmers. Leading agriculture input companies who are currently utilising ICT to services can also expedite the expansion of ICT by showcasing the industry the benefits of it and share their experiences for other companies to build on. Lastly and importantly, the continuity of favourable government policies and regulations (on internet and call tariffs) will be a pre-requisite on a broad level for the rapid expansion and utilisation of ICT in all aspects of development.

The writer is Senior Business consultant, Swisscontact-Katalyst.

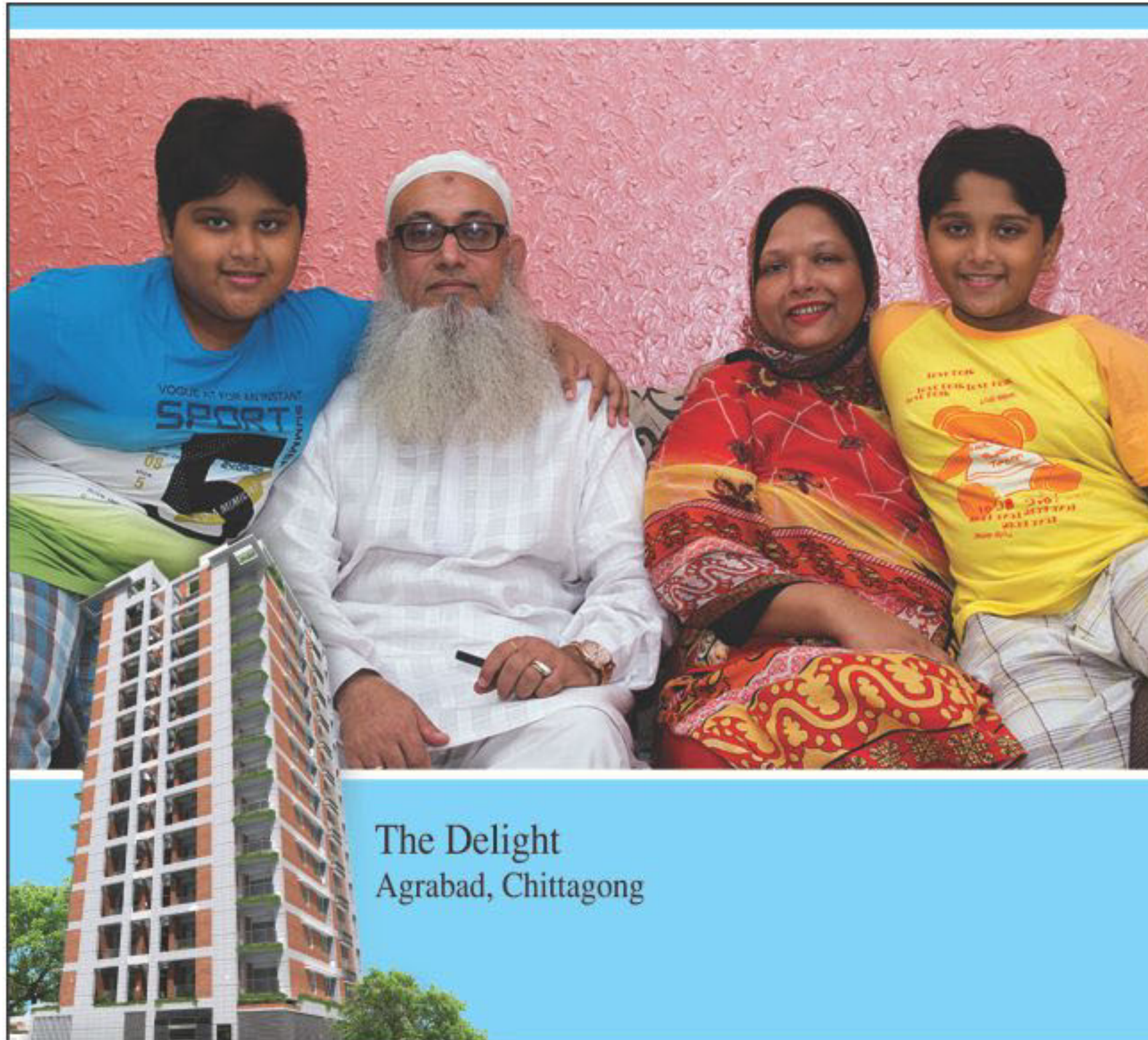
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Sensational
 - 6 Symbol of Slowness
 - 11 Scarecrow's wish
 - 12 Singer Ronstadt
 - 13 Paris river
 - 14 Victorious
 - 15 Feel sympathetic
 - 17 Used to be
 - 19 Braying animal
 - 20 Boater or bowler
 - 23 "It's my belief..."
 - 25 Parcel (out)
 - 26 Romeo's creator
 - 28 Elbow
 - 29 Mad magazine feature
 - 30 Compass dir.
 - 31 Obtained
 - 32 Put into words
 - 33 Add value to
 - 35 Lasagna or linguine
 - 38 Scarlett's last name
 - 41 Operative
 - 42 In the buff
 - 43 Oklahoma neighbor
 - 44 Place
- DOWN**
- 1 Some ammo
 - 2 Mine material
 - 3 Reasonable treatment
 - 4 Excellent
 - 5 Like some rural bridges
 - 6 Vegas machines
 - 7 Muses count
 - 8 Small worker
 - 9 Chapel reply
 - 10 Napkin spot
 - 16 Requests
 - 17 Bits of smoke
 - 18 Friend of D'Ar-tagnan
 - 20 Sign of disbelief
 - 21 Skylit lobbies
 - 22 Wee
 - 24 Mammie's mate
 - 25 Singer Tillis
 - 27 Snape's class
 - 31 Pesky swarm
 - 33 Sicilian volcano
 - 34 Casual talk
 - 35 Butter square
 - 36 History bit
 - 37 Application form box
 - 39 Stephen of "The Crying Game"
 - 40 Throw in



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

H A S T E N A S A
O M A H A Y O D E L
T O W I T A G A V E
O R B S P R O P E R
L O U A R M T N T
L U C K S O U T
S K I S L I M B
D U C K S O U T
T A P A R E R O W
E N E R G Y M A Y A
A G R E E D I V A N
C L O D S I C I N G
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