

What do We Need the List for?

While the whole nation is gasping with impatience for the government to pounce upon the criminal hordes and terrorist mafia and allow civilisation again to dawn upon this ancient abode of high culture, the man charged with delivering the goods says he has asked for a list of the wayward ones to be made.

The law and order situation is not after all as reassuring as the Jatiya Sangsad was recently told by the Home Minister. As a sense of insecurity grips the society in the manner of a vice, specially after daylight murder of the sacrificing leader Ratan Sen, laying of siege by Shibir on the Rajshahi University now abandoned by the panicked general students, and guardians in Dhaka of school-going children getting terrorised, the Minister has responded with another assurance that government has started making a list of criminals and terrorists. And for the success of the initiative, he has called upon members of public, specially the traders and shopkeepers the victims of extortionist mastans, to pass on to the authority particulars of such bullies, if necessary, secretly. The only happy thing about the pronouncement by the Minister is that this constitutes, in very real terms, his recognition of the fact that the nation is indeed in the throes of a violence that is eating into the vitals of both society and government and in the end of the polity called Bangladesh.

We call the pronouncement silly as it says in exact words that the 'government was preparing a list of wanted criminals and terrorists'. How can criminals etc be 'wanted' without there being first of all a list? If they are already 'wanted' why aren't you catching them? It is much too evident you are not catching them and are interested in making a list of them, then how are you 'wanting' them and what for?

Before the government gets down to business more serious than making a list, it must tell people of its definition of the much too abused term — 'terrorist'. Who is a terrorist? Isn't he or she just a criminal? How do you set a terrorist apart from other criminals and why? It is expected that the government may feel inclined to call the perpetrators of politically motivated crimes as terrorists. But the present government is not very suitably placed to go by this. In the interest of the success of the projected campaign against terrorists the government must first establish bona fide of its intentions and actions and of the whole establishment itself. Its rights to go into action against armed political cadre indulging generously in the use of their guns and more primitive axes must first be proved beyond reproach — in the interest of the campaign.

This is very clearly a delicate path the government has been forced to take. The factor that makes the job so difficult for the government apparently lies in the fact of the ruling party itself harbouring a big armed youth cadre. Shying of liquidating this, how can the government expect to discipline the other parties' conduct? If government is sincere in seeing the end of all armed party cadres — we, indeed the whole society would be with them, the first task in this will be for the government to persuade other parties of the genuineness of its sincerity in the matter. If it can do this, the biggest hurdle to engaging the worst problem of Bangladesh politics successfully will be removed.

The government does not tire of priding in their exertions about seeing democracy blossom, and we feel encouraged with every toddlers step it takes even if erratically. It is very much in the interest of democracy that the criminals are punished, politics is cleaned of goons and a rule of law truly takes over. How is that in such a time government is averting its eyes from the emergence and outright plunging into terroristic activity so much resembling the Nazi SS of an out-and-out fascist organization with a tell-tale name? That has been possible because of government's dependence on political expediency rather than the true interest of the polity. Our first democratically elected government in a decade would not stand to reap success in its profession of curbing criminals and terrorists unless it can throw out its expediencies for what they are — dangerous junk.

Press Freedom in Russia

International press bodies are right in expressing their concern over the way the authorities in Russia and other republics in the former Soviet Union have been dealing with the media in their territories. There is no doubt that having dismantled so many other relics of the communist regime, they are perfectly sincere in restoring freedom to the press and giving to newspapers, news agencies and the electronic channels the independence they never enjoyed. Their motives remain above doubts, but what they have done so far raises serious — and indeed disturbing — questions.

The latest case concerns the leading Moscow daily, *Izvestia* which the Russian parliament would like to turn into its own mouthpiece, a move on which President Boris Yeltsin has taken an ambiguous position, but which has been justly criticised by the London-based International Press Institute. It is far from clear what a parliament can do with a newspaper, except filling up all its columns with legislative debates and discussion.

Meanwhile, the authorities are marking time with other long overdue measures. National news agencies remain under control of governments, perhaps without much of a central desk since each republic would like to use the branch of the Tass in its own area in the way it likes. Newsprint is rationed, while government officials decide which newspapers are to be printed at state-owned plants. The electronic media is yet to see much of the freedom it has been craving for.

The situation seems no better in a number of East European countries, especially Hungary and Poland. In these countries, government officials have started talking of order, forgetting how much risks journalists had taken in opposing communist regimes in the past by publishing underground newspapers and in supporting the newly-emerging democratic forces.

We recognise that the switch-over from the control of government to private ownership, especially when it is linked to economic reforms, cannot take place overnight. However, some measures, especially in the formulation of new media laws, should take place now to restore public confidence at home and goodwill abroad.

BASICALLY, the main function of the foreign publicity is to project the image of the country abroad and inform the world community at large and nationals residing abroad of the policies of the Government and development activities taking place in the country. External Publicity is looked upon as a vital element in the representative machinery of a modern statecraft as a result of the rapid expansion of the media, both print and electronic, which has enabled the publicist as an aid to diplomatic and economic offensive of nations.

Foreign publicity mainly fits into two patterns. There is political publicity. Officers dealing with press and information in a mission are to influence people abroad on specific and current controversies and explain the stand of the Government on national and international issues. It is felt by every country in this world that external information service is required to present a case of a country abroad during times of peace, apart from war time.

It is a fact that most of the tasks of representing the country abroad, in fast media as radio, TV and newspapers and also slow media as books and journals could and should be done by the External Information which prepares and prints sufficient background information about the activities of the Government including the texts of speeches of significance and full description of political action to inform and educate opinion-forming leaders of other countries.

The External publicity is designed to undertake the dissemination of information with a view to promoting a better understanding of the country, its institutions, policies and programmes. It also promotes cultural and religious ties and seeks to dispel misconception and misinterpretation of information.

Press officer working in the mission has the task to explain the domestic and foreign policies of the country he represents and provide feedback to

the Ministry so that public opinion abroad may be assessed at the Headquarters to prepare comprehensive publicity plans and put it for action. The success in the international scene will necessarily depend on a balanced and forward-looking foreign policy and, what is equally important, on adequate projection thereof.

Two-way Responsibility

Apart from keeping missions informed of the developments in the country to brief the media and opinion forming circles abroad, External Publicity addresses itself to sifting and analysing reports sent to headquarters from missions and producing a critical report for the information of the higher authorities and different agencies of the Government.

Another important aspect of projecting the country abroad is the frequent visits by foreign mediemen including TV and film making bodies. These are exceedingly sensitive since the mediemen go back to their countries and report on the country they have visited. It may be noted that the western press is not necessarily free from bias or prejudice. They tend to be influenced by political, commercial or social considerations. The press may manipulate news, suppressing it at times or exaggerating it on other occasions to promote sale of its stuff.

Although the western information media — newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, publishing houses and film companies — claim to be independent, there is constant control over their activities as far as news and information about third are concerned world countries in particular. The news which travels from the third world and underdeveloped countries to the western media is selected and slanted by the desk editors of the wire services, newspapers and broadcast media. Viewed from this angle, the external publicity requires to handle visits of foreign mediemen carefully.

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

One of the most important aspects of the work of the External Publicity is to counter biased, untrue and false report put out by the foreign media. The task is more challenging in times of crisis when External Publicity has to take the wind out of motivated and inspired propaganda.

Vital Component

External publicity being a vital component of the governmental machinery of a country, it is normally designed to supplement diplomatic, political, economic and social activities by nations. Sustained and sound projection of government's policies and programmes is achieved by a well-coordinated and constructive operation of the External Publicity set-up. An effective External Publicity machinery seeks to promote economic policies, strengthen trade, commerce and export interests, apart from projecting foreign policy.

The information and cultural programmes are inter-linked. In the field of cultural activities, the main task is performed by the non-Governmental institutions in the free world whereas it is accomplished by Government-sponsored institutes in socialist countries but coordinating functions are performed by the Government institutes like the Ministry of Culture or Education or External Information Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in many parts of the world. The External Publicity Division also organises visits of cultural teams to participate in the international exhibitions occasionally in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, besides despatching films, paintings and cassettes to project culture abroad.

In pursuit of the objectives of projecting country's image abroad External Information Division of any country generally produces a number of regular and ad hoc publications, desk or wall calendars and di-

agrams depicting people's life, culture, industry etc., for overseas distribution. These are prepared keeping in mind the requirements of different kinds of consumers.

Special Kind of Job

Publicity materials including films submitted by foreign missions are scrutinised and vetted by External Publicity Division. External Publicity work in a mission or at the Headquarters is a special kind of job and cannot be performed by an average information officer or a journalist or a radio programme producer unless he knew modus operandi intricacies of foreign policy since the foreign publicity supplements diplomacy.

Lord Strang and other members of the Foreign Office in the United Kingdom have rightly said in their book 'The Foreign Office' that 'the question of publicity brings us back by a natural transition to the impact of democracy — both internal and external or universalised diplomacy; for in a democratic country, publicity is by no means solely of the Government's making, even within the purely national field, and the Government is always swayed to some extent by what it seeks to sway. Foreign policy in the democracies is, in fact, very largely the product of interacting official and non-official publicity of Governmental guidance and explanation on the one hand, and of popular expressions of opinion and demands on the other.'

It may be worthwhile to note that the image of the country depends also on the cumulative reaction of a country's position in the comity of nations, the calibre of her political leadership, the achievements of her men of arts and science and the successful projection abroad by not only officers working in the mission but also nationals working abroad.

Officers assigned abroad to deal with press and public re-

lations are required to sell ideas of his Government to the people of the country he is posted in but he needs to work in such a manner which must not tend to suggest a proselytizing motive. The broadening of democratic control over foreign policy makes it inevitable that publicity impinges upon ever increasing force on the field of inter-Governmental diplomacy.

Added Importance

Many countries in the world today attach importance to the planned projection abroad of their countries through external publicity set-up because relations between countries are not static but dynamic. In India, the Pillai Committee for the reorganisation of the External Publicity has in 1966 summed up the situation: 'External Publicity is an instrument of foreign policy and diplomacy. Its problems and needs are not the same as those of domestic publicity. Its targets are different and its approach, the emphasis and means are all distinctive.'

The External Publicity of the Ministry of External Affairs in India is headed by a Joint Secretary who is also the official spokesman of the Government of India. Under the Joint Secretary, there is a Director, a Deputy Secretary and 10 Under Secretaries. The Under Secretaries hold charge of independent sections like Press relations, films, printing press and publications production, mission service (territorywise divided), reference, library, liaison with other Government agencies like PID, Radio and TV etc. There are 23 officers working at the Headquarters while there are 37 Information Centres/Wings abroad. Almost equal number of officers are working in the External Publicity Wing in Islamabad.

In 1962-63 the External Publicity became an integral part of the Foreign Office in the United Kingdom on the recommendation of the Plover Commission. Overseas Information Services in UK has three departments dealing

with information work: 1) News Department is the authorised point of contact between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British news media and between FCO and Overseas News Correspondents stationed in London; 2) Information Policy Department is responsible for the direction and financial control of the official overseas information services and of the overseas information services activities and for policy liaison with the BBC External Services; 3) Overseas Information Department provides guideline and briefing to British Embassies and High Commissions overseas.

Most British Embassies and High Commissions have an Information Officer of the rank and status of Counsellor/First Secretary or Second Secretary on their staff. These officers, who work in close collaboration with their colleagues dealing with political and commercial affairs, advise other staff on questions of public relations, try to build up good relations with the local news media, undertake public speaking and broadcasting, issue bulletins, handle press inquiries and act as official spokespersons.

In Japan, there is the Information and Cultural Affairs Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which has four divisions dealing with information activities: 1) Press Division; 2) Foreign Press Division; 3) International Publicity Division and 4) External Publicity Division.

Malaysia's External Information Division is a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is headed by Under Secretary (General Matters) and has 26 officers at the headquarters. The External Information Division of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a powerful body dealing with publicity and cultural projection abroad.

Incidentally, in the twenty years of independence, authorities in Bangladesh never attached the importance this vital organ deserved.

Responsibility of Students : Other than Politics

by Hubert Francis Sarkar

THE educational institutions, the Dhaka University being the most glaring example, provide us a perpetually discouraging picture. The gun-slingers and the rowdy elements are predominating there. Nobody can say or do anything without conforming with theirs. Murders are continually taking place on the campus. Intimidation is common. Academic interests are sacrificed. All these are symptoms of a sinister disease: self-destruction in ignorance. Everybody seems to be aware of the situation; but, nobody can venture to change the things. The crisis looks alarmingly deep-rooted and is expanding continuously. It is time to have a closer look at the facts and figures contributing to the crisis of education, and search for a strategy to hit the crux of the problem and find a way-out. Focusing on the prevailing situation in the Dhaka University, the following observations may be noted.

The authorities, the teachers' association and the university administration appear to be more than hostages in the hands of hooligans, so goes the popular opinion. With the said intentions of keeping the campus a seat purported exclusively for academic persuasions, they can, at best, give press notes and organize silent processions whenever any exigency breaks out.

The seat of learning which has produced the luminaries in the intellectual firmament of Bangladesh appear to be ill-

equipped to cope with the deadly monstrosity of gun-play and stabbing. It is, therefore totally wrong to put the blame on the shoulders of the teachers for all these.

The student wings of different political parties, who accommodate the violent figures for the purposes best known to them can never move on their own. The veritable stooges and puppets as they are playing in the hands of the politicians, kill and main the students belonging to opponent parties and vice versa, allegedly at the behest of the politicians outside the campus.

It has been further pointed out by the knowledgeable quarters that the student organisations do not give a chaff for ideology or manifesto. All those written and said, are just only the political window-dressing. Under the banner of student organizations, they allegedly satisfy personal animosities, jealousies and self-interest. Nothing fundamentally beneficial can be expected from them. It will look strange to know that leaders are appointed by outsiders rather than elected by the student activists.

Over-aged 'Students'

Mentionably, the central leaders of the student bodies are over-aged 'student' politicians only stretching their stay on the campus on various ploys. There are valid reasons to suspect these elderly 'students' who maintain connections with central leaders

of political parties for their personal sake rather than campaigning for the genuine demands of the students. They are there on the campus to work out a formula for the parent organizations. In return, they are assured of a safe place in the hierarchy of the parent organisation.

Deplorably, the parent organisations thus by the elderly 'student leaders' control the Alpha to Omega of the student activities. They look upon the student activists as slogan-chanting processionists, the gun-toting puppets who are devoid of any political orientation and do not know what is right and what is wrong.

Again, the student activists can put any say only when they can show mastery in gun-toting. They do not know why they should do that or, why they should not do the other. Already the propensity to consider the students as a band of play things has become inveterate in the psyche of the leadership.

Then the political activities of the student activists go into nothingness. Contrary to this, the students have played the most vital role in any kind of anti-autocracy movements in the history of this country.

Instead of pushing ahead the genuine demands of academic life, the leaders try to mobilize the students for movements in the streets. Why don't they mobilize the general public than the students? After

all, the students have got a far more important business to do rather than toppling an autocrat for another.

Facilities

Are the students enjoying enough facilities — libraries, laboratory equipment and research opportunities? Has the fall of any autocrat changed their lot positively? I do not believe so.

The modern equipment and current written materials necessary for research work might have featured predominantly in the demand charts of the students bodies. The low quality of foods served in the hall dining rooms could have come along with it. The cumbersome administrative procedures can be streamlined to facilitate the students' present and future.

There is an emerging feeling that the elderly student leaders have a dyspepsia to academic works and that's why they never feel it the 'number one' mission to press home these demands. If they can overthrow military dictators, they can also make all these possible.

A consensus in this regard is possible among the student bodies if the out-siders can be compelled to stop putting their ears into the affairs of the students.

Of course, nobody can downplay the invaluable contribution of the students

community to anti-autocracy movements. But, this has to be stated that they must not be distracted from their main business. Also, they must be trained to think about the fishlike nature of the politicians who use their 'political' rights as coat-changers.

Interestingly, the vanguards who could make a parliamentary election a success have failed to block the dismissal of the DUCSU elections. The student activists and the student leaders know better which are the reasons behind such a mystery. If they voluntarily start to expose to the public whose vested interests make such imbroglios, the public may be more enlightened and more ideally equipped.

Seats in the Halls

Seats in the residential halls are in reality distributed by the student leaders. The distribution of seats then goes to a devil's hand. More a leader can marshal fire-arms and muscle-power, more he can put his say in the distribution of seats.

Needless to say that such a devil-devoured system can give rise to vandalism only. The so-called democracy-lovers are simply killing democracy here. Dhaka University provosts helplessly see the things slipping away.

As are often flashed in the press, the intra-party conflicts are always characterized by displays of arms and muscle-power. These clearly point an

accusative finger to the weak and loose organisation of the student bodies. Gangs of muggers and murderers take over the role of students leaders.

The police postioned inside the varsity campus have failed to contain the deterioration of the total scenario. Impotent as they are to any challenging situation, the police presence give the armed hooligans a morale-booster. The audacity and recklessness are on the increase in the face of a force who are supposed to enforce law and order but fail to do the same perpetually.

Bitterness engulfs our mind when we find in the newspapers the photographs of the dead bodies of gunned down students. For all these, the university authorities may single-mindedly eke out a formula which will raise them from the virtual hibernation, they are experiencing miserably. They may at least tell the police to go home rather than putting on a false custodians' role. The student bodies must start to reject the over-aged people as student leaders. Young and energetic students can replace these people. This one vitally important decision will signal a new era in the universities and the affiliated colleges. Also, it is time the student activists establish their presence more recognized. And, de-mobilizing the evil force that control dormitory activities, by any means, will go a long way.

To the Editor...

All that glitters

Sir, Looks like anything goes! That's the impression an observer gets out of what have been happening in Bangladesh these days especially in entertainment arena, mainly because Bangladeshis love to fulfill their recreational appetite with anything affordable, even fake is good enough when original is beyond reach; and if it happens to be foreign, then nothing on earth can stand in their way.

This tendency seems to be true also for a state that finds foreign original goods too costly and usually looks for cost-efficient look-alike or 'second-hand' or even home-made copy to meet her needs.

The nationalist feeling may fear this trend can turn into a national norm gradually in addition to growing dependence on foreign commodities as amplified, for example, by the foreign round-the-clock television programmes available now.

A glittering instance of craze for anything alien was recent performance in Dhaka by a number of look-alikes of

top-rank American showbiz celebrities in front of an audience longing for western recreation.

Such an idea about gratifying pastime passion may not be all that bad for the socialites in an LDC aspiring better life as long as characteristic native socio-cultural traits remain safe for an individual national identity.

Yet, rather enjoying foreign mimicry, trying to learn something original from modern civilization that will enrich national values of her own, may help this nation improve her original look.

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Return of earnest money

Sir, It is too much for the client to cling to the earnest money for months together and let the contractors suffer for no fault of theirs. On better human considerations the rules in this regard need a change. Clients should not hold earnest money of those

contractors who participated but failed to qualify in the bid for a period not exceeding one month from the date the tender was opened. Some clients keep the earnest money for about a year on some pretext or the other and do not release it. Contractors are made victims because they are on the wrong side of the counter. All government organisations, autonomous corporations and private organisations should take uniform decision in this regard not to make the bidders suffer unnecessarily. In some cases clients go one step further. They deposit the earnest money cheque with their bank and get the benefit of utilising interest money, accrued therefrom. This is highly unethical but who cares for ethics these days. It is treated as middle class morality. I feel it should be stopped outright.

A M F Quadir
Dhaka

Harassment

Sir, We, the Bangladeshi passengers in one way or other, are harassed by the diplomatic missions, customs,

immigration and even airline officials by almost every country outside Bangladesh. We are really an unfortunate nation. But when we return home we expect some co-operation from our fellow nationals. The government has been sincerely trying to improve the modern airport facilities such as Green and Red Channel, Scanning etc to reduce the sufferings of the passengers. But, unfortunately, these are not properly implemented due to a section of officials.

The recent incidence at Zia Airport confirmed me that we are made hostages at all spheres of life by our own people. On 13th July I was returning from Australia via Bangkok Fl No TG 321. After completing immigration, I collected my luggage and was proceeding toward Green channel as I had nothing to declare nor I had any contraband items. Suddenly, I was stopped by one uniformed person and asked to go to a particular custom official. I said him that I had nothing to declare and I should go through Green channel. He said, 'No, your luggage is marked and you should produce it to custom official'. Without any further

argument I produced my luggage to the custom officer. First thing he said amounted to 'give us something and go'. I refused to pay him anything. Then he opened my luggage and unpacked every item which took almost an hour. Finally nothing taxable was found with me and I was allowed to go.

It is good that luggages are scanned and marked accordingly before their arrival at the luggage counter. We very much appreciate such anti-smuggling measures. But facing a situation described above one would ask then why this channel system exists and how the markings are done? This will not stop smuggling as long you are asked to pay and go, rather this will increase the suffering of innocent passengers like us. We sincerely request the appropriate authority to investigate the arbitrary marking system by a section of officials immediately, for the greater interest of the nation.

F R Chowdhury
Lalmata, Dhaka

Social values

Sir, I fully agree with the content of the article 'strike as

a political weapon-option abused" by SAMS Kibria, published in 12.07.92 issue of The Daily Star, where the author has clearly depicted the state of social values prevailing in our society. It has been order of the day to brace the news of various bloody incidents every-day occurring throughout the country. Once it shocked our mind but now-a-days it does not fling any sensation on our mind.

People are growing hostile to one another day by day. They can't put up with others even in trivial matters. Peace has been the will-o-the-wisp — we hardly find it. How can a student beat up a teacher? How can they call strike either in protest against the rustication of a so-called brilliant student? We rather feel safe if we can avoid all responsibilities imposed on us. So our intellectuals had better come up with initiative to change such social values.

As regards our mental amelioration I have little to say, but a society can't go on any more in such a way.

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