

Octogenarian doctor killed

Another pointer to plummeting law and order

THE killing of an octogenarian doctor in Jhenaidah is a fresh reminder of criminality assuming an intractable character. It took place in a small town where the issue of maintaining law and order is not expected to be as complicated as it is in the big cities.

The victim, Dr SK Mukherjee, was known in his town, and in the entire southwestern region, as a man who had rendered selfless service to humanity. Such men usually remain above personal rivalry and animosity that could lead to the kind of dastardly crime perpetrated in Jhenaidah. It has proved our expectations and calculations wrong.

It is not clear what was the motive behind the killing. But initial reports indicate that the doctor might have angered some local extortionists by not responding to their illegal demands. If that were true, then another innocent man has fallen victim to organised extortionism -- an all-pervasive malady in our context today.

A closer analysis will surely reveal that most of the crimes being committed in the country are in fact a manifestation of people's helplessness being exploited ruthlessly by extortionists, kidnapers and hoodlums of all kinds. The law enforcers do not seem to have an answer to what is going on in the cities. But the situation is different in the smaller towns where the inhabitants know each other and the police can keep tab on the goings-on a little more easily.

But the rise in the number of crimes suggests that police have failed to make their presence felt. And the Jhenaidah incident has shown what a price citizens have to pay when law enforcers fail.

The killing of the doctor is, however, more than a law and order failure. It has brought disgrace to all of us. Society should have acknowledged the service that the octogenarian doctor had rendered to it, but the way he was paid back has been shocking, to say the least.

The law enforcers should activate themselves immediately with a view to bringing the perpetrators of this mind-boggling crime to justice. They must realise that people's confidence in the existing law enforcing system will be further eroded if the killing of a respected, elderly doctor is treated as one of the many crimes that are committed every day.

PM must get to the bottom of it

Airport Road divider fiasco: Inefficiency and lack of coordination par excellence

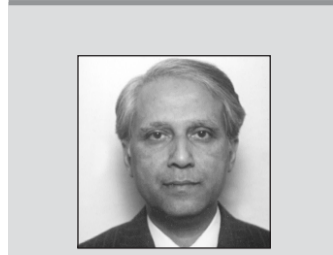
THE Prime Minister getting upset about something is not so uncommon, but taking immediate action on the cause of the annoyance is rare. And that's what Khaleeda Zia did on Wednesday when the communications minister reportedly failed to give her a satisfactory reply to her query on dismantling of road dividers at Airport Road. We must laud her for her quick thinking on the matter. When the news reports about the dismantling and reconstruction of the dividers were brought to her notice, she immediately asked the concerned minister and on failing to get an answer decided to visit the spot herself. What was amazing, the minister nonchalantly expressed his ignorance about the whole issue.

This brings some disturbing questions to our mind. Firstly, why and how could the minister feign ignorance when it was his ministry that was doing the work and it had appeared in quite a few dailies with photos. Secondly, if the minister was oblivious of the development, then who was responsible for the work? If wasting money and causing inconvenience to the city dwellers were the prime reasons for stopping work at Airport Road, then why did anyone in the government not raise any question?

The new road dividers have already been erected in almost all parts of the city including the busiest of roads, causing severe congestion on the streets. Is the government trying to tell us that they had not noticed the trouble and traffic jams it's been causing ever since the construction began?

We want to know who was responsible for the lack of coordination regarding the Airport Road work if the person had taken it on without informing the concerned authorities. We also want to know who is accountable for the sheer waste of public money that has already been spent in the project. Lastly we ask -- is there any end to such inefficiency and total disregard for the country's development? May be not, may be we would have to wait for the Prime Minister to get upset again.

Bangladesh and investment



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

SENIOR members of the current Bangladesh administration continue to reiterate that all factors required for encouraging foreign investment are present within Bangladesh and that there is no reason why foreign investors should not come in droves and exploit available conditions. One is surprised when one reads such remarks. In all probability, such representatives rarely interact with those who are responsible for assuring and providing the requisite conditions to facilitate such investment. Probably, if they got out of their high-powered utility vehicles, met more people not involved with 'high-powered' steering committees and read reports prepared by the World Bank and other civil societies, rather than those put together by 'senior' government specialists, they would realise that not all things are well in our country. It is probably the proverbial 'ostrich syndrome' of all lesser developing countries that persuades them to think that there is nothing to worry and also that there are no causes for anxiety. This is indeed sad.

Time has come for our government to take a step back from their many power-point presentations with all those wonderful graphs and tables and seriously evaluate on-going criticisms.

It is true that in recent times, we have done fairly well in macro-economic terms. The 'Far Eastern Economic Review' in one of their latest issues has particularly praised the Bangladesh economy and predicted not only higher economic growth but also increased foreign exchange reserves for the

coming year. They have in this context also predicted a rise in remittances from the Bangladeshi Diaspora abroad. It is expected that this will strengthen the taka as against the US dollar and the euro.

However, such good news is set aside and suffers when we also read about a recent World Bank study entitled 'Improving the Investment Climate in Bangladesh'. It is a disappointing commentary on the way we

economy. However, it has not become a norm. In most cases, such evasions are still exceptions. With us, this virus appears to have assumed universal proportions.

We must remember that Bangladesh is competing today for scarce resources. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is not automatic. It should not be pre-supposed that the world is fighting for our invaluable and cheap human resources. Yes,

during FY 2003 was expected to increase to 7.3 per cent from 6.5 per cent in FY 2002, due mainly to a recovery in manufacturing production and steady growth in electricity, gas and construction activity. Statistics available indicate that the first eight months of FY 2003, year-on-year manufacturing output actually increased by 5.2 per cent relative to the corresponding period of FY 2002, with strong growth evident

government probably needs to analyse why this is happening without attaching recriminations. Is it because some foreign companies are finding it difficult to generate smooth returns on their investment? Are they discerning ineffectiveness in our investor's protection regulations or in the incentives for investment? Is it lack of congenial business environment coupled with informal political interests?

lines regular kidnappings, murders and traffic problems. All these contribute to a rise in the anxiety threshold. Given the available quality of life and existing work related difficulties, one honestly fails to understand why a potential foreign investor should decide to move to such a horizon as compared to safe havens like Thailand and Malaysia.

The government has to tackle the situation with seriousness and reduce the cost of doing business in Bangladesh. It should start with an intensive, objective and impartial examination of the reasons for corruption. This will help to determine whether personnel in affected areas of governance in the public sector are being paid proper wages so that they can survive with honesty and dignity. They need to also identify the various ways corruption and cutting of corners are encouraged through informal political pressure. Probably, an independent anti-corruption body needs to be put in the place. Today, maximum reform is required here.

Bangladesh has a bleak future if we cannot free ourselves of this vicious cycle. There is no way we will have investment in the proportions that we desire. Transparency and accountability have to replace the existing structure of greed, psychological preference for the default culture and the criminalisation of the political process. A prospective investor must feel secure to transfer his hard-earned resources into our country. It is not enough to say that the government has introduced one stop investment support mechanisms. It is just not taking place. Mere power-point presentations extolling the virtues of coming to Bangladesh will not resolve our credibility crisis in the international investment arena. We have to be seen to be consistent with our stated objectives.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

POST BREAKFAST

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are managing our institutional infrastructure related to investment.

This study evaluates various aspects and then identifies weaknesses. The survey was apparently carried out in end-2002 in consultation with firms involved in garments, textiles, food and food products, electronics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals located in Dhaka and Chittagong. It has also been mentioned that the survey covered nearly one thousand manufacturing units. That is broad spectrum indeed. Consequently, the survey, one would think deserves special scrutiny and consideration by those members of government who are charged with combating these malpractices and shortcomings.

Some of the unfortunate aspects highlighted include erratic power supply, corruption within the sectors of customs and tax departments, law and order, environmental, labour and social security agencies. This is not the first time that fingers are being wagged at us. We need to wake up.

It is true that in developed economies as well, corruption sometimes feature in a big way. Avoiding payment of VAT and taxation are current there also. For example many openly point out that Italy's informal economy is larger than its formal

we have a labour force eager to learn different skills and provide support for various economic activities. However, even here, we have several constraints -- low functional literacy, lack of English as a medium of expression and operation and absence of facilities for graded training. We only have a marginal advantage, and labour is but one of the four factors of production. We are also deficient in capital and entrepreneurs. As such, we are really, in cricketing terms, on a sticky wicket and have very little flexibility.

In the first week of July this year, the head of the Bangladesh Resident Mission of ADB told newsmen that despite progress in some areas in the economic front, the investment climate remained weak as reflected in low levels of both domestic and foreign investment.

This comment was on the basis of observations contained in the ADB quarterly economic report released that week. It was also mentioned that if the country was to achieve GDP growth rate of 6.5 per cent by FY 06, as envisaged in the government's medium term macro-economic framework, investment, specially private investment, needed to be stepped up significantly. ADB also noted in this regard that growth in industrial output

since January 2003.

The above statistics show reasonable activity. Then the point is why (if all the macro-economic factors are so good), FDI and local investment are really not coming in. The query also rises as to why we are being unable to build and modify our infrastructure to expected levels. This problem assumes sharper focus when we compare ourselves with what is happening in our neighbouring countries and also in Vietnam. In fact, a report has recently noted that the annual inflow of foreign investment into Vietnam is nearly fifteen times higher than Bangladesh. Even Myanmar, despite political problems and disguised sanctions is attracting more FDI than us.

I will not even suggest that we compare ourselves with China, India or Thailand. The irony is that unlike these countries many multinationals are expressing their confidence in us by voting with their feet. Many important international companies are leaving Bangladesh and relocating themselves elsewhere.

In the recent past, we have seen foreign financial institutions rethinking their commitment in Bangladesh. We have also noticed the withdrawal of Shell operations. The

Figures indicate that FDI inflow in 2001-02 fiscal year was over US dollar 300 million, but during July-March period of FY 2002-03, there has been a sharp decline. This is not an encouraging sign. The problem is further compounded by the weakness in our foreign portfolio investment potential.

On paper Bangladesh is providing a large number of incentives to foreign investors. However, the impetus is being largely lost because of many drawbacks. Some of them are of our own creation and others emanate from natural causes (natural disasters). Poor governance, inefficient handling of law and order situation, a bureaucracy mired in corruption, lagging telecommunications facilities in the IT sector, work stoppages due to political reasons and poor handling of goods in our ports come immediately to my mind. The July 2003 Country Commercial Guide issued by the US Trade Centre in Dhaka catalogues various ills but it particularly underlines the question of procedural delays. These are but a few elements that give us our negative image abroad. Added to all of these is the recent suggestion that Bangladesh is terrorist prone. Daily newspapers also highlight with gruesome photographs and head-

India realises that the road to America runs through Israel

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

WITH Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's recent visit to India, India joined the long list of nations that have attempted to court America through befriending Israel first. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was the trailblazer. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Egypt broke off diplomatic relations with the US. Although the ties were restored after the 1973 Israeli-Arab war through the efforts of Henry Kissinger, the relations remained frosty. It was only after Sadat visited Jerusalem in the fall of 1977, which led to the signing of the Camp David peace accord between Israel and Egypt two years later, that Sadat's objective was achieved. In exchange for returning Sinai to Egypt, Israel neutralized the number one Arab threat to its existence. By giving Egypt two and a half billion dollars annually since, America has made sure that Egypt would never threaten Israel again.

Although several 9/11 hijackers were Egyptians, Egypt never gets blamed for terrorism in the American media. India's aim is to become the US's strategic ally, just like Israel, by going to bed with Israel first.

By making nice with Sharon's Israel, India also joined a long list of nations that sacrificed the Palestinians to further their own interest. Egypt was the first. The group that was betrayed in Camp David was, of course, the Palestinians. According to the Israeli peace activist Uri Avenry, just before the Camp David negotiations, the State Department prepared a dossier for President Carter. The dossier stated that Israeli Prime Minister Menachem

Begin focused on minute details, while Sadat dealt with big ideas, and that both men were susceptible to flattery. More ominously, the dossier concluded that Sadat cared only for Egyptian, not Arab interests, and was ready to sell out the Palestinians. Begin and Carter were too willing to oblige. The agreement did not call for a sovereign Palestinian state, but for Palestinian "autonomy" that would allow Israel to

Defense/Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, as early as the sixties; one reason he remained Israel's and America's favourite king. Hopelessly dependent on Iraqi oil, Jordan professed neutrality during 1991 Gulf War I, and earned the ire of the US and Israel. In 1994, however, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Rabin's Israel, and got back into the US's good book. For its trouble, currently Jordan enjoys free trade

obedient to the wishes of the US, no country has done more for the US economy than Saudi Arabia. Yet, thanks to the very negative portrayal of Saudi Arabia in the Zionist-controlled US media, currently it is the nation most hated by Americans. In its cover story in the September 15 issue, TIME magazine posed the question: "THE SAUDIS, whose side are they on in the war on terror?" Why? Because the Saudis

India develop its atomic bomb. What Sharon visit had done is to make the Israeli-Indian nexus public. Like any other nation, India is entitled to follow a policy that is in its own interest. The Sharon visit did not surprise the writer. Educated Indians are pro-Israeli. Twenty years ago, the writer was surprised to find so many of his Indian colleagues critical of their government for not forging stronger

The timing of India's hobnobbing with Israel could not have been worse for the Palestinians. No less than the Vice Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, has advocated the killing of the elected leader of the Palestinians, Yasser Arafat. President Bush, who loses sleep anytime Palestinians kill Israelis, as usual is totally silent. Secretary of State Powell said that if the Israelis were to kill Arafat, "I think you can anticipate that there would be rage throughout the Arab world, the Muslim world." Notice the wording. Not because the act would be criminal, which should land Sharon in international War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, but because the act would be bad for Israel! That is the typical line of the Bush Administration: not that the Israeli fence snaking into the West Bank is illegal, but because incorporating so many Palestinians into Israeli territory is "not good for Israel!"

Sharon believes that with continued settlement building and occupation of the West Bank, the West Bank will over time become a part of Eretz Israel. Who says might is not right? That is why Sharon has sacrificed more Israelis -- over 850 dead, another 4,200 injured (population-wise, equivalent to 50,000 dead Americans, and 250,000 injured Americans) -- in the last three years; far more than Israel ever lost in any war. To hasten its strategic alliance with America, the risk that India is taking by embracing Israel so hard at such an inopportune time, is that India may be in danger of being stained by Israel's sins.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Pakistan has always griped that in spite of its wholehearted support for the Palestinians, the Palestinians have maintained neutrality over the Kashmir dispute (because of Indian support for the Palestinians). The timing of India's hobnobbing with Israel could not have been worse for the Palestinians... To hasten its strategic alliance with America, the risk that India is taking by embracing Israel so hard at such an inopportune time, is that India may be in danger of being stained by Israel's sins.

continue its occupation. Not entirely happy, Begin annexed to the agreement a statement that "the Palestinian people" means "the Arabs of Eretz (Greater) Israel." Says Avenry: "The Palestinian people were not, of course, represented at the conference that was to decide their fate. They were not consulted at all. Carter, Begin and Sadat determined their fate as if they were too primitive to have an opinion. Sadat was ready to sell the Palestinians down the river in order to sign a separate peace with Israel, and gain the favour and money of the United States."

It was common knowledge that Jordan's King Hussein was secretly meeting with the representatives of the nation his country was officially at war with, such as Israeli

with the US. What is less known is that Iraq's Saddam Hussein also made sweet noises to Israel. After the Camp David accord in 1979, Saddam led the Arab League's efforts to expel Egypt from the organization. In 1982, however, when Israel invaded Lebanon, Saddam did not condemn Israel, even though a year earlier in 1981, Israel had destroyed Iraq's nuclear facility in an unprovoked attack. Iraq at that time was being aided by the US in its war against Iran; Saddam did not want to jeopardize that by alienating Israel.

Now let us see how two staunch US allies, who have not paid their respects to Israel, are faring. By keeping oil prices low, thus saving the US consumers trillions of dollars, and generally being totally

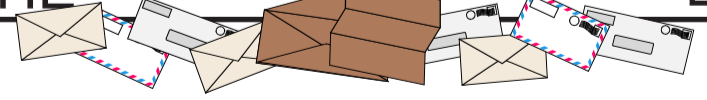
made up with the Israelis! A historical ally of the US, Pakistan reversed its foreign policy towards Afghanistan at the US's behest after 9/11. In spite of giving America a free hand in Pakistan, Pakistan remains the second most hated nation in the US. No wonder General Musharraf in making overtures about normalizing relations with Israel.

Although publicly India has been vociferous in its support for the Palestinians, secretly India too has been meeting with Israeli officials since Israel's birth in 1948. In his autobiography, the late Israeli Defense/Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan said that he had secretly visited India at the Indian government's invitation as early as in the 1960s. Critics say that Israel helped

alliance with Israel. It would have made perfect sense if India had invited peacemakers such as Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres or Ehud Barak. It is unfortunate that India decided normalize relations with Israel by inviting the mass murderer Ariel Sharon, who is not even welcome in Europe! It is supposed to be cowardly to hit someone who is down. The Muslim world, and certainly the Palestinians are now down. It is hard to imagine how Sharon's visit can help India when Muslims and Palestinians rise up again.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

IMF strings aim to destroy our economy

Under the poverty reduction facilities (PRGF), IMF will release \$7 million second tranche of a \$490m credit by December and they have already cleared the first instalment by June. The total fund will be provided in seven instalments. And a six member IMF mission visited Bangladesh for a period of ten days starting from 2-9-2003 to review the macroeconomic situation of the country. Another team will visit Bangladesh in December before releasing the second tranche of the PRGF credit.

Nobel laureate economist Prof. Joseph E Stiglitz had criticised the World Bank-IMF policies during his stay in Bangladesh and said "the policies of World Bank-IMF can be debated, but the \$490m PRGF

Programmes will surely benefit Bangladesh." What a contradictory statement! In fact, by releasing fund for Bangladesh, these selfish organisations want to destroy our economy as well as the over all prospect for development.

Bangladesh has to fulfil some conditions to get the fund and these conditions include reforms in the Nationalised Commercial Banks (NEBs), phasing out the margin of letters of credit (LCs) and undertaking tax reform. And, if Bangladesh fulfills those conditions, our banking system will be totally destroyed, which constitutes a major part of our economy. Apart from being a little bit problematic due to 'corrupt officials' and loan payment evasion, our banking system is good enough.

By implementing our banking policy more carefully, we can maintain a sound banking system. We do

not require any changes or reforms in our banking system. If reforms are made for getting \$490m, there will be rooms for these evil organisations to play tricks with us more dangerously and destroy our whole economy. So, it is my ardent appeal to the economic policymakers not to accept \$490m with the condition of reforms.

AL-Amir Law, 2nd year, DU

Rag culture in Jahangirnagar University

Jahangirnagar University is completely a residential university. Most of the students live in the campus. Ragging, however is a very common and frightening word among

the campus residents. Specially, the freshmen have to face raffish situations. And these types of activities are often done with political threats. Even the guests are not spared from ragging. It is just a mean notion. Some imprudent seniors are practising this day after day and the general students are suffering.

A new student or a guest, who is a bit shy because of the new atmosphere of the campus is being called by some politically leaning student leaders in their room and asked to be stripped is no way desirable! Every action has an equal and opposite reaction -- the students who are being ragged in such manner wait for the next batch so they can do the same.

Rag culture is a mental as well as a physical torture. It has to be

stopped. But who will stop it? The authority of the university should be conscious about this. It is destroying the good will of the campus. Every body has to realise that it is a shoddy culture and it must stop here. Campus encourages education, not rag culture.

Md Mehedi Hasan

Mushin Hall, Dhaka University

Presidential system

The national parliamentary session has started as usual without the participation of the Opposition, which is making the session a complete sham. It has become a norm that the defeated party would boycott the parliamentary session making the very existence of parliamentary system a hoax.

I remember once I had the privilege to meet the former president H M Ershad who was answering a query about the parliamentary system. He stated that if he ever get the mandate of the people, he would definitely change the present parliamentary system. According to him, presidential system it is a more responsible form of government and at the same time stable, because the constant boycotts of the opposition in the last couple of years have made the parliamentary system a big farce. So, this system will not work in this country.

Al-Haj S M Khalid Chowdhury Dharmandi RA, Dhaka

Payment of revised and enhanced municipal holding tax

According to DCC, the house owners of Dhaka city are required to pay their municipal tax at a revised and enhanced rate from the current financial year 2003-2004.

Two months of the current financial year have already passed and the period of first quarterly payment of holding tax with rebate is also nearing to an end.

But the DCC has neither issued any notice or bill to the relevant house owners for payment of the municipal holding tax at a revised and enhanced rate as yet. Why such inordinate delay?

We are afraid that all of a sudden, abruptly and arbitrarily the DCC without any prior knowledge and consultation with the house owners would scud holding tax bills to the house owners. As a result both the

house owners and their tenants would be thrown into great confusion, problems and difficulties.

We are also afraid that raising and re-fixing the municipal holding tax may lead to various irregularities and unfair means by some unscrupulous and dishonest employees of DCC.

We therefore suggest that adaptable measures should be taken for re-assessment and re-fixation of the new holding tax.

OH Kabir Dhaka