

Development and the role of state

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

If we want to modernise agriculture and mitigate drudgery of the farmers, we have to adopt mechanisation, which calls for development of industries to support it.

The present national issues like terrorism, extortion, rising crimes, student unrest, labour unrest, unemployment, official extortion and the like are not unmanageable as they are the outcomes of manageable problems.

This cannot, however, be done by sermon. It will need innovative institutions, overhaul of existing ones, and orientation, re-education and motivation of the administrative machinery i.e. a functional and responsible government.

Sometimes corruption is cited as a major obstacle to development. There is virtually no corruption in Bangladesh. What is going on is open and bold without any deterrence; it is defiance of the legal authority of the government.

Bangladesh seems to invite foreign

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investments without judging their desirability. Contrary to general belief, Japan and South Korea developed themselves by wisely resisting undesirable foreign investment with relevant laws.

We are probably leasing, if not selling out, our scarce land to foreigners for setting up Private EPZ, such as Korean EPZ in Chittagong. Is it at all difficult to set up an EPZ by ourselves? The Railway authority is seemingly giving Chittagong Railway Station land to Grameen Phone to construct a building.

Is it advisable to allow foreign investments in land, and utility services which had traditionally been controlled by most of the countries of the World? We cannot afford to pay in foreign exchange our utility bill.

the country, all these sets are imported. There is an undue monthly levy of Tk.500 which amounts to Tk.1,050 crore annually. If the average monthly bill is Tk.3000, the annual bill comes to Tk.6,300 crore (i.e. US\$1,088 million at US\$1 = Tk.57.9).

of a balance between inward and outward foreign investments.

Some people are apparently plotting to export our meagre gas resource for probably some kickback. It will be irresponsible from national context. If we make India invest in pipeline for export, and we cannot supply sufficiently, will India take it lightly? Why should they? Let's not unnecessarily create a cause of conflict with India.

It is natural for any opposition to

exploit and highlight the weakness of the government and engage it in reacting to the former's accusations. The opposition's purpose is served if it can drag the government into the rhetoric of defending itself and blaming the opposition at any turn.

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never give up efforts and ambition to achieve the goal in a rational way. People never abandon such a leadership. Despite repeated frustration in the past, can the people trust the leadership of Khaleda Zia for some time more? It is now up to Begum Zia to assure the people through determined, comprehensive, rational and educated steps.

The views expressed here are of the author's own and not necessarily of the organisation he represents.

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BNP plans to counter JS boycott

WEEKEND NOTES

JAMILUR RAHMAN

Parliament boycott by the opposition is a problem that continues to baffle the ruling alliance. But it hasn't yet found an effective countermove, nor has it given up the hope of finding one.

After all its exhortations and appeals fell flat, the ruling alliance is now planning to make some changes in the rules to take the fun out of the boycott game. According to the existing rules, a lawmaker may lose the parliament seat if she/he remains absent from its proceedings for 90 days, a pretty long time.

The change, if effected, will take away some manoeuvring space from the opposition MPs, who have not joined any session of parliament since June 25. The alliance strategists deem the change in rules necessary to bring back life to the democratic dispensation, hobbling along with visible discomfiture at the moment.

The BNP-led alliance is now convinced that the 90-day rule is giving the opposition too much leeway.

It is an interesting situation. Without question, parliamentary democracy loses much of its force and flair, when the opposition does not emerge as a key player. That is a universally acknowledged truth nullified by a host of political complexities, some of which quite intriguing, in our context.

The alliance is, therefore, perfectly justified in doing as much as it can to bring back the opposition to parliament, though anything other than a conciliatory approach may turn out to be counterproductive.

But the AL is apparently convinced that it is time to intensify the pressure on the government. So chances are not bright that it will reconsider its position on parliament boycott.

Meanwhile, the price spiral continues to worry people. The commerce minister has finally given a plausible explanation of why the prices are soaring up. He has admitted that traders have to pay tolls at no fewer than 16 points, for example, on the Jessore-Dhaka route. It seems an organised crime, not the market forces alone, is pushing the prices up.

The minister has been frank enough to tell the truth. It may take some pressure off his ministry since enforcing the law is none of its business. But the government cannot feel relaxed with the revelation, which merely shifts the burden of explaining why prices are shooting up from one ministry to another.

Now it is the home ministry's turn to answer the unpleasant question. The police administration took note of law and order in the city before the holy month of Ramadan began, and deployed special teams at different points. The criminals regularly stalking the city roads are the target.

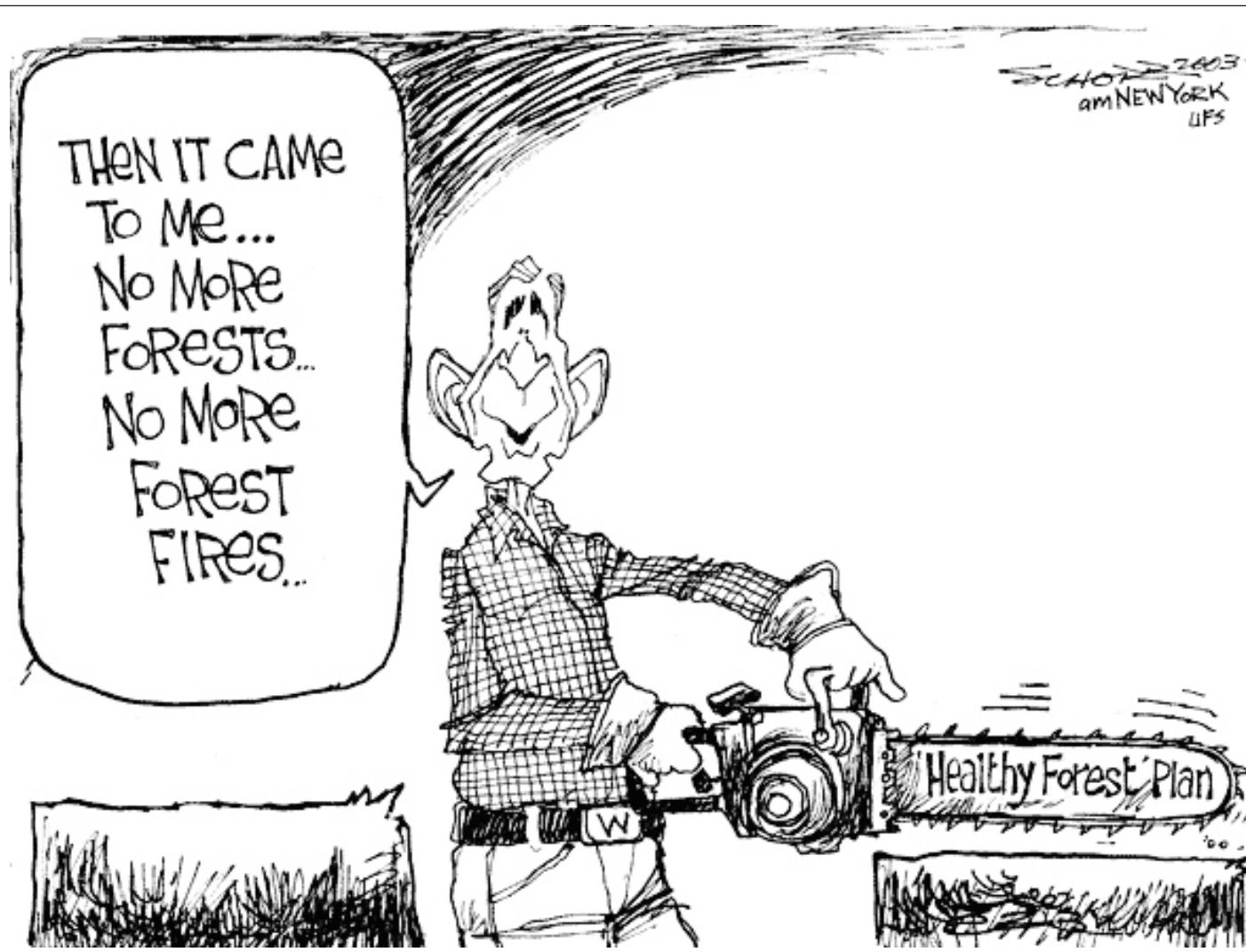
The law enforcers are doing what is expected of them. But the extra surveillance won't pay dividends if people are fleeced by traders instead of being waylaid by muggers-- asking for prohibitive prices. And traders say they have to do their own arithmetic, after paying the extortionists at 16 points on just one route!

There is another development on the political front. The AL is planning to add steam to its anti-government movement by enlisting the support of some other political parties. It may be recalled here that the party has long been trying to forge an alliance with the left-leaning parties. Talks were held to reach an understanding on the core issues; but it was not very clear whether they made real progress.

However, the latest news suggests that things are changing fast. The AL, JSD (Inu), Communist Party of Bangladesh and Workers Party are planning to jointly hold a national conference in January to bring into focus what they termed 'marginalisation' of Union Parishad by the introduction of Gram Sarkar.

This may give the four parties an opportunity to launch a combined assault on the Gram Sarkar, which has not had an easy sailing since the government decided to revive the brainchild of the late president Ziaur Rahman.

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Surging crime: The administration must arrest the dangerous trend

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

Violence of all types is searing the land. Most worrisome, faced with such escalating gangsterism, the investment climate is at an all-time low and the economy is in the doldrums. Pessimism and hopelessness are having a field day. Political infighting and rampant killings are sweeping the country in such an ugly manner that commerce has come to a grinding halt and social amity is fast disappearing.

This has been one of the blackest weeks in the country in recent times. Coming up with increasing frequency, grisly incidents of crime have put a blot on the image of the country. It is also a blot on the government which promised a crime-free society after their takeover in 2001.

Undoubtedly, the grisly killing of a minor boy Mintu aged 7 at Rajoir Upazila in Madaripur on October 30 for ransom of Tk 35,000 is an act of barbarism. Mintu's decomposed body was recovered after 5 days from underneath the hyacinths in a nearby pond. Reports have it that payment of the Tk 35,000 ransom money was arranged but the abductors neither took the money nor spared the life of Mintu.

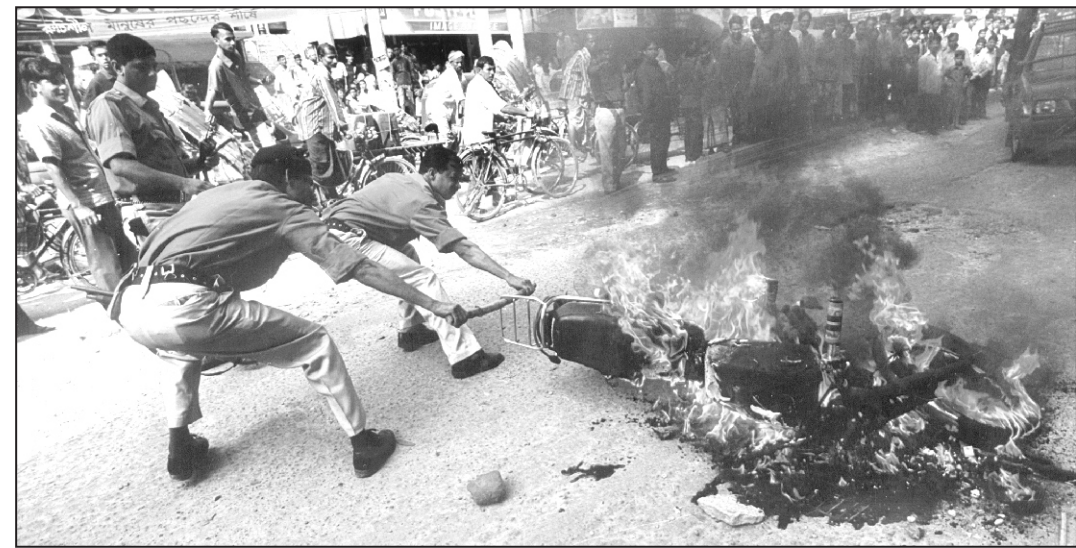
In the meantime, based on the suspicion of Mintu's family members, the local police nabbed the killers Zahurul Sardar and his brother-in-law Russel Mollah who confessed their guilt. Given the country's history of peaceful living, amity and fraternal relations, this vengeful spree is a break from tradition. Surely civilised societies do not allow anger to descend into barbarism. Unfortunately, the country is now witnessing the transformation of revenge and greed into bloody

People are apt to think that the administration's ability to tackle the sensitive and core issues of state-craft, viz police administration, economic issues, is hardly anything tangible. But what is ominous is that trouble-makers, looters and goons seem to have a large measure of administrative sanction in the mayhem that goes on. And that inevitably destabilises governance of the country and takes a heavy toll on the popularity of the government

slaughter. The alleged death of two young men in police custody in Khilgaon and Gulshan thanas has raised eyebrows about the police. In the case of Sumon who allegedly died of torture in police custody, people are questioning whether he really was caught in a robbery incident in the locality and suffered grievous injuries on his person due to mob beating, as police sources report. People ask if Sumon was a victim of mob beating then why was he not taken to DMCH to ascertain the extent of his injuries and why were his relations not informed immediately as per the requirement of law.

In any case, whatever the findings of the police investigation, the cops can't evade the responsibility of the charges made against them. While people in the country fret and fume over the series of brutal incidents occurring without respite, it was learnt that on November 4 unidentified assassins slaughtered three youths near the railway line at Shyampur WASA gate. Police sources attribute these killings to revenge and extortion related conflicts arising out of the sharing of extortion booty. Police further claim that the assassins belong to a criminal group led by the criminal Shahin. They got Shahin arrested with weapons as a sequel to a feud between them and Shahin's group ultimately eliminated them. But local people and neighbours say that these assassins did not have a tainted past and they were working in some mills.

Before the loud protests about the Sumon killing case had abated, Khilgaon thana police added another hit. This only says that like Veerappan in Indian's Madhya Pradesh forest, urban Chittagong has seen a proliferation of goons who can operate their clandestine activities defying all canons of law. Terrorism, extortion and political vendetta in the country are no longer abstractions or something associated



Angry mob set ablaze a motor bike reportedly used by muggers in Dhaka recently.

extortion bid. Later, on being challenged by the local people, who besieged the thana till 11 pm, the cops returned Tk 1.5 lakh. The alleged culprits in uniform have since been arrested but the master operator SI Shahjahan Sabuj and the informant Delwar have been absconding. The wealthy businessmen and ruling party loyalist Jamal Uddin of Chittagong could not be recovered from the clutches of his kidnappers, alive or dead, even after 100 days, although his family paid Tk 25 lakh to the abductors' agents in the presence of the police as part of the ransom money of one crore demanded for his release. This only says that like Veerappan in Indian's Madhya Pradesh forest, urban Chittagong has seen a proliferation of goons who can operate their clandestine activities defying all canons of law.

Terrorism, extortion and political vendetta in the country are no longer abstractions or something associated

with Chittagong alone. They are the most defining and destabilizing force in the lives of the people today. They have become an immediate fear for everyone who has a stake in the civilisational order and the norms of a tranquil society. Such attacks, abductions and ransom bids are pathetic reminders that someone out there is determined to strike at the heart of the country and take advantage of the poor governance.

And the stark fact is that at this hour of grave crisis, the government can neither sit tight nor relax. More shocking, law enforcement agency who could have halted this dangerous slide have joined hands with the criminals and this has emboldened their moves. True, in the face of mounting criticism against the brutal treatment of Sumon and his subsequent death, all the police personnel have been transferred from Khilgaon thana. People wonder if this can be construed as any punishment or can act as a deterrent to the accelerat-

ing rate of crime deeply ingrained in the cops in recent times.

In fact we have a justice system so flawed that we have yet to bring to justice those who committed grievous crimes years before. Nearly 10 years on, most of the cases progress at a pace so imperceptible that an occasional story in the newspapers is the only reminder of justice not done. The bullock-cart pace or rather release of the hardened criminals after a protracted trial because of the loopholes in FIR or GD entry so emboldens the criminals that they dare to threaten the relatives of the victims with dire consequences should they proceed with the trial. In fact, the past five years have seen a decline into lawlessness, chaos and corruption so rapid that experts had taken to describing it as worse than ever before. Surely, stories of what was going on must have reached the stalwarts in the administration but they chose to ignore them and continue inflicting administratively incompetent officers on vital

sectors and tinkering with politically irrelevant issues.

The question one may ask is what kind of criminal justice system keeps these dangerous criminals under trial for so long? The answer is that we need a justice system that punishes criminals before we forget what their crimes were. Since justice is such an elusive thing, the average person faces sentencing without trial if he happens to be on the wrong side of some politicians or officials. He can be wrongly arrested, wrongly denied bail, even have his bank accounts frozen, his property seized and his life totally destroyed. As the justice system is virtually non-functional, the average offender, whether he is a policeman or other official knows that he can get away with theft, bribery and corruption. Not just because justice is unobtainable, but also because our laws do not provide punishment of officials who harass innocent citizens, amass vast wealth and property beyond their ostensible means of income.

Could the public ever know how the Khilgaon thana OC could have such a mansion in Mohammadpur area? These are questions to be answered in curbing crime from all directions. Unfortunately as new political leaders and extremist ideologues emerge every day, millions of perfectly middle-class citizens -- the sort who want good governance, a better economy and limit their religiosity to private practice -- find themselves marginalised.

People are apt to think that the administration's ability to tackle the sensitive and core issues of state-craft, viz police administration, economic issues, is hardly anything tangible. But what is ominous is that trouble-makers, looters and goons seem to have a large measure of administrative sanction in the mayhem that goes on. And that inevitably destabilises governance of the country and takes a heavy toll on the popularity of the government. The administration must without delay see what changes can be made to make ordinary people in the country feel that there is someone up there doing something.

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All health information to keep you up to date

Stroke: Can this be prevented?

Stroke is a very common cause that leads to a dramatic change in the life of an affected individual, in older individuals. A stroke is significant brain dysfunction due to ischemia. And ischemia means local and temporary deficiency of blood supply. This ischemia in the brain results in neurologic deficits. If the clinical deficit is persistent for 24 hours, even if it resolves over a few days, the ischemia is termed CVA (Cerebrovascular accident) or stroke. Then again, if the clinical deficit resolves by 24 hours, the ischemia is called TIA (Transient ischemic attack). Brain cells thus deprived of oxygen are damaged or die within minutes during a stroke.

Warning signs of a stroke (TIA/CVA)

- In most instances the history and physical examination explain the pathophysiology of the event. The symptoms of a stroke usually develop abruptly over minutes or hours, but occasionally over several days. Symptoms of stroke are often confusing, but any of the following symptoms should be brought to a doctor's attention without delay: * Headache, mental confusion or epileptic fit * Sudden blindness or disturbance of vision in one or both eyes * Slurred speech or difficulty in speaking * Dizziness or fainting * Loss of sensation * Loss of balance * Weakness or numbness in an arm, leg or facial muscle * Paralysis or weakness on one side of the body is the commonest effect of a serious stroke.

How to lower your risk

1. Treat hypertension (high blood pressure). Have regular check-ups;
2. Avoid high cholesterol and fatty foods;
3. Take less salt in your diet;
4. Maintain your ideal weight for your age and height;
5. Exercise a suitable programme regularly; but have a full medical check-up and doctor's advice before starting;
6. Stop smoking and drinking alcohol, and
7. Try to avoid stressful situations through life style modification and relaxation methods.

Did you know?

Many clinicians think that Aspirin, Clopidogrel are helpful in preventing stroke. They recommended this to people susceptible to blood clots. Consult a qualified doctor or specialist if you think you might need it.

Next: Sugar is not always sweet