

# More than a Protest - it's an Indictment

## Society and the Rotting Fish

At a time when the serious deterioration in the law and order situation across the country has become the foremost issue of public concern, and produced a motion of no-confidence against the government in parliament, perhaps it is appropriate that some light should be thrown on the general erosion of moral values in society which is threatening to cause a collapse in social discipline. A day-long seminar held in the city last Thursday entitled "Decay of Moral and Social Values in Bangladesh: Its Roots and Nature," made an effort, with limited success, to identify the causes of the crisis and point to possible remedies. The speakers' panel, formed largely of government leaders, officials and academics, dwelt mainly on problems related to the youth of the country, although agreeing that they were not to blame for the crisis.

There is little doubt that, over the years, people in this country have gradually become more and more prone to accepting corrupt and unethical ways as the "normal" means of going about their business in life. This now encompasses virtually every sphere of social activity - political, economic, educational and the rest. There is hardly an institution left which has not been distorted and corrupted through this process. Social scientists will no doubt point to urban deprivation - lack of adequate educational facilities, unemployment, lack of leisure facilities etc - and rural poverty as the principal reasons behind this state of affairs. However those factors alone cannot explain the utter disregard for the law and disrespect for traditional values that are now prevalent among all sections of society, not just the youth or the disadvantaged.

Speakers at Thursday's seminar looked at the problem from another angle. They blamed the socio-political leadership of the country, meaning themselves and their peers, for having failed to guide the younger generation along the correct path. Such self-criticisms are fine, but unfortunately, that too missed the point by a mile. When we talk about erosion of moral values, are we really talking only about the youth of society? No, the real crisis exists at the very top strata of society - political leaderships, the bureaucracy, military establishment, the business community and yes, the academic community too, all these have set the "example" which the rest of society, meaning the youth, the middle-class, the urban disadvantaged and rural poor, have merely followed in order to stay in the race. When the elite section of society abandons traditional values, flouts the law and engages in a mad rush to make money without the slightest consideration for the social cost or consequences, what can be truthfully expected from the rest? When the "leaders" place themselves above the law, the public cannot but lose faith in the institutions of the state to operate fairly and justly. The old Vietnamese proverb that a house leaks from the roof, or that a fish rots from the head, has been proven beyond doubt in the case of Bangladesh.

The question facing the nation at present naturally is, how do we reverse this process of moral degradation, a process many people consider to be irreversible? Since the "fish has rotted from the head", it goes without saying that it is the head that has to be restored to health before anything else can happen. Needless to say, the formation as well as erosion of a society's values are natural processes, which cannot be reversed or re-directed through administrative means. In other words, we cannot demand that the government should do this or that, so we can all be healthy people again. However, since the establishment was principally responsible for this state of affairs, it has to take the initiative in correcting it too. The government should play its part by sincerely applying the law to the letter across the board. The government machinery, particularly the police and the judiciary, should not allow the high and mighty to remain above the law any longer. Indeed, organs of the government itself have to be brought under the scrutiny of the law as a first step. That in time will go some way towards restoring the public's faith in society. Administrative means can reduce the compulsion towards and necessity for corrupt practices. The other vital, attitude-forming institutions - the family, the teaching community and the media - can then take up the campaign for moral regeneration. But the first thing must come first.

## Banani Supermarket

A fairly large number of residents of Banani - it is said to be around 140 - face an untenable situation with the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). According to a report published in this paper on Saturday, they have made substantial deposits amounting to a total of about Taka three and a half crore for eventually owning shops and offices in a proposed 14-storey supermarket in Banani.

So, what's wrong with project that, on the face of it, seems perfectly straightforward, designed to serve the locality that can do with a new supermarket? The problem is, the construction of the supermarket started in the late eighties and its ground and first floors were constructed in 1988-89. That was the time when Col (Rtd) M A Malik was the Mayor of Dhaka. He was succeeded by Nazim Rahman, and the work on the construction came to a halt, without any warning. Rumour has it that the project fell victim to a clash of personalities - or perhaps a conflict of interests - of Malik and Rahman.

While some of the depositors have taken their funds back, out of sheer frustration, most have still kept what they have already paid with the DCC which, as our report suggested on Saturday, is earning a hefty interest on funds placed with the corporation. It is of course quite conceivable that these funds may well have vanished with either a credit organisation or the scandal-hit Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI).

The situation calls for clarification. Neither Malik nor Rahman may be there with the Corporation, but the DCC administration very much exists, with a new Mayor in charge of it. It is a pity that officials connected with the new administration, including the Mayor himself, were far from communicative with a reporter of this paper last week. Let us hope that DCC has had second thoughts on the matter, realising the need for accountability and transparency in its policies. It will be good if the construction of the supermarket is resumed and completed according to a new time schedule. The least DCC can do is to advise the depositors about their funds, or return them - with interest, just in case the project is abandoned.

It seems that the government is on the defensive on the question of law and order. Judging from what has been happening in recent months - all forms of violence in all sorts of places - one could safely call it a mafia land. Crime which is being committed every day involving murder in most cases, does not exist in our Radio and Television. But, by contrast, it makes headline news, daily, in our print media. The picture that emerges from these reports is of an administration that has virtually collapsed. The utter ineptitude of the police, its inability not only to prevent a crime being committed within eyesight but also to catch the criminal, the mystique of the criminals moving about freely, and holding out threat to the complainants for their temerity to lodge complaints, - these are the common themes of newspaper reporting. The readers are horrified, the lawmakers voice their concern in the Sangsad, but the Home Minister remains unperturbed. When others demand his resignation for his sheer incapacity to protect the life and property of citizens, he takes it as a joke. Not only that, he makes a pronouncement, claiming the least crime record for Bangladesh compared to other countries, quoting crime figures from the year of liberation onwards and he thus wants us to believe that Bangladesh is not only the best

## Can a civilised government, especially a government elected by the people, shirk the responsibility if things are as bad in the country as they are?

of civilised lands, but also we are having the best of our times. The house rejects his claim, challenges his crime figures, but he remains unruffled. Curiously enough, he does not quote crime figures of the three months before the political administration of his party took over.

Doubtless we are witnessing the extremes of political perversity. All concepts of accountability have been thrown overboard. A dastardly attack is perpetrated by the police on journalists on duty, every body blames the city police commissioner for the brutality and demands his removal, but the IGP does the proxy for him and he remains where he is. This surely is high drama, but this certainly is not in the best of tastes.

It may well be that the government, in the face of widespread criticism of its failure to maintain law and order, is unable to admit the charge but is actually secretly concerned. This may be a pure guess but I suppose it is a good guess. A large scale transfer of SPs and a hurriedly called conference of senior police officials in the city do not look like a routine exercise. Also, the frequency of transfers at the highest level of administration, rumours circulating about imminent purges in the ad-

ministration, do not indicate a machinery running smoothly and well under control.

Murders, and most of them political murders, have become routine. This is a legacy of the past, true. I wish I had a list of the killings that took place during the previous regime, the crimes for which no expiation will ever be enough. In some of these cases, the murderers remained undetected and the responsibility was never fixed. I forget the name but I re-

member the much loved young labour leader who was killed on Adamji Jute Mills ground. He, and Rauf Basunia of Dhaka University, and Moezuddin of Narasingdi and Noor Hossain, to name only those I remember now, are cases of deliberate, mindless murder we still shudder to think of and we still hold it against the government of the day. In one of these cases, the murderer was apprehended, put behind the bars for form's sake, and latter released and allowed to go scot free. A murder was sanctified, and all for political considerations. The record goes further beyond. But does it explain away the

crimes being committed now, and the inconsequentiality of it all? Can a civilised government, especially a government elected by the people, shirk the responsibility if things are as bad in the country as they are?

Of course the government does not accept that things are bad at all. On the contrary, they would have us believe that we never had it so good. The famous utterance, attributed to Harold Macmillan, did not prevent the toppling of his

last word till the matter is taken up and till the honourable members have spoken. We will wait and see what they say and how they say it.

No body expects the government to fall on the issue, however just and serious the charges may be. The verdict of the House will not be on the merit of the case, because the House will not be transformed into a court of law. The makers of law are not the dispensers of justice.

The interest of this proposed motion of no confidence lies in the fact that it is meant to be purely a motion of indictment, and nothing more than that. The government will survive, and it has a right to survive, but the issues on which the indictment has been framed, and the uniformity of the charges, in their range and totality, should have a tremendous impact. They should more than embarrass the government. They will have a force of their own. And they will not enhance the image of the government at home and abroad.

Two things related to the motion will be taken note of by political observers. One: The Opposition has been driven mainly because the government failed to properly respond to criticism and its refusal to form a

parliamentary committee on law and order, as suggested by the Opposition. This could only mean that the government was underestimating the seriousness of the situation while, in the estimation of many, not necessarily politicians, the situation has reached a point of crisis. Two things in particular appear to have exasperated the Opposition: the worsening law and order situation, and the government's failure so far to act according to the agreement of the three alliances, adopted and signed on November 21, 1990.

The second thing which political observers will not miss about the motion of no confidence is its application for the first time as a part of parliamentary norm and practice. It is more than a protest, more than a walk-out. The word no confidence is charged with indictment, with a sense of rejection. Observers will notice in what spirit the government faces the charges. A show of contempt, a sign of facetiousness, because there is a majority in the House, will only prove that the party in power thinks less of the Parliament than it should. Already, the concept of the sovereign Parliament, sanctified by the Declaration of the Three Alliances, has received a number of dents. Here is a chance for the government to repair some of the damages done to the concept for which it has been held responsible.

## PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

government. The complacency of our government, too, could be harmful to its own future.

In this context the no confidence motion can be viewed as highly significant. The Prime Minister has said that the motion will be faced politically. That is a correct attitude, correct in so far as the right of the Opposition, the right of a Member of the Sangsad to do so, has been accorded. The Speaker has assured that the session will continue till the House has taken the issue up. All this is within the provisions of the constitution. Every body seems eager to uphold the constitution. So far so good. But we shall not be saying the

## Asia: Generals Take the Back Seat

Military rule is starting to become passe in many Asian countries as civilians demand that soldiers go back to the barracks. (Kunda Dixit) of IPS reports, from Manila.



1988, but he is still pulling strings from behind the scenes. Despite recent signs that the regime may be loosening up, it still ignores the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) and its popular imprisoned leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, in elections in 1990.

But the events in May in Thailand have been a reminder to many about what may happen when military regimes ignore demands for political reforms from an increasingly affluent and educated middle class.

The army used shocking violence to put down rallies killing at least 46 people. A month later, Bangkok newspapers were still collating and publishing the names of hundreds more still missing and feared dead.

The appointment of Anand Panyarachun in June somewhat defused anti-military feelings but hardline officers like General Suchinda Kraprayoon, Anand's predecessor, and Air Chief Marshal Kasat Rojananil are in hiding - and still in control of their vast business holdings.

Suchinda and Kasat both belong to Class Five of Thailand's military academy that has become notorious for spawning the present crop of powerful officers. Experts on the Thai military say it will be difficult to confine the generals to just soldiering.

"The clique from Class Five are monsters and barbarians," said Sukhamband Paribatra, a conflict studies expert at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University. "They don't give a damn about international opinion. I don't see any way out but a further confrontation."

But there is a growing realisation among civilian leaders that the military's influence must be curbed, said Defence

Minister Banchob Bunnag in Bangkok: "The role of the armed forces must be restructured and depoliticised to adapt to changing socio-economic and political conditions."

Unlike Thailand and Indonesia, nearby Malaysia inherited British colonial tenets of civilian supremacy, which is still intact. But even if the military is not in power in countries like Malaysia and Singapore, their civilian hierarchy is authoritarian.

In Asia's newly industrialised economies like South Korea and Taiwan, generals have found that, having achieved the region's highest living standards after Japan, it was time to take off their camouflage fatigues.

In the Philippines, the only pictures of Ramos in military uniform are archive footage from his dramatic defection in support of anti-Marcos demonstrators in 1986.

While Philippine military officers occupied seats in government and private firms during the Marcos era, they are not as deeply entrenched in big business as their Thai counterparts.

With their gripes more about pay and promotion, Ramos' big challenge is to keep the boys in the barracks happy so he can let businessmen in his cabinet have a crack at reviving the economy.

## Lights Out as Delhi Swelters in Hot Summer

All over India, with the arrival of summer, power breakdowns are frequent. There is no electricity for hours.

While the temperature soars to 45 degrees Celsius, power stations break down because of defective equipment.

Sharing the discomfort and anger of Delhi's nine million residents is the diplomatic community, about 1,000 envoys and their families distressed year after year by the onslaught of summer and the consequent power failures.

Air-conditioners stop humming in the posh colonies of Vasant Vihar, Shanti-niketan, Golf Links and the Diplomatic Enclave itself. Many households have their own generators - enough to power a few lights, fans and perhaps

one air-conditioner - but as one Asian diplomat's wife angrily asks, "how many generators can you put in your house? Imagine the noise."

"Should we leave our husbands in Delhi, go back home or travel to some hill station as the Englishmen did in the Raj period?"

In the cool hill stations, or resorts a few hours driving distance from Delhi, the British built comfortable bungalows and good roads. They themselves shifted the center of administration to Shimla, one of the grandest hill resorts in India.

But not all diplomats find it easy and convenient to send their families to the hill stations. Not only does it involve big expense, there is also security.

### Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi,

Living outside this sea of misery is the presidential palace where electricity never goes off except in the servants' quarters

No wonder Delhi has been declared a hardship post by many governments where envoys get additional hardship allowances. This, of course, does not compensate for the heat and discomfort.

Living outside this sea of misery is the 340-room presidential palace, or the Rashtrapati Bhawan, where electricity never goes off except in the servants' quarters and the houses of civil servants who live in the compound of the former viceregal lodge.

The upper classes, too, can

afford to fend off the heat by installing power generators. Or maybe visiting cooler climes abroad.

But for millions of Delhi residents sweltering in heat, it's back to grandma's ways. They are once again looking for hurricane lamps lit by kerosene, earthen oil lamps and, of course, candles.

Engineers say Delhi is using a too much power. Delhi is not an ordinary city. We have more than one million air-conditioners, millions more coolers and fans. All these con-

sume power. And as the evening approaches, we find that Delhi consumes power to the extent of 60 megawatts more. And we are unable to supply increased energy unless our power stations get better equipment," says one engineer.

The happiest people are the poor inhabitants of slums who, in any case, do not have electricity. They are engaged in the business of making candles which are supplied to wholesalers who, in turn, send them to retail shops all over the country.

Church-backed small enterprises of women and orphan children find it profitable to produce candles on a commercial scale. These are made in ornamental shapes and sold for 2 to 20 rupees (US\$ 0.7-0.70) per piece depending on

the size and shape of the candle. The general consensus was that although the new economic policy is investor friendly, prospective investors in India's power sector appear to be worried over the returns on their capital and supplies of fuel.

There fears have been allayed. They were assured of regular supply of coal or gas for thermal plants to be set up by them. The prospective investors were assured that returns on their investments would be comparable with Southeast Asia. It was not a matter of small stakes. More than US \$2 billion will be required for setting up power projects with a total capacity of 11,000 MW. — *Depthnews Asia*

## To the Editor...

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.

### Save from Kidnappers

Sir, Due to prevailing lawlessness in the country, particularly in Dhaka city, and serious rumour as well as incidents of kidnapping, we, the innocent students have stopped going to our school for the fear of being kidnapped. What wrong we have done to the society that it cannot ensure our security of life and study?

I, therefore, pray to the appropriate authority to kindly clear up this undesired circumstances, so that we could be blessed with the holy-light of education. Otherwise, we shall have no other way but to

pray to the Almighty Allah, to kindly send an angel to save us.

Sabrina Jamal Sonia  
Student of Class - VII  
Dhaka

### Security of diplomatic enclave

Sir, I have read with much interest the opinion put forward by Mr. Jamaluddin Ahmed, a former Deputy Prime Minister on the "Safety and Security of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara", published in your esteemed daily under opinion column on 14th July 1992. There is no denying the fact that the unfortunate inci-

dent which took place at the Chinese embassy has not only jolted the mind of the people of Bangladesh irrespective of any political affiliation or opinion who find no suitable words to condemn such incident but also put the democratically elected government in a very embarrassing position to the government and people of a very friendly country. While offering our sincere apologies to the people and the government of China we must be able to prove to the international community of our determination to ensure "special security arrangements" to the diplomatic enclave i.e. Gulshan, Baridhara, Banani areas by initiating all out corrective measures urgently.

In order to ensure special security of the country's only diplomatic enclave in Dhaka, I am of the opinion that government should take effective steps to pin-point the root-causes of the security-lapses that led to occurrence of an incident of such a magnitude so that right steps can be

taken to check any such recurrence. Although in my opinion Mr. Jamaluddin Ahmed has rightly spelt out the main causes but I would like to add some specific points and appeal to the government and the concerned ministries/authorities to kindly take note of the following so that necessary corrective measures can be taken to strengthen the overall safety and security of the diplomatic enclave.

1) Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara should be treated as a "Special Security Zone" in true sense with deployment of more security forces to sustain an atmosphere of safety and security.

2) Dhaka City Corporation with the assistance of RAJUK and the law and order enforcement agencies should take urgent by the following steps to clean the diplomatic enclave to ensure pre-condition for providing security: (a) Remove urgently all the slums grown in and around the diplomatic enclave including the one of "DMC's

sweepers" located at junction to the Gulshan park at Road No.1 opposite to National Shooting Complex. (b) Remove all the unauthorised shops, constructions, factories from this area. (c) Regulate the rickshaw, baby taxi, tempo and bus stations under, strict control. (d) Must keep parks situated in this special zone free from any undesirable activity.

We only hope the concerned government agencies shall prove their effectiveness by initiating action on priority basis. After all, we all should remember that we must not fail to uphold the image of Bangladesh to the international community.

A Rashid  
Banani, Dhaka

Parliament and debates  
Sir, The parliament is definitely a place of debate and discussions. In the Parliament, people's representatives de-

M Zahidul Haque  
Assistant Professor,  
Bangladesh Agricultural  
Institute, Dhaka.