

Law and order nosedive hurting business

It's all rooted in politics-crime nexus

WHEN the gut feeling in most people is one of trepidation in the face of the rising crime curve, the industry and trading community has taken issue with the government urging it to apply a brake on the deteriorating scenario immediately. Six industry and trade bodies in a joint statement on Sunday appealed to the government for its intervention to avert a breakdown of whatever little remains of law and order.

This is not the first time that the business community are expressing their frustration and dismay over the upsurge of crimes. But what is definitely striking about their latest call for action is the sense of urgency and desperation reflected by it. For, they are chagrined at and frightened by the free fall of lawlessness demonstrated by unabated abduction of businessmen, kidnapping of school children and the increasing tyranny of extortionism, hooliganism and murder. What is cause for particular disquiet is that while everyday major offences are committed there is hardly any news about getting to the bottom of a previous crime, let alone any punishment meted out to the culprits.

Add to this what chief of the foreign investors' chamber Wali Bhuiyan had to say at a luncheon meeting on Sunday: crime is now a profitable business; there is no incentive for honest men to remain honest. He is basically referring to the criminalised atmosphere.

We have seen some highly publicised special anti-crime campaigns or drives. Remember, the Operation Clean Heart and the Joint Police-BDR special terrorist combating operation in the south-west part of the country. The clean heart operation was expensive with its huge running costs. On top, it drew a justified flak for the human rights impingement taking a toll of 43 lives. Even if these are set aside, what did it achieve in the end that could be of an enduring value? The moment they left the scene, all the vanished thugs, villains and hooligans crept back into the open in style. The criminals thrive on a diet of political patronisation. Let's recall an incident both vindicating and abjuring it. At a roundtable organised by The Daily Star, Prothom Alo and the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Mannan Bhuiyan, the BNP secretary-general and Abdul Jalil, his counterpart in the Awami League, took a common pledge to keep criminals out of their parties. Although the promise remains unfulfilled, there is powerful logic for having such bilateral understanding; both the major political parties -- BNP and Awami League -- are overwhelmed by criminals. So long as the umbilical cord between crime and politics is cut off, ridding the society of criminals will remain a day-dream. The worry goes beyond a mere concern for administration and law and order; it has acquired economic, political and image-building connotations we can only ignore at our peril. So, the nexus between crime and politics has to be broken.

Jamaluddin's rescue awaited with bated breath

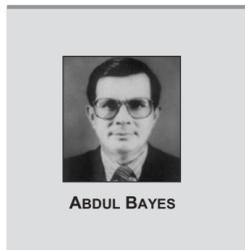
Who is not running out of patience?

IT would be difficult to count how many raids have been conducted by the combined force in the forests of Chittagong. That's where businessman Jamaluddin Ahmed Chowdhury has reportedly been hidden ever since his abduction almost 40 days ago. But how could his abductors elude the supposedly stretched out arm of law for such a long time? There has been reshuffle in the police administration, investigation has changed hands many times, top brass of the police said that his whereabouts were known, and that he would be rescued shortly -- but he still remains untraceable, missing. His family awaits his return just as they have been for more than a month. Can anyone in the administration say, why? All the raids, all the steps, all the assurances that we have been reading about in the newspapers have simply turned futile.

The protracted manhunt has drawn a blank for everyone to see. It's been a meaningless chase so far despite the speculated leads in the case publicised with aplomb from time to time. Returning empty-handed after every raid has become a regular feature for the law enforcers. Something seems seriously wrong with the way the chase has been conducted. Either the criminals have been outsmarting the law enforcers or the law enforcers themselves have no clue on what to do next. Curiously, it's like searching a needle in haystack. It is of the essence in a manhunt like this that the success element is built into it insofar as ferreting out the culprits and rescuing the kidnapped go.

This case has been so high profile -- politically and otherwise, that we all thought it would come to an end sooner than later. But if the expectation is belied there, then what lies in store for some other kidnapped person? Police should also keep their plans of raids secret, otherwise advance reports would only set them back further. After all that has happened, just in case if it is revealed that Jamaluddin is no more -- would anyone answer what could be worse than that? We join the nation in hoping he is rescued at the soonest.

Shrimp culture: Deaths or dollars?



ABDUL BAYES

THE purpose of my visit to Khulna -- first ever in my life -- was not anything relating to shrimp culture, although I knew that greater Khulna holds the key to the culture that grew out of our dire need of dollars from foreign countries. As time passed, shrimps began to show potentials as an important source of foreign exchange, accounting for, perhaps, 6 per cent of our export earnings and about 3 per cent of world exports of shrimps. At global level today, about one-third of the shrimps are reported to be farmed here compared to barely 5 per cent in the 1980s.

This is the dollar-side of the development. But the dark side should never be in oblivion. Since shrimp culture started to surge, however, local conflicts crept up with grabbing of land, environmental degradation developed, considerable number of people were dashed below the poverty line and a host of adverse impacts were impinged thereupon. The imputed costs of such hazards should be added to the revenue earnings to arrive at sustainable development of the sector. There are many newspaper stories that I have been hearing for a long time about the socio-economics and politics of shrimp culture. In fact, if one scans through the news and views relating to deteriorating law and order situation in greater Khulna one could, perhaps, come to the conclusion that the lion's share of these deteriorations owe to shrimp cultivation and related issues.

While in Khulna, in connection with PETRRA sub-projects, I visited Coastal Development Partners (CDP) office. CDP, along with 15 other small NGOs, act as partners of the various projects that Poverty Elimination through Rice Research Project or PETRRA tends to support. Mr. Akhtarul Alam Tutu heads this organization. The posters pasted on the wall of the office gave me the impression that CDP is involved mostly with issues relating to the poor. It is not a micro-credit organisation as classical definitions

of NGOs would suggest but an organisation engaged in facing human rights violation, environmental hazards, repressions on women and above all, highlighting human values. And of late, the organisation associated itself with the dissemination of rice diversity technology to the poor in the coastal areas.

It is there where I came across the 'unknown' costs of shrimp culture that CDP has been striving to dig out. It goes beyond the calculus of the principles of profit maximisation. I have newspaper clippings

with the advent of shrimp cultivation. Unplanned growth of the projects, absence of proper regulations and above all, lack of governance grievously gave way to an unsustainable development.

My hypothesis turned out to be wrong as I began to talk to the villagers. People of the village that I met seemed to be perturbed, panicky and powerless in the face of known man-made catastrophes. They informed me about three phases that shrimp cultivation passed through over time. First,

villages. Water flowing to and from was stopped building barrages and thus causing a host of adverse impacts. The poor villagers objected to this barrage in the canal and are being threatened by the powerful mastans. Some of the villagers were reportedly put under criminal cases. While the police were looking for those poor villagers to arrest, they were, allegedly, least interested to kick out the devils from the dens. As I was told, huge sums of money from the goons and the powerful gher owners force them to pay a deal far

are gradually forced to fall upon leasing out land for shrimp cultivation. There are no winter crops anymore -- pulses, oil seeds and vegetables and the collapse of the cattle raising has had serious economic and nutritional consequences not usually counted in the economics of shrimp culture. " There have been many reports of khas lands (government owned lands) being used for shrimp farms illegally by influential members of the society, sometimes in possession of false property deeds, and in

cultural land is not adversely affected and (d) the rules of the game is such that both economic and non-economic costs are duly calculated to point to a sustainable development of the sector.

To this effect, many steps need to be on board but allow me to cite a few: (a) the industry should fully acknowledge its responsibility of using the best of resources to ensure environmental sustainability, economic viability and social equity; (b) there should be an unrestricted access for third party monitoring all aspects of production, distribution and technology used; (c) there should be improvement in pond designing, water exchange and pollution control; (d) existing farms should comply with national land use policies, strategies and legislation; (e) future development of the sector should be based on consultation with local community; (f) specific commitments to uphold human rights should be at the top of the agenda and finally (g) all farms should fall under the Seal of Quality to meet the environmental and humanitarian needs of the industry.

I now draw the attention of the readers to news paper reporting of 15 days of July to justify the title of the write-up: Shrimp culture: Deaths and dollars. In fact, the following reports are just the tip of the iceberg. Everyday, on average, one incident of death or other crime was reported to take place in greater Khulna. Perhaps this drives home the point that deaths and dollars have unfortunately become regular phenomena.

July 1 : Tk. 1 lac stolen from shrimp farmer in Demra, Bagherhat (Janakantha)

July 4: Firearms and ammunition seized from a shrimp farm in Rampal (Daily Sebok)

July 10: Court cases filed by widow against 10/12 persons for the murder of Yakub, a shrimp farmer (Daily Sebok)

July 10: fries worth Tk. 100,000 looted from shrimp farm in Rampal upazila (Daily Purbachal)

July 12: A gang fired at Abdul Malek (48), a shrimp owner from Zamira village, phultala upazila (Daily Sebok)

July 14: No arrests following the murder of shrimp farm owner in Phultala upazila.

The government should take the situation very seriously before the vital sector gets sick when, perhaps, deaths will occur but dollars would flee.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE

We want that the growth of shrimp cultivation should take place under a regime where (a) access to common properties are not encroached upon; (b) small farmers have the freedom to reap home the rewards from shrimp cultivation; (c) productivity of agricultural land is not adversely affected and (d) the rules of the game is such that both economic and non-economic costs are duly calculated to point to a sustainable development of the sector.

with me for August 2003. Throughout the month, cases of terrorist attacks, human rights violation and other vices surrounding shrimp culture are reported almost on every day. Only during the last three years, I was told, 55 persons were killed, and 42 incidents of assaults and 17 instances of poisoning of fish/shrimp ponds took place.

Hearing the horrors, I showed interest to visit some shrimp ponds called Chingri Gher -- the places I have never visited before. Next day, I drove to the gher located in a village named Magura Ghona under Dumuria Thana. A narrow sempucca road passes through the heart of the village and I had to step down from the vehicle for a walk of a kilometer or so to the gher. My a priori reasoning suggested that people of that village should be relatively better off than others since infrastructure development and other linkages connected with shrimp culture should shower positive externalities to the villagers (besides the fact that they could increase their earnings from the culture).

As I stood at the fag end of the village, I could see vast tracts of lands turned into gher by developing polders. These are agricultural land that historically the people of that locality leaned on to meet the food security need by producing rice. In the past, when cultivation of crops was the mainstay, ecological balance was maintained, indigenous technologies were adopted and an egalitarian approach to the preservation of common properties was in evidence. But gone are those

there was a time when the owners of the gher -- with money and muscle power -- used to grab lands of the poor without paying them a penny. This was the early stage of the so-called "blue revolution" and a business of the "big". Second, then came a time when collective farming was developed in some places but the poor were deprived of their due shares from the farms. And now, in many places, small farmers are themselves doing the cultivation -- instead of renting out land -- to eke out a living but problems mounted rather than mitigated.

One example should suffice to show the severity. Recently, a 6 km long canal was occupied by goons to develop gher and cultivate shrimps in the water of the said canal which is a common access resource passing through nearby

to the 'development' that took place in the canal.

More interestingly, the day I visited the spot, the local MP came to the place to remove the barrage and thus allow the access to common resources by all people. This was an appreciable job done by the local MP. But unfortunately, no sooner had he left, the villagers complained, the barrages inside the canal came up again.

I was told that the rent from leasing out land for shrimp cultivation -- Tk.1200/bigha -- is much less than that for rice cultivation. The soil fertility is seriously affected due to the intrusion of the saline water into the fields and the yield rate is down by 20-30 per cent. Witnessing a decline in the yield of agricultural crops and the lack of access to common resources, poor farmers

some cases with the support of the local police or government officials. Violence and intimidation towards small-scale shrimp farmers in order to appropriate their lands is also reported to be widespread", says one report on shrimp cultivation and its impacts.

And to visit some of the developing countries counting on shrimps, look at the following observation. " Shrimp farmers in Thailand left behind an ecological desert. These farms are hardly useful for other economic activities. Outside investors are enriched, local people are impoverished. Development runs above the heads -- very little trickles down to them".

I recall that few years back, Bangladesh shrimp exports faced a shrink following EU objections to some of the aspects relating to production and distribution. Quite obviously, the buyers need not be blamed and gracefully some of our exporters took the pains to upgrade their processing plants and production process. The wake up call helped create an atmosphere where the non-economic costs of shrimp cultivation deserve attention.

The above-mentioned observations should not be taken as a negative attitude towards shrimp cultivation and export. After all, we all want dollars but not at the cost otherwise. We want that the growth of shrimp cultivation should take place under a regime where (a) access to common properties are not encroached upon; (b) small farmers have the freedom to reap home the rewards from shrimp cultivation; (c) productivity of agri-



Is Iraq turning out to be America's "New Vietnam"?

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

PERHAPS it is early days yet to predict that unequivocally, but the situation in Iraq is certainly beginning to point that way. The US forces to be precise, the American and British allied forces -- scored a relatively easy victory over Saddam Hussein's army which included the elite and much vaunted Republican Guards in a matter of days. It was practically a walk-over, with neither the American nor the British troops suffering any serious casualties on the battlefield. But since then they have been paying a heavy -- and most unpredictable -- price for whatever they have won. Both the USA and Britain have already lost more troops than they had done in the last Gulf war in 1991, with the death toll among the British soldiers in Iraq hitting 50 (as against 47 twelve years ago), which means more troops have died attempting to keep the post-war peace than during the actual war itself. And as the increasingly volatile situation in areas in and around Baghdad, Najaf and Basra indicate, the hostilities are not likely to end in the foreseeable future. The gravest risk facing the allied forces is that they are having to defend themselves against a virtually invisible enemy which can and does strike at the least expected places and times.

Besides, the targets of this illusive enemy are not the US and British soldiers alone, other important, non-military persons engaged in the restoration of normal life and the rule of the law in post-war Iraq are also being attacked and killed. The blast that killed the chief of the UN Mission in Baghdad together with more than a score of international and Iraqi aid workers, the car bomb that exploded outside the Jordanian embassy killing a similar

number of people and the devastating bomb attack on the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf that claimed the lives of 85 worshippers including the leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim, and injured more than 200 others who had all assembled there for the afternoon prayers on Friday, 29th August, are glaring evidence that there are die-hard elements who are bent upon destabilising the country and will stop at nothing in order to achieve their goal, be it revenge or anarchy. And there is practically

formed an alliance with Islamist fighters from neighbouring countries who are infiltrating into Iraq to engage in Jihad against allied troops. The US administrator in Baghdad has promised a full enquiry into the Najaf attack, saying: "Again they (Saddam loyalists) have killed innocent Iraqis, violated one of Islam's most sacred places. Again, by their heinous action, they have shown the evil face of terrorism." But the Americans are not very keen on taking an active role in the investigation process because of the current Iraqi sensitivity -- not to say hostility -

Corporation Chairman entered the arena. Both refused to give an inch." That's how a leading broadsheet summed up the latest phase in the Hutton inquiry into the apparent suicide of Dr David Kelly, the Ministry of Defence scientist and chief source of information for BBC Radio 4 reporter Andrew Gilligan's controversial despatch on the Government's "sexed up" dossier on Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction or WMD. "Yesterday" means Thursday, August 28, when the Prime Minister Tony Blair

head of communications at Downing Street. I took this as an attack on the impartiality of the BBC and the integrity of the BBC, done with great vigour."

This battle of words between the Government and the leading national broadcaster has not remained just that and has already claimed a major casualty, the Director of Communications himself, believed by Whitehall sources as the second most important person -- after the Prime Minister -- to influence Government policies and decisions. Mr Campbell has resigned and is due to

Alastair Campbell is not going to be the only casualty of the Gilligan-Kelly, or Government-BBC, battle-front. The Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon who gave evidence before the Hutton inquiry a few days before the Prime Minister -- and who has since been dubbed "Minister of Self-Defence" by a section of the Press for trying to deny any direct role in the naming of Dr Kelly -- is also likely to go soon, as are other key figures like the Downing Street Chief of Staff, the Press spokesperson as well as Mr Blair's official policy advisor. An apparently shaken Mr Blair is believed by knowledgeable sources to want a completely new set of senior advisors so that he is able to make a "clean break" with the damage caused by the Kelly affair. Thus more heads are likely to roll in the weeks to come in a major No. 10 reshuffle and, as Labour MPs try to come to terms with the shock of Mr Campbell's exit, several in the higher echelon are going to have their wings clipped. So, for the time being, it is going to be a battle of containment, pursuing a cautious, defensive strategy.

LONDON LETTER

Following the euphoria in the immediate aftermath of the war, relationship between ordinary Iraqis and foreigners, including and other than the Americans and the British, has been steadily deteriorating, and three months after the official end of hostilities the administration of Iraq remains utterly confused and muddled. "Vietnam" may still be a far cry, but at the same time, it certainly remains a not-to-be-ruled-out possibility.

nothing the allied forces can do to put an stop to this spate of violence.

Soon after Friday's bombing, the Iraqi police arrested 19 men and information obtained from them led to the apprehension of another 15. All of those arrested belong to the Wahabi -- Sunni Islam -- sect, and all are alleged to have links with al-Qaeda. Thus, although the motive for the assassination of Ayatollah Mohammed Bakr al-Hakim, who is a leading Shia cleric, is not immediately clear, it is an extremely dangerous sign in view of the fact that the Wahabi sect refuses to recognise the Shias as true Muslims as they regard Shia rituals as idolatrous. And if the al-Qaeda link is true, it is very likely that unidentified members of Saddam Hussein's former security apparatus have

- to their presence in the country.

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A different battlefield
Time to get back nearer the homefront to London.

"For three months, the Government and BBC fought a pitched battle over the Gilligan affair. Yesterday the Prime Minister and the

appeared before the inquiry commission to give evidence and explain his role in the affair so far. During his two hours and 20 minutes testimony, Mr Blair said: "You already have this extraordinary serious allegation, which, if it were true, would mean we had behaved in the most disgraceful way, and I would have to resign as Prime Minister."

On the other hand, the Chairman of the BBC's Board of Governors, Gavyn Davies, accused Alastair Campbell, the Downing Street Director of Communications, of maligning the Corporation when he appeared before the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) in June. "I felt this was an extraordinary moment," said Mr Davies: "an unprecedented attack on the BBC mounted by the

leave Downing Street in about four weeks time when the Hutton inquiry concludes. His departure means that Mr Blair will lose his closest ally and staunchest supporter. As long as Mr Campbell was by his side, Mr Blair remained one step ahead of the Chancellor of Exchequer Gordon Brown in the latter's bid to become the leader of the party, and eventually replace him as the Prime Minister. Losing Mr Campbell means that Mr Blair and Mr Brown are now evenly balanced, and although Mr Campbell is expected to become part of a new "kitchen cabinet" around Mr Blair and advise the Prime Minister on election strategy as he launches his campaign to remain in office for the third time in succession, it will not be the same as having him as an integral part of the inner circle at No. 10.

CORRIGENDUM
The Daily Star special on the silver jubilee of BNP inadvertently did not mention the names of former party secretaries general late Col (Retd) ASM Mustafizur Rahman and KM Obaidur Rahman MP. Both of them served as secretary general for several years and held cabinet portfolio. Col Mustafiz was a close comrade of late Ziaur Rahman and played a key-role in forming BNP. He was an adviser to Ziaur Rahman and served as commerce minister, home minister and foreign affairs minister in the Zia government, Sattar government and Khaleda Zia's government.

Is it parliamentary democracy?

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

FEEL tempted to quote from Churchill about the performances of the lawmakers in the House of Commons: "Parliament reassembled late in February (after the election in December 1900) and plunged immediately into fierce debates. In those days the proceedings in the House of Commons were fully reported in the press and closely followed by the electorate. Crucial questions were often argued with sustained animation in three-day debates. The house used to sit till midnight, and from 9-30 onwards was nearly always crowded. It was Mr Balfour's practice as Leader to wind up almost every important debate, and the Chiefs of the opposition having summed up in massive form their case from ten to eleven, heard a comprehensive reply from eleven to twelve." This clearly indicates the amount of time law-

makers spent on national issues seriously in the House for taking decisions and making laws, is worth taking note of by our lawmakers.

Lawmakers in different Parliaments in Europe and many parts of Asia too feel encouraged to speak proudly of the conduct of their Parliaments. On the other hand, we feel discouraged to speak about the performances of our lawmakers in the Parliament.

The last session of the eighth Parliament remained ineffective because of the boycott of the Parliament by the major opposition party (Awami League) law makers over the abusive remarks against the leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina by State Minister for Housing and Public Works Alamgir Kabir. Prime Minister's Parliamentary affairs advisor, who is also an elected member of the Parliament, is on record as making invective remarks against the political leaders

and a section of journalists was not even spared. The Parliament is considered to be the mirror of the country. Considered opinions of the law makers is reflected on national and international issues in their speeches, apart from their enacting laws and amending existing laws, if necessary, to meet the needs of the country. Unfortunately last session of the eighth Parliament witnessed

infectives against political leaders. This is not the way proceedings of the Parliament should be conducted by the Speaker or Deputy Speaker. The opposition in the Parliament demanded expunction of unparliamentary words used against Sheikh Hasina, unconditional apology from Alamgir Kabir, and promise from the Speaker to conduct the proceedings in line with the constitution and the rules of procedure of the Parliament. These seem to be minimum demands that one could expect from the opposition. As the

demands were not met the session of the Parliament ended without their presence.

Why the question of expunction of derogatory or unparliamentary words will arise in the first place? It is the responsibility of the Chair to ensure that unparliamentary words are not used in any speech in the Parliament. Members of the Parliament are immune from court proceedings if speeches are made against any decision. That does not mean that a lawmaker is immune from making derogatory remarks in the House, which is tantamount to violation of the sanctity of the Parliament.

In 20 months time following the formation of eighth Parliament 39 ministerial standing committees were finally constituted in the last session. We must cheer the authorities for undertaking the task of constituting such vitally important committees, but two seats in each of

the ten member slots were left vacant for inclusion of members from the main opposition party. It is really amazing to note that the ruling party did not succeed in securing names of the members of the Parliament belonging to main opposition party in 20 months time. Apart from this, not a single Chairmanship of the standing committees went to the opposition nor to coalition partners. According to newspaper report, one important member belonging to JP (Manju group) resigned from the standing committee as a junior member of the Parliament headed the committee. Anwar Hossain Manju, MP considered being in the Committee as disgraceful and humiliating.

The main opposition blamed the government for forming only partial Parliamentary standing committees without any representation from the opposition, which violated article 247 (1) of the rules of procedure.

The constitution of Parliamentary standing committees appearing to be incomplete and in violation of existing rules of procedure, also caused dissatisfaction among senior members of the ruling party.

Can we take lesson from the instances of other countries to improve our system? In this connection, I would like to draw attention of the lawmakers to the committee structure in the Congress of the United States. The committees are key to Congressional behaviour; their decisions, more often than not, become the decision of each House. They establish sub-committees within an important committee, such as, House appropriation committee and the House foreign affairs committee.

Similarly, 22 permanent Parliamentary committees in Bundestag (Parliament) in the Federal Republic of Germany play very significant role in scrutinising and controlling

activities of the government. The committees correspond to the Federal government's departments and cover all the ministries. The committees range from foreign senior members of the ruling party.

It is however, encouraging to note that in her speech in the Parliament on 16 July the Prime Minister, reportedly urged the Awami League to return to the Parliament and avoid boycotting to make it effective. It is true that without Parliament there will be no democracy whatever that we have. On the basis of consensus of all political parties Parliamentary democracy has been introduced in the country by amending the constitution. In Parliamentary democracy members from the opposition

bench should be given enough time to speak on any issue of national importance as they are elected representatives from their constituencies. If they are not allowed to speak, what will they do sitting in the Parliament? Moreover, the Speaker or Deputy Speaker should conduct the proceedings of the Parliament impartially in line with rules of procedure to make it effective. The existing Parliamentary system in the country needs to be modernised to make it a dynamic institution to guide the nation as the House of Commons in Great Britain has been doing for the last few centuries. The government and opposition members in the Parliament jointly should evolve a mechanism for reform in line with other countries where Parliamentary system works successfully.

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