

Crimes against humanity

Sexual violence against Rohingya women and girls

AS more Rohingyas pour into Bangladesh to escape torture and death, one of the most horrifying realities have come to light — that hundreds, perhaps thousands of young women and girls have suffered the worst kind of sexual violence at the hands of the Myanmar security forces. This has been revealed through gruesome testimonies given to the media by women and girls who have managed to survive. Doctors treating Rohingyas in the camps have also confirmed that many of the women and girls they have treated have injuries that show that they have been sexually assaulted and raped. Doctors of a UN organisation working at a refugee camp have said they have treated hundreds of women with injuries from sexual violence during the army operation in October and November.

The accounts given by survivors who have either been subjected to sexual violence or have witnessed others going through it, reveal a diabolic collusion among the members of the Myanmar army to encourage each other to rape and gang-rape. One of the most important conclusions drawn is that rape and sexual assault were used systematically by the security forces as a strategy to humiliate and terrorise the Rohingya people. Such strategies have been employed in other cases of ethnic cleansing; the wide-scale rapes of women by Pakistani forces in during our Liberation War, in the war in Bosnia, in Rwanda and other countries, serve as chilling evidence. It is shocking that the Myanmar government and its de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi, refuse to acknowledge these horrific crimes despite the eye witness accounts and the findings of medical professionals at the camps. The scale of the sexual violence warrants proper documentation of the cases and number of victims so that the evidence can be introduced in an international tribunal to try such crimes against humanity.

VIPs not above the law

Laudable action against traffic violations

THE police yesterday filed cases against 57 drivers and fined them for using the wrong side of a road in the capital. According to the traffic police on duty, 70 percent of the vehicles were carrying bureaucrats, 10 percent police and the rest were carrying media personnel, an army officer and others. Among them were also a state minister and an MP.

Traffic violations have become such common practice that holding lawbreakers accountable for their actions became a laudable act, worthy of special notice. If 57 cases were recorded in one night, and in one spot, we wonder how many violations are committed daily.

Breaking the rules of the road on such an epidemic proportion leads to a collapse of the traffic system, resulting in chaos, traffic jam, accidents and regular disruptions in public life and safety. And violation of law is infectious, particularly when those in positions of power are seen to do so. The general public who witness these incidents are then motivated to emulate a bad act. In any case, the law should apply to everyone equally and in all cases, regardless of whether offences committed are major or minor. It is heartening to see that in a culture where power breeds impunity, VIPs are being held accountable for their actions when not in accordance with the laws of the state. The police move should set an example for those who are inclined to infringe the law with impunity. We hope this is not a one-off action and will be continued as a regular practice.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Bank recruitment process

The bank recruitment process under the supervision of Bankers' Selection Committee has been praised for its transparent nature. Candidates do not have to pay any fee to apply for a job, and the entire process is smooth and easy.

As the number of candidates increased over the years, the committee is forced to conduct job exams in the educational institutions across the city. However, in the absence of a vigorous monitoring apparatus, some unethical practices have recently taken place in certain exam centres. Bangladesh Krishi Bank's recruitment exam, for example, was mired in controversy for the same reason.

For the sake of the banks and the candidates, it is important that the committee will ensure that the exams are held without its integrity being compromised.

Elias Roktim, By email

Urgent rice import needed

Rice is an extremely important and sensitive food item for Bangladesh because it is the country's most important staple food. The recent rice price hikes have, therefore, created a serious problem for the country's poor population.

Floods in recent months across 21 districts have caused extensive damage to both Aman and Boro crops. It was, therefore, only normal that there would be a shortage of food in the aftermath. However, the food ministry failed to anticipate the crisis beforehand. If the authorities concerned had taken appropriate measures in time, perhaps the crisis could have been averted. Besides, those hoarding rice illegally should have been detected earlier.

Now, to mitigate the damage, the authorities should take steps against illegal hoarders and facilitate the process of importing rice on an urgent basis.

Biplob Biswas, Faridpur

Why reforming the public service sector is so crucial

OPEN SKY



BIRU PAKSHA PAUL

ONE of the sweetest memories that I treasured during my two and a half years stay in Bangladesh is teaching at different civil service

institutions. I don't know how much I added to the central bank as an economist, but I tried my best to convince hundreds of junior bureaucrats that Bangladesh is a vibrant economy where every civil servant's role is integral to cementing a solid path for development. And that is why they have to constantly improve themselves with quality training to enforce strong governance. They must pursue higher education with an exposure to western institutions and eastern growth secrets to reap the full benefits of globalisation for our motherland.

We have an abundant amount of literature on how sluggish and impeding our civil bureaucracy is. The time has come to let go of that past. We need to move forward and recruit young officers who can view national problems differently. They are more independent and want to express their opinions. Let us confer liberty of thought and speech on them. This doesn't mean young administrators will be allowed to join different political parties of their interest, but it allows them to express their methods of handling national issues such as poverty, corruption, judicial tardiness, women's deprivation, illiteracy, and public health.

This type of brainstorming is almost entirely absent in our bureaucracy. In most cases, you are a good officer as long as you can memorise the existing circulars and follow them to the T. That culture, which originally came from the British and flourished in the feudalistic patriarchal society of ours, should be prevented from growing any further. It is a culture that inhibits innovation among young officers. Once I worked in the Australian government and found how the secretary, whose office was in Canberra, visited the Sydney office almost regularly and listened to young officers for new ideas on improving the services.

Bangladesh can never become an upper middle-income country without modernising its bureaucracy, and that reform must start with fresh recruitments. The British never wanted a highly educated bureaucracy lest they confronted disobedience from the

literate Indians. Such thinking is redundant now. Then why do such archaic moral vestiges still remain with us? Just because a senior officer didn't get enough funds to pursue higher studies in the past does not mean this should be the fate of new officers. Training makes officers productive, but only training is not enough nowadays. They need to pursue higher studies wherever opportunities prevail. Incorporating a higher studies programme would be the most effective way to educate the future bureaucracy to make them competent for an "internationalised" Bangladesh. We can't forget that we recruited brilliant graduates from universities and dampening their scholarly capabilities

suffers from the colonial mindset that these young men and women are destined to serve quietly, not to dream of higher studies. This process of blunting brains, so to speak, is more dangerous than the regular brain-drain our country faces.

Young civil officers are enthusiastic about training. But opportunities are still inadequate. A higher education policy for bureaucrats is not often clear and fair across cadres. There should be a high-level committee to advise the Prime Minister on new education and training policies for civil servants. The Public Administration Training Centre (PATC) at Savar can be made a full-scale university of public services where academics and bureaucrats will meet to

so. But a quality service-span of five years outweighs a poor-standard service time of twenty-five years. It's not simply worktime that enhances national output fast; it is labour productivity that quickens growth. An innovator is much more important for this nation right now than a typical "good official". We need more investment ambassadors at present than investment regulators.

Our poor performance in the knowledge economy index in Asia again warrants the reformation of the bureaucracy. The constant criticism of the bureaucracy and the dumping of all our failures on its shoulder has become like a broken record and does not help anymore. We have to rely on this machinery anyway. We cannot brush



will cause an irreparable loss to the nation's human capital.

A meritorious young man coming from a poor family couldn't pursue doctoral degrees overseas. For the family's sake, he had to join the civil service at a time in his life when his potential was about to materialise. If the government gives him the opportunity, shouldn't he be grateful and serve the nation with deeper integrity? Doesn't our society benefit from his skills and expertise? If a talented young woman had stopped her education after becoming a magistrate, she will definitely feel the urge to exercise her aptitude in earning a foreign degree once the initial "powerful and happy" days of service are over. But the bureaucracy still

transform it into a hub of knowledge on governance and growth. Chinese and Indian bureaucrats are now trained to face the economic competition among emerging nations. Whenever I had an opportunity to meet them, I found them to be formidable pundits for their countries' economic agendas, not simply clerk-like—well versed in rules and regulations. Since the regime believes in a digital Bangladesh, making the government machinery efficient through the use of advanced technology is inevitable.

We understand that sending officers overseas or to training academies from an active department may not always seem feasible. The ministry may count how many years' service is lost in doing

aside the role of public administration in using resources and in conveying development goals nationwide.

The prime minister has encouraged bureaucrats to look beyond their regular duties and many officers have already been rewarded for their out-of-the-box ideas and innovations regarding education, the environment and poverty alleviation. More can be done by empowering these officials with adequate training, interactions with think-tanks, and education opportunities. Let them dream, let them speak about our national interests, and thus, "let thousand flowers blossom."

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Zero tolerance for violence against children



SYED MANZOORUL ISLAM

MEDIA reports about the abuse of children tell us a chilling story that we have suddenly become a nation which doesn't value its children, which takes cruelty against them as a matter of routine, and which doesn't feel ashamed when a 5-year-old girl is raped in front of her parents. Even the most sensational of child abuse cases have a shelf life of a couple of months, after which they fade away from media attention and public memory.

pressurised by local power groups to maintain silence; even if cases are reported, the police often don't pursue them. When a case finally reaches a court of law, punishments are not in keeping with the severity of the crime. The accused are often set free on bail, which emboldens them to threaten the victim's family to withdraw the case, or worse, put them in harm's way. Money, power, political affiliation, weak or incompetent police charge-sheets and the reluctance of witnesses to testify combine to create a situation which favours the criminals and puts the victims at their mercy.

What is really heartrending is when children are abused within their families, in the hands of parents and relatives they trust. Abuse and cruelty take many

be given proper care and attention both at home and at schools. A large number of children, however, are deprived of these rights. Many have to work and consequently forego school; many are sent to urban households to work as domestic help. Children work in chemical factories and lathe machines; they are employed as porters in railway stations and as transport helpers. Each of these employments leads to physical abuse and exploitation. There are international convention and national accords against child labour; but these are more honoured in breach than in enforcement.

When children are abused, tortured, raped and killed, we expect the state to wake up from its slumber and the society

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priority. There is also no explanation why citizens' groups spend far less time in addressing children's issues than, say, those concerning politics. But the time of inaction should be over. The best shouldn't lack all conviction when the worst are full of viciousness.

We suggest that the government, the civil society, the rights groups and others who believe violence against children should end must come together and fight on behalf of the helpless children. There are laws against all forms of abuse and violence, what is needed now is their steadfast application and showing zero tolerance to the perpetrators of any form of violence against children—wherever they might be. An uncompromising application of law and justice will certainly substantially reduce crimes against children and may one day free children from abuse.

We need to protect our children for the simple reason that they are our future. If we believe that our future should be much better, brighter and more prosperous than the present, we have to put all our efforts to safeguard, foster, nurture and support our children.

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Monstrous as these crimes are, what equally horrifies us is a culture of impunity which allows the perpetrators to escape justice. Incidents of abuse are not reported unless there is a death, or the media picks them up. Families are

forms—from wilful neglect of children's needs to physical punishment to rape and sodomy. Children—all children, irrespective of their parents' income or social position—should ideally be in school from the age of five; they should

to come out of its passivity. But neither seems to happen. The recent increase in children's murder is inexplicable; there is no answer to the riddle why the government doesn't take the task of protecting children as the number one