Dhaka, Tuesday, August 4, 1992

The Plight of Shopowners

Nothing could reveal the hollowness of the home minister's claim that the law and order situation was under control than the strike by the city shopowners on Sunday. Driven to desperation by extortionists, local hoodlums and terrorists the retail traders inflicted loss upon themselves ffor when shops are closed the biggest losers are their owners) to drive home the point of their precarious situation. Literally driven to the very end of their patience they had no better way of expressing their frustrations than to go for the type of collective action that we saw the other day. Important trading centres like Baitul Mokarram, New Market, Elephant Road and the wholesale market of Moulvibazar, to mention only a few, wore a desolate look while the home minister basked in the self-proclaimed success of having controlled crime in the city.

The psychology of make-belief in which our home minister evidently prefers to live, instead of facing up to the reality that the rest of us have to grapple with everyday, is gradually eroding our confidence in the legal edifice that binds the society together. The faith that the law enforcing agencies are there to save the innocent and inflict legally permitted punishment on the criminals takes years to build. It is on this faith that the civic minded people tailor their lives. As for the criminals, it is the fear, that law and those who enforce it are ever vigilant and will punish them no matter how powerful or rich they or their backers are, that controls them. Once that fear is broken then law enforcement bodies lose much of their effectiveness. If for day after day crimes continue to be committed and the criminals go about their business with impunity then the public trust on institution of government itself comes into question. The nonchalant attitude of this government and the business-as-usual approach of the home ministry are raising serious questions in the public mind as to how bad the law and order situation will have to get before we can expect the type of action that we, and civilized societies everywhere, have come to expect of our governments. What is perhaps most disturbing is the type of response we occasionally get. One typical reaction of the home minister is that necessary laws are being prepared to bring the criminals behind the bars. It is as if the inadequacy of existing laws is the reason why the criminals are not being caught. Legal experts point to the non-implementation of the existing penal measures, and not to the inadequacy of laws, as the reason for the rise in crimes. The other response, about which we have

commented yesterday, is that necessary lists of criminals is in the process of being prepared, and once the list is ready, the criminals will have had it. We cannot help but recall that during the much publicised anti-smuggling drive, the home minister had also declared that a list was being prepared of the smugglers. Whatever came of that 'list' and how effective that drive was-a visit to any city shop will give the answer.

The home minister will be well served if he listens to what the shopowners are saying. He and the formidable police force that he controls, should take up the deteriorating law and order situation as the most urgent task that this government is facing. In the successful solving of this problem the credibility of this government will depend to a large extent. The bottom line is that our economy will have no chance of growing unless the criminals are punished and the overall law and order situation becomes normal.

Award for Ravi Shankar

Pandit Ravi Shankar has been awarded the prestigious Magsaysay Award. For a maestro of music of his order, no award can honour him any more; rather the awards themselves earn esteem through the citation. Indeed, all awards add in respectability with each time they grant recognition to a man or woman for excellence. In this case also, the reciprocity is not missing but it is the award that receives more than the recipient in the process. Ravi Shankar hardly needs an introduction in any part of the world. That he has become an institution through his non-parcil musical achievement over the past 40 years should make it a point that it is not so much the recipient but the award itself that finds in an ever brighter halo.

Honouring him with the award is like doing the same by awarding the Nobel Prize to Shakespeare. And lo, for what performance has he been awarded! Quite unbelievably, for journalism, literature and communication arts. We understand the problem of the foundation which, like any of its kind, has to follow some guidelines while making the choice. Even a versatile genius of Ravi Shankar's class may still fail to conform to the set rules of the foundation. That is why the award committee has to cite journalism and literature as the areas of his specialisation which, to speak the truth, is not the case. Therefore, nowhere is the eagerness of the foundation to make the award available to a man of his stature so keenly manifest as in this and similar other cases.

The apparent anachronism is understandable too. Directing spotlight on itself and a celebrity or supremo of Ravi Shankar's calibre, the foundation does a great service to society and the humanity in general. That is highly important. So, no question about the merit or rationale of such awardgiving. People of the ordinary sort feel inspired and can aim ever higher. It is not the foundation and the recipient of the award alone, but also the entire humanity that shares in the glory. Aesthetic excellence by a single person is an eternal achievement for all peoples of the world. Yet, there is a small point to ponder. The point is to bring less known ones with high performance to the limelight. A Wole Soyinka or a Naguib Mahfouz, perhaps needs to be focused more than their peers in the more advanced societies. Such recognitions add not only lustre to the neglected but also act as a greater encouragement for millions of millions of people in the disadvantaged societies. Even after years and decades of excellence like that of Ravi Shankar, such an award in recognition loses some of its purposes. Still then, it is quite satisfying to know that the award has not gone to any one with raw talents but undeserving it.

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

Sind Situation Remains Explosive

Mariana Baabar writes from Islamabad

N the southern province of Sind, the military operation enters its second and most decisive phase. The Pakistan army which has been given constitutional powers to bring normalcy to the strife torn province were given additional powers this week. The new law now goes a long way in fulfilling the demands of the army which needed extra powers to search and arrest law breakers. The second phase, senior military officials confide, would be a tricky one, and impossible to implement unless there was cooperation from the federal and provincial governments.

The Nawaz Sharif govern ment has halfheartedly agreed to the military's demands that terrorists, kidnappers, mur derers and other law breakers would be arrested, no matter to which political party they belonged. A senior army general commented, "If we would arrest four cabinet ministers of Muzzafar Shah's government in Karachi, his government would fall... Lists have been exchanged between the military and the IJI government, where the president, Ghulam Ishao Khan has also been taken into confidence." This was important because pressure is now building on the army from their own officers involved in 'operation clean-up', to arrest and detain the son-in-law of the president, Irfanullah Marwat who works as an advisor with the Shah government. The military intelligence has compiled reports about Marwat's 'excesses', which he committed while the former chief minister of Sind. Jam Sadiq, was still alive.

Charges range from rape, kidnapping and reselling stolen cars. High on the list reportedly are members of parliament both from the national assembly and the provincial assembly. Besides members of the MQM, the names also include those from the Pakistan People's Party. Though Bhutto who is cooperating with the army, specially where the military operation in her home province is concerned, has been silent, there has been a strong worded rebuttal from Jam Mashooq Ali, a minister with the Sharif cabinet and son of Jam Sadiq. When reports of his name being on the wanted list first came to light, he said, "I challenge the authorities to bring proof of my harbouring kidnappers and dacoits. We are a respected family of Sind and my ancestors have always rendered their services for this

country... Included in the list which the various military and civilian agencies have compiled are members of the Al-Zulfigar Organisation (AZO), headed by the brother of Benazir Bhutto, Murtaza Bhutto. Murtaza has repeatedly denied that his organisation exists today. The military in private has also acknowledged that PPP leader Benazir Bhutto has nothing to do with the AZO but her mother, the chairperson of the PPP, still maintains a soft corner for the organisation. Nevertheless the army insists that they have names of AZO members in Sind who have

edge that the charges include terrorist training at the hands of RAW, the Indian intelligence agency. So far the army has failed to arrest terrorists of the MQM, who were also the chief leader and organiser in the ethnic party. The army, when it moved into Sind, according to a federal minister Chaudhery Nisar Ali, 'relied too heavily on the MQM dissidents who, because they were out of touch with the headquarters of

Altaf Hussain, failed to identify

been involved in anti-state ac

tivities. It is common knowl-

the locations of the members. Charges range from rape, kidnapping and reselling stolen cars. High on the list reportedly are members of parliament both from the national assembly and the provincial assembly. Besides members of the MQM, the names also include those from the

Also disappointing has been the fact that only a very small number of arms and ammunition has been recovered. The delay in sending the army into Sind by the Sharif government, because of political compulsions, gave a lot of time for the arms to be hidden and many MQM workers to go underground.

The second phase of the army action will also confront the MQM as an underground party where all the key members are in touch with each other and where arms have been widely distributed.

Already the army has, to some extent, slowed down its operation in the cities because of a vocal backlash from the urban population which charged that the operation had turned into an MQM bashing operation'. Visits to the interior of Sind show the inhabitants of the rural areas are slowly shedding their inhibitions as far as the army is concerned and going a long way in cooperating with them. Suspicion had accumulated from the past when the military dictator Gen Zia had used the army to crush the Sindhis in the interior.

In talks with senior military personnel, one of the main stumbling block in the way of arresting dacoits and kidnappers is the lack of intelligence reports and photographs of the law breakers. Because of the intrinsities of politics inside rural Sind, there is no hard or fast rules which can differentiate between the dacoits. Investigations have shown that a number of notorious kidnappers have the patronage of the local leaders of the area, without whose help it would be impossible to carry on with their profession. The local administration, specially the police has been also of no help. claim army officials stationed in the interior of Sind. Most of these officials have pledged their alliance more to the various political parties in the area or to those who have helped in securing them these jobs. Changes in the police administration have started at the higher level and this would also find its way into the bot-

Interesting has been the assertion of the Chief of Army

remain in Sind till the law and order situation becomes normal. This is a far cry from the constitutional provision given to the army which clearly indicated that the army operation would remain in force for only six months. Together with this the government is now being approached by the military that they should be given additional powers under Article 245 of the Constitution which basically gives the army rights to try prisoners in military

Staff, Gen Asif Nawaz who de-

clared that the army would

Pakistan People's Party.

At the political level the chief minister of Sind, Muzzafar Shah, heads one of the weakest governments where each day sees more and more MQM members giving their resignations and in one day alone this week the deputy speaker of Sind assembly accepted ten more resignations of the MQM MPAs. This has led to a serious contemplation by the Sharif government to suspend the Sind assembly instead of dissolving it and proclaiming governor's rule. In this regard the Sind governor Mehmood Haroon has held several meetings with the president in Islamabad. Added to the woes of the Sind chief minister is the planned

protest of the opposition led

by Benazir Bhutto who have

threatened street agitation

from August 30 if the Sind

chief minister does not resign. According to Bhutto, Shah has no moral justification to remain chief ministers when he has, according to her, lost his majority in the assembly. For Bhutto, this would be also a test of her claims to be a popular leader.

Not since the '90 elections has Bhutto come on to the streets to prove her strength. Together with this, Bhutto is holding the national assembly resignation card close to her chest - she has threatened last week that she together with other opposition members, including those on the treasury benches, would resign from their membership in the national assembly. The prime minister has welcomed the resignation of the opposition saying that he would go according to the Constitution for by-elections.

Bhutto would not, at this stage, make any false moves. Also she would do nothing to annoy the army. In fact the progress of the army operation has, to a great extent, been facilitated because there has been no opposition from the PPP whose home province is

Ironically though Sharif was hesitant to send in the army into Sind, it is this very operation that has for the time being given him a new lease at the prime minister's house. As long as the army is involved inside Sind, neither the president nor the chief of army staff would be tempted to open a new front. For a man who has survived from crisis to crisis, Sind is today giving Sharif some breathing space, where reports of his corruption and incompetence have taken a back seat with the army action in Stnd.

SAARC Forgets its First Lessons in Co-operation

by Prof. C. Suriyakumaran

Foreign Ministers Conference has concluded in Colombo, with still some difficulties in advancing on trade co-operation - for quite understandable reasons. In a recent Article, I had specially praised the President of Sri Lanka's suggestion of Trade expansion by import from within the Region, of goods now obtained from outside. It was the only approach to viable trade cooperation in the situation of our countries, and in fact recalled an approach developed in UN ECAFE during the Seventies. It was a Programme that substituted an impractical regime of expansion by tariff dismantling committed to "Import commitments" to one of "Export expansion", with commitments to increased domestic production. The change was from a system of "Tariff relations" to "Commodity relations", as the basis of Trade expansion. The Asian Development Bank too was established by ECAFE (in 1965) with clear Charter Clauses precisely to promote Regional Co-operation'. But we may leave them aside for the moment, and hope they will strike the attention of the

The amazing immediate failure by SAARC has been on its declared steps for co-operation on Environment. It has commended itself for some partial initiative it has taken in this area, completely overlooking, or deliberately by-passing one does not know, another longer established Inter-Governmental Organisation, precisely for Environment, whose Articles of Association have

SAARC Ministers.

HE Eleventh SAARC also been lodged with the United Nations, and whose Governing Members are none other than Ministers of the

SAARC Countries themselves. What makes the action worse is that the Organisation, SACEP (the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme), had quite major Programmes over a wide area of Environment and Resources Management, some even funded by International and other Organisations.

The sad feature is that \$A-CEP has been in relative stagnation, to face the truth, because its own Member Countries as a whole, have not extended the minimum interest and support needed by it. SA-CEP itself owed its successful setting up in 1981, to the leadership and drive of the President of Sri Lanka when he was Prime Minister.

For the record, it is noteworthy that two similar Subregional Organisations, also promoted by UNEP several years ago, for ASEAN (as ASEP) and for the South Pacific (as SPREP), have been flourishing, the latter in fact having been designated by its participant countries as their spokesperson for the recently concluded

It seems it is time that the Countries here become serious, both about Environment, and about "Co-operating" with their own Mechanism, and its goals - unless they are not serious about co-operation itself.

The writer is visiting Professor, LSE. former Deputy Executive Secretary, UN ECAFE; Director, Education Training and Technical Assistance, UNEP; and Regional Director for Asia and Pacific.

Rethinking "Japan's Experience and its Relevance to Bangladesh"

HIS is written in res ponse to Dr. Mustafizur Rahman's post article titled "Japan's Experience and Its Relevance to Bangladesh (The Daily Star 29-7-92). Dr. Rahman rightly points out that Bangladesh and other developing countries have a lot to learn from Japan's past in order to help achieve high levels of economic growth. The government and the people of a nation need to have a strong untiled vision of economic reality and the willingness to enact unpleasant policies that are beneficial in the long run. as he suggests. However, why must Japan be our role model? Are the economic and social preconditions" that brought about the burst of economic growth in Japan relevant to Bangladesh? Is the growth formula as simple as passing appropriate industrialization laws or tariff protection or subsidies?

The answer to the first question is easy. Japan is the first non-European country to achieve sustained high levels of economic growth. It let the rest of the world know that industrialization is not neces-

sarily equivalent to westernization. Japan's value for Bangladesh does not lie with the notion that its position as the world's second largest economy has been achieved in less than a hundred years. Germany and the Scandanavian countries can boast similar feats of industrialization in the nineteenth century about the same time as Japan. Dr. Rahman quite correctly

growth began after the Meiji Restoration in 1968 when the government decided that Japan would be a "rich country and have a strong army." But it is important to emphasize the difference between the "spurt' and initial level of GNP. Japan was by no means an impoverished country during the Tokugawa Shogunate before the Meiji Restoration. The Tokugawa Shogunate enjoyed a very efficient bureaucracy and tax-collection system that the Meiji government inherited. The Japanese cities from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century were highly developed even in comparison to their European counterparts. The country as early as mid-nineteenth century possessed a high literacy rate (as high as 70% according to some studics). Even Japan's rural populace, according to famous Japanese economic historians such as Rosovsky and Ohkawa, were well-accustomed to such "modern" luxuries as soap, several sets of clothing, lamps, etc. It seems, by general comparisons, Bangladesh has not even reached the level of economic well-being that Japan possessed in 1868. How can we begin to emulate Japan's industrial patterns of 1950's and 60's, as Dr. Rahman suggests, when we can't even compare with Japan's social

and economic conditions of

Consider some other factors that make us different from Japan. Japan has never gone through the social and economic upheavals of colonialism. In fact, Japan was a colonial master. Ask the people of Taiwan and Korea about their humiliation under Japan. Pre-World War II Japan has benefitted greatly under its policy of dumping its industrial goods on its colonies, getting cheap raw materials and using their near-slave labour. Similarly, Japan, since the Meiji Restoration, had a near-paranoic drive towards self-preservation that translated into imperialism. Most of its industrial might between 1890 and 1945 went towards militarization. One can argue, and a great many books and PhD dissertations have been written on this, that it gained the technology to make lathes and other capital goods as a by-product from its military ship-building docks in the 1890's.

Dr Rahman would agree that most countries that have gone through industrialization has first established a strong agricultural base (Hong Kong and Singapore are obvious exceptions). The Meiji govern-

by Qazi M. Fazal

ing and being capable of implementing universal primary education for an already pretty literate populace, was to spend several years assessing its tax base in the agricultural sector (of course, its other first acts were to create railroads and communication systems within the whole of Japan). The government promoted agriculture to the point that the sector points out that Japan's spurt of was achieving 2-3% annual growth rates between 1880 and 1920. Then it taxed the rural sector in order to finance the promotion of the military, industrial and railroad sectors. The poor farmers paved the way for later economic growth. Can Bangladesh afford the social costs of taxing the farmers

and allowing the rich industri-

ment's first act, after mandat-

alists to be richer? Finally, let's examine Dr Rahman's aversion to laissez faire and affinity for Japan's industrialization. As he points out himself, until 1911 Japan was essentially an open economy because of an unequal treaty with the West. Did that hurt its economic growth? By no means. Japan, until 1911, promoted industries that it had a comparative advantage in, namely primary products such as tea and silk. It could produce these products cheaply because of surplus labour and local expertise, just as Bangladesh promotes jute and tea. However, the Japanese did not suffer from the Dutch disease of primary product dependence and over time switched to other sectors such as textile, food processing and light industry manufacturing. Like all developed countries, it went through various progressive stages of industrialization after it had established the agricultural sector. Even when it promoted import substitution and had protective tariffs for certain industries, they were temporary. Permanent trade protective tariffs creates inefficient industries as there are in Latin

America and India. A quick glance at a Japanese economic history book will reveal that most of Japan's industrial sector between 1910 until the end of World War II, and even unofficially afterwards, were in the hands of giant family-run conglomerates known as "Zaíbatsus". Industrial policies and official government laws mattered little since all the actual decisions were made in private between government officials and Zaibatsu executives who were more often than not the same persons. The intermingling between the government and the private sector although perfectly natural in Japan in those times would be considered corrupt under current standards.

This brief look at Japanese economic history is simply to demonstrate that the lessons of economic growth from Japan's experience may be somewhat more complex than borrowing certain laws and industrial policies. First of all, how could Japan's industrial

policies after World War II be of any relevance to Bangladesh when post-war Japan's and Bangladesh's structural economies are so very different? Second, there certainly are patterns of economic growth from a poor to a rich country. Take a look at the Newly Industrialized Countries -Korea and Taiwan again - they followed an economic history almost parallel to that of Japan Therefore, let Bangladesh not jump ahead of itself and draw various inappropriate lessons from all over Japan's economic experiences over more than a hundred years. We are hardly industrialized enough to start discussing import substitution or tariff protection. Third, if we must draw lessons, or adhere to some growth model or formula, then let us figure out the basis of comparison between the two countries. In what period of Japan's social and economic history would current day Bangladesh fit into? After we have figured that out, let us try to see what phenomena are uniquely Japanese and not relevant to

Obviously since Bangladesh is a country that is merely embarking on development, the most relevant time period of comparison with Japan is right after the Meiji Restoration. What did Japan do then? They built up a strong railroad infrastructure, developed agriculture, established a strong tax structure, and invested heavily in public works other than railroads. Let Bangladesh do all that because it has not

Other factor's that led to Japan's initial growth are its imperialism and its cultural phenomena such as the Zaibatsus and Confucianism. Japan's imperialism and post-war humiliation made it reluctant to be recipient of foreign investment, not because of any great economic strategy as Dr Rahman seems to think. It could afford to keep foreign investment out of the country because of its incredible domestic savings rate (perhaps due to Confucian ethics) Bangladesh does not have high savings rate nor much tax revenues, therefore foreign investment is absolutely necessary for industrialization where else can we draw funds for investment from? Certain lessons are uniquely Japanese and are not valid for Bangladesh, so let's forget

In the end, there are a lot of things that Bangladesh can learn from Japan and other countries, but let's not grope at them randomly and make vast generalizations. Regardless, Dr Mustafizur Rahman's conclusion that no rapid progress or "spurt of growth" can take place without a strong government is irrefutable. Let's hope that the policy makers in the country fully appreciate "Japan's and other countries" experience and its relevance to Bangladesh" by picking and choosing the lessons, no matter how bitter, that are appropriate for us given our social and economic conditions.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Senile ramblings

Sir, Will some Angels of Mercy kindly rush to our police establishments with a plentiful supply of Vitamin A? The guardians of law and order, poor things, are going blind. For sometime now, they have been unable to see the numerous mastaans, hijackers car smashers, bus burners and others of their ilk, who infest our streets. Despite a permanent and forceful presence in our universities, they fail to see the vast array of arms in broad daylight, or to identify those who carry and use them with impunity. Periodical raids to different Halls are held but each is an exercise in futility. The proverbial last straw was the show of force at the Press Club recently after which even the Hon'ble Home Minister was forced to admit at the Jatiyo Sangsad that the police were "unable to differentiate between friend and foe" [Do they still have any friends?). Possible these 'visually handicapped' coppers felt safe to put up a physical show on the Fourth Estate, who can, after all, only shoot back with a canon, unlike the cannons used by our more violent elements elsewhere (shades of Fatikchhari).

Kindergartens, tutorials etc have proliferated all over and possibly, are the fastest growth industry in the country today, perhaps, because they have not

yet come under our Finance Minister's eagle eye. Therefore, the Leader of the Opposition, is to be commended for showing us a new avenue for income generation in this sphere. She has been widely reported as confirming that very soon she will start teaching democracy". Admission to the first batch is to be reserved for members of the ruling party, but hopefully, she hopes to extend her experience in "teaching democracy" to all in due course.

Just to set the records straight, will one of your more knowledgeable readers kindly inform us whether the recent prolonged absence of the opposition from the Jatiyo Sangsad is to be classified as a walk-out, a boycott, or has the concept of hartal at last penetrated those august halls? I would like to think, perhaps, being overwhelmed by the haunting melody of the revered Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Sahib's immortal classic - "Ja, ja, mein tooo-se naaa-hi booo-lun re, ja ja" —they tried to put it into practice at the Sangsad at public expensel

Quazi Akhlague-uz Azeem Anderkilla, Chittagong

Valuable minerals

Sir, Huge deposits of valuable minerals monazite, ilmenite, zirconium and rutile

etc popularly known as 'blackgold' are lying unutilised in Cox's Bazar for the last 2-3 decades and are getting lost day by day.

I have written innumerable letters to the authorities concerned. Many national dailies and periodicals have published reports, their editorial comments and my letters on the subject matter but of no avail The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources has always been constantly and mysteriously maintaining total silence.

I have come to know from a reliable source that the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources has drawn up a project' amounting to Taka two hundred erore only for the use of the minerals. But the Ministry has only been hatch ing the 'project' for the last sixteen years.

We are all aware of various projects' and their performances in the public sector. I am able to launch a 'project' of my own, with my own technical knowhow, without any foreign technical assistance, with a capital investment of Taka five to six lakhs only either in the public sector or in the private sector.

If for one reason or another the government is unable to use the valuable minerals, would humbly request the people's government to kindly issue to me a mining licence for its utilisation in the private sector. It may be mentioned here

that in a couple of years the valuable minerals may be lost for ever which would undoubtedly be a great loss for a poor country like ours. O H Kabir

Dhaka