

A Despicable Excess

The news of the carnage took more than a day to travel 30 miles to the national capital. But this was no insignificant fracas between contending armed parties. When newspaper reporters from Dhaka went to the Daudkandi village of Sadanandi, on Thursday afternoon, full 50 hours after the occurrence, they found ashes and only ashes with nothing standing to denote there was a throbbing prosperous village there.

The ashes told of a massive case of arson. But fire was only a part of the medieval raid of mindless cruelty. Four to five hundred people attacked the village spraying stengun bullets and bursting hundreds of cocktails. They assaulted whoever they found, with sharp weapons. They threw resisting women into the raging conflagration and pressed burning cigarettes on the limbs of the oldest of them. In two hours the operation was complete and nothing was left of the village. Now it is only dread and panic that live there in the traumatised minds of the survivors.

A mere 500 metres away there stood the fully manned Daudkandi police station. Police stood dispassionately aloof. Not that the thana did not have an inkling of the attack. Perhaps they kept away because they had foreknowledge of who were going to be involved. The police will find it difficult to free themselves from such a serious accusation.

The police performance tends to corroborate numerous press reports pointing the finger at ruling party underlings as the culprits. But one must thank the Home Minister for making certain what at best was a suspicion — by his dismissive comment on the gruesome act dubbing it as a matter of small conflict between parties at contention. This is disquietingly reminiscent of the unfortunate Government Press Note on the Nawabganj massacre of January 31 inventing a clash where there was only a one-sided killing operation. It can indeed be that the Nawabganj killers and the Daudkandi arsonists come so low in the BNP hierarchy that it would not be correct to blame their acts on the party. But the Home Minister's antics not only make that sane approach difficult, they very dangerously reflect on his making a short shrift of a criminal excess. Coming only fifteen days after the Nawabganj massacre, the Daudkandi carnage would be something beyond the sensibilities of the nation to take.

Seldom a tender for any construction job would be contested without the blessing of front organisation of the ruling party. This unwritten law was made the more formidable by local JCD top brass in Daudkandi being themselves interested in the job. Someone crossed the path and bought tender papers. He was given a beating and ordered to return the papers. A young man from Sadanandi protested. That was Sadanandi's only crime. While justice should hopefully take its course chastising the criminals — at least the 200 that have been reported against — and compensating the victims, what will happen to the institution of students power over award of construction work orders and student tolls exacted from all jobs undertaken by contractors? Corrupting youth as a means to political ascendancy is bound to take a high national price. The ruling party owes it to the nation to take the first and best step forward to wean their students away from all kinds of corruption and morally indefensible activity. A failure to do that would boomerang on the party first.

Dim View of Dormitory Life

So typed have become our reactions to certain words that seldom do we venture out of the tunnel vision of what these instantly mean to us. One such word is campus. It invariably raises the spectre of a cache of arms hidden somewhere or the occasional gun-running spree traded by students. That there are other sedate, day-to-day and highly functional aspects of student life, like those in the hall dormitories, hardly ever come in for a review unless the worst happens forcing us to take a dim view of things.

Or else how are we to explain the tragic dysentery, vomiting and writhing in pain of 200 students among the 500 who were food-poisoned eating cooked cauliflower at the Jagannath Hall cafeteria? The manager of the eating place put up a defense tracing the origin of the mishap to the purchase of the supposedly green vegetable from a presumably rotten, toxic heap of cauliflowers. In other words, his cooking was above board, so he claims, something that can be proved one way or the other, by a simple lab test. Hopefully this will be done with the left-over cauliflower.

At any rate, it is the disaster that is prompting the test now and this is in a class of default by itself. For, it brings into focus the conspicuous absence of periodic checks on food items served in the dining spaces, cafeterias and canteens of various residential halls. Marketing on the cheap is just one part of the problem, the rest is a matter of unclean utensils, left-over servings, exposed food and the hazardous environ all rolled in one. There are food committees alright in the halls but not the mechanism to ensure that the students get safe food to eat. If each and every hall cannot afford a nutrition or a sanitary expert on its staff, it should however be possible to constitute a few committees comprising, among others, professional testers, centrally, by the university authorities. These then could be frequently sent round the halls for enforcing sanitary and food standards. The hygienic or sanitary angle is emphasised keeping in view the deplorable state of toilets in the dormitories.

The adolescents in their prime of preparatory lives can not be given a raw deal particularly when their stay on the campus and in the residential halls is much longer today than it used to be two decades ago — thanks to the sessions jam. As it is, the youthful students are given to a degree of carefree living and they are used to outside eating as well, including junk food at times. Keeping all these in view, it is extremely important that edibles served in the halls and the environment around, are of the best possible quality so as to hold them within the campus. They need the nutrition and the strength to wholeheartedly prosecute their studies. It is time the elected hall unions and the university authorities together direct their attention to improving the students' quality of life on the campus.

BANGLADESH'S young population (under 14) that mounts up to 50 per cent of the total population of 120 million, lie virtually unnoticed. They are a vast untapped wealth of the nation that could be turned into a most effective and potential manpower of the country. Born mostly of poor parents, the male children supplement their meagre income, while many of the female children get into the clutches of child-traffickers and find their ultimate abode in brothels. Most of the male-children labour in factories and fields until their hands are gnarled and their backs bent. Some of the female children sell their bodies in the alley ways of the towns until they are haggard and dead from vile diseases. Many of them wander homeless in the streets of the big cities and towns surviving by begging and stealing. They die by the thousands every day of easily preventable diseases like measles, whooping cough and diarrhoea. They are the most disadvantaged group of the total population. The neglect of these youngsters by the society and last of all by the government, pre-occupied with politics and image boosting programmes, is most depressing.

The summits that are occasionally convened by the world leaders in an effort to care for this vast multitude of the population of third world countries starting from Bangladesh to Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, Pakistan, Ethiopia, Sudan, Nepal, Bhutan and India remain confined to taking agenda. Undoubtedly, the plight of the world's most vulnerable group remains unchanged. We have not so far witnessed any tangible programme translated into appreciable action.

Our failure to delve deep into this tenuous issue and grapple with it properly might explode it into a catastrophic situation. This will mean turning the country into a snow-capped volcano — pretty and

recent years along with organised crimes by local youth gangs. Punishment is meted to the offenders and even when they are released, the kids go back to the families which are same as the streets. The situation has reached such an extent that poor parents, sometimes indulging in crimes themselves, encourage their children to work as couriers. With crime woven into the fabric of the society, the nation has every reason to be wary.

Although international law prohibits child labour under 14, it flourishes on a rampant scale throughout the world. India has an estimated 100 million child workers, although the official figure is only 20 million of whom 80 per cent are on farms. Others work in mines, quarries, tea stalls, garment factories, carpet and glass factories. Some of the child-workers even in our country are, incredibly, only 4-5 years old. Studies on the plight of the children in all

crippling the growth of the nation. Developed countries in the west should allow their surplus fund to flow into the poverty-ridden countries like Bangladesh for the emancipation, education and health care of the less fortunate and unfortunate in this region. This would help tap the immense opportunities needed for economic recovery and well-being of the people allowing the children of the third world an access to better living and education.

Political leaders and people belonging to all shades of opinion must wake up to the fact that the time for reckoning has arrived. If the country has to prosper, if it has to carve out a self-sustaining future, it should not have a lack-lustre education system or an infrastructure that is falling apart. It should not have people being turned away by hospitals because they do not have money or dying in the street corner of drug overdoses or becoming

when he was still Shanghai's chief official and the city's communist party head. In 1989, while most Chinese cities were in turmoil over pro-democracy protests, Zhu dealt with the uprising in Shanghai in a bloodless manner — sending in the workers rather than the troops to restore order. This left him untainted by the Tiananmen debacle, unlike other Chinese leaders including Prime Minister Li Peng and Deng.

In 1991, Beijing anointed Zhu as chief of the powerful State Economic Commission that controls day-to-day management of economic affairs. Deng attributed his promotion to "peaceful and flexible" measures in tackling the 1989 student protests in Shanghai.

Zhu was given the unenviable task of revamping loss-making state-run enterprises, a job that involves social and political skills as well as economic ones in a bid to prevent social unrest as people are made redundant.

By 1992, Zhu had expanded his powers in the Economic and Trade Office, considered to be the single most important organ of central government, and with his appointment as head of the communist party Central Committee's Leading Group on Finance and Economy he emerged as China's foremost economic policy maker.

But it was when Premier Li Peng dropped for the political limelight last April with a suspected heart attack that Zhu's star really rose.

Overseas, the Vice Premier is also known as the "Chinese Gorbachev", a man whom the West can do business with, and a man who may be able to put into place an economic system to replace the present boom-bust economy that previously ran on the dictate of one or two men adept only at crisis management.

Indeed, the year 1993 saw Zhu's meteoric rise in Chinese politics — a bit of a way to go for someone who was merely a city mayor just four years ago.

But his admirers say Zhu was already displaying his potential as national leader even

Unguided Youngsters: Untapped Wealth

by Md Asadullah Khan

calm on top but serious problems seething within. A silent revolution resulting from simmering discontent that is brewing up may, in no time, throw us all in the web of danger. To explain it more clearly, socialism may have failed but yearning for social justice rings true in every heart.

How do we fight shy of the problem that warrants our attention most? What a horrifying drudgery and waste of human energy at the prime of one's life due to lack of economic protection, guidance and motivation? Sleeping in railway stations, picking through garbage and sifting for food in the municipal dumps!

Juvenile crime in Bangladesh has exploded in

the third world countries including Bangladesh make a very disquieting revelation. Unrelenting poverty is the lot of the children in all these places. School is a luxury, especially so in Bangladesh. Children who are mostly below 12 and working in printing presses, garment factories, shrimp-collection shops in different parts of the country must work to stay alive.

However with such a precarious economic viability and scant resources at the disposal of the government, we can't get rid of the dreaded scourges like disease and poverty vis-a-vis the grotesque problem of the youngsters

victims of random crime because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The great society we had dreamt of, meaning a social fabric free of the vile scourges of disease and poverty, and cherished it to come into being, at least since the days of liberation war, has not come to pass. We are aware of our problems — our petty self-interests and narrowness blocking the road to progress and emancipation; but we are not keen to solve these problems with courage, conviction, nationalistic feeling and proper planning.

Drug addiction and drug trafficking among youths is

ment could do anything to protect the children from these scourges. What has dismayed the vast majority of the people who want the society to move in the proper direction is the trepid response of the government and the national leaders to this very surge of mayhem. The way the whole country is plunging into chaos because of the apathy and neglect shown towards this vital section of the society, the cream of the whole population, signals a potential calamity for the nation. In fact, the whole country has inherited decades of benign neglect, misplaced priorities and outright incompetence at every level.

The government must wake up to the stark reality that this

How unfortunate the situation is that behind the blinding glitter of the new multi-millionaires sprawling up in the posh areas of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi, the rest of the country is ailing with the bulk of its citizens. Alleged corruption in the administrative cadre of the government and widening economic and social fissures in the body politic of the nation have soured the rural disadvantaged group on the ruling class.

At this hour of crisis and need, sensible leaders, irrespective of their party affiliation, have to come forth to heal the rifts developing between the groups.

Government's not-so-worthy performance has given rise to an unsettling sense that it is not up to the job. Efforts taken to ameliorate the plight of the youngsters in rehabilitating them in the society have been only piecemeal. Crime wave in the big cities is spreading in the breadth of the country. No wonder, because of the sloth attitude and indifference of both the government and the society, these unguided youngsters are roaming in the streets with lethal weapons and indulging in mugging and other violent crimes. People no longer feel secure either in the street or in the house and an atmosphere always charged with such terrorist activities in the office adversely affects business and tourism. These youngsters who could not be taken care of in the appropriate time and manner, have turned into masts and hoodlums afflicting the society and causing a threat to development activities of the country.

It is no time mincing words and putting blame here and there but we must get into action right now.

The writer is Controller of Examinations, BUET, Dhaka.

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crippling the growth of the nation. Developed countries in the west should allow their surplus fund to flow into the poverty-ridden countries like Bangladesh for the emancipation, education and health care of the less fortunate and unfortunate in this region. This would help tap the immense opportunities needed for economic recovery and well-being of the people allowing the children of the third world an access to better living and education.

Political leaders and people belonging to all shades of opinion must wake up to the fact that the time for reckoning has arrived. If the country has to prosper, if it has to carve out a self-sustaining future, it should not have a lack-lustre education system or an infrastructure that is falling apart. It should not have people being turned away by hospitals because they do not have money or dying in the street corner of drug overdoses or becoming

eating into the vitals of the nation. Many of these disgruntled youngsters are going to resort to unethical and illegal means of earning a living because of the lack of opportunities of doing anything else. How unfortunate the situation is that the saddest casualties are children in this trade. We have a whole generation of human beings within the country who could be so productive and helpful to humanity but are being lost.

The drug trade perhaps, or obviously, has shown them that in a little time they can make a lot of money and they have accepted the violence that goes with it. Government effort to curb the daunting problem and similar other anti-social and criminal activities like smuggling, vandalism and child trafficking has been far from satisfactory.

The looming question that arises in the mind is that, if the society and the govern-

vulnerable group of population needs care and sustenance to ward off the disasters stalking the nation. The government should think seriously about creating an independent Ministry of Children's Affairs and incorporate the Ministry of Social Welfare into this newly constituted ministry to avoid too high additional expenditure for staffing. Social Service Departments may be re-structured and their gamut of activities may be re-oriented in the light of the present horrifying state of the social ills creeping into the fabric of the nation. Under-privileged children and children born of poor parents who can't cater to their food and education should be picked up and placed at the responsibility of the state. The task may appear to be gigantic and the cost staggering but it will prove to be as much useful and profitable as setting up several industries in any part of the country.

And now it has become clear just how difficult a task Zhu and embarked upon. Analysts here say Zhu's re-entrenchment policies have alienated regional governors — who have significant power bases of their own — because the move signifies a recentralisation of power.

Under 1992's unbridled reforms, the regions had enjoyed unprecedented powers over their own affairs. Some analysts also say Zhu may have made enemies within the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) as well by demanding that the military reign in a number of lucrative commercial ventures.

Zhu had kept a low profile during and after the Third Plenum of the Central Committee in mid-November, which gave the go-ahead for reforms to continue. By late December, though, he ordered price controls to be reinstated on grain when panic-buying triggered sudden price rises.

Zhu's detractors say the economic czar has started slipping in his tightrope act of keeping up reforms while controlling overheating. They say he has begun to alienate liberal factions in the politburo, including possibly Deng himself by reviving some aspects of the centrally-planned economy.

But Zhu's fans say his austerity drive will be showing results only this year.

If Zhu can hold on to power for another year, he will be declared a winner and will be the undisputed successor of Deng, say analysts. But if he fails, he will become the scapegoat for all of China's problems and 1993 will be unique as being the years of Zhu.

China watchers have since been charting his every move to how he is consolidating his position and assuming the mantle of successor to Deng.

Media reports here say Zhu moved swiftly to put his allies and proteges — mostly technocrats and reformists — in charge of economic restructuring to bolster his own position. He also aimed to break the dominance of central planners, headed by Li who traditionally controlled the banks, the finance ministry and the State Planning Commission.

In October, it was reported that Zhu had put together a high level economic think tank — another move designed to ensure Li could not claw back economic decision making powers he had lost to his vice premier.

But some analysts note that the Li faction still controls up to a third of State Council departments, and they believe the prime minister had deliberately taken a backseat to allow Zhu to dig his political grave over the country's economic problems.

Zhu then launched his 16-

the post of Governor of the People's Bank of China and was also handling daily government affairs that would normally have been the premier's domain.

Zhu then launched his 16-

China: The Rise of Zhu Rongji

China's powerful vice premier consolidated his position in the past year, but he may be facing his toughest challenge yet. Yojana Sharma of Inter Press Service reports from Hong Kong



A month after he was made executive vice-premier in March 1993, Zhu was appointed head of the Central Committee's leading group on agriculture.

By July, he had taken over

attempt to divert public attention showed a demonstration on the TV as to how periodical draws are conducted. It is indeed a pity that in view of an unwholesome decision, an effective savings unit viz. prize bond is losing its effectivity in the public mind.

Accordingly, it is for the National Savings Directorate to take suitable steps to do away with the system of time limit. They should also continue to prepare and circulate the lists of unclaimed bonds as before for the benefit of the bond purchasers.

Further, purchase and sale of prize bonds as per government scheme is to be done in the banks and post offices. But numerous grievances made by the sufferers through letters and opinions in various national dailies show a number of loopholes, inter alia, 1. most of the banks' branches do not perform this part of the job and they simply inform that prize bonds are not available there. They perhaps think that it is an extra burden on them. The Bangladesh Bank and the Ministry of Finance who have positive role of superintendence over such institutions do not appear to have any notice of such accusations voiced very often in the media.

2. Sometimes people frantically go from bank to bank only to hear an expression of regret when they badly need to sell

some of their holdings. As the role of prize bonds on the growth of the capital that adds vigour to the economy of the country cannot be over-emphasised, it is the duty of the authority to put a degree of compulsion so that bonds are available in all post offices and banks without any difficulty and its sale for cash should not be too much burdensome.

Persons instrumental for originating matters for such retrograde step should be pointed out and the matter deserves careful and sympathetic consideration of the authorities apart from other matters relating to the prize bond drawing etc that also come in the national dailies from time to time.

It is for the appropriate authorities to study the statistics to examine whether the prize bond is gaining or losing popularity day by day owing to unthoughtful decision of government with regard to time limit etc. It is easy for them to examine what were the numbers and amounts of bonds in circulation before and after such decision.

It is extremely unfortunate that certain decisions taken at the initiative of some unwise civilian officers should adversely affect the smooth working of a public utility scheme.

S M Hussain
Mottijheel C/A, Dhaka

A global problem
Sir, Rubbish disposal is an international problem. It might be interesting to pause a moment from all the problems that Bangkok or, for that matter, Dhaka is facing and look at a problem they have over there in Canada.

It is well known that the Maple Leaf is the national symbol of Canada. It adorns its flag and I like to collect its gold coins.

In Ontario there is a community called Maple. Its people pride themselves for living in a community named after the national symbol of Canada, no, they like to mention that the national symbol of Canada is named after them.

Last year the community of Maple happily welcomed in its midst the largest mosque in North America. The then Prime Minister of Ontario attended the opening ceremony and praised the construction of this mosque as proof of Canada's integrating all its citizens — native-born or immigrant.

But what a horror, the new government of Canada has now decided to build a huge rubbish dump in the heart of this very community — and close to this largest mosque in North America to boot!

Hanjifa Nilofar
Bangkok

To the Editor

English medium schools

Sir, This refers to a letter of Mr Don Aspin published in your esteemed daily on 14th February, under the caption 'English medium private schools — woes of parents'. I certainly agree with his opinion. The English medium schools of our country are not only charging high fees, sometimes their teachers do not have adequate qualification to teach the students. The concerned authorities should take remedial measures to prevent this unjustified and unreasonable fees and also investigate their standard of teaching.

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Prize bonds

Sir, It is known to all concerned that out of a series of savings devices, Prize Bond occupies a unique position. It helps people to grow capital which helps government to invest the fund in various nation-building projects. When the scheme was first introduced, it was very much liked and appreciated by the general mass.

The government used to hold draws every quarter and declare prizes, and the prize-winning bonds which were not claimed and prizes not drawn were compiled in a booklet

form for distribution among the interested public. Such booklets for several years were also put on sale by the National Savings Directorate.

Although initially there was Prize Bond of Tk 10/- denomination only, subsequently 50-Taka bond was also introduced and both the kinds are on circulation now. For reasons not quite clear to us, government restricted the time-limit to six years i.e. if one fails to put forth claim against prize winning bonds within the course of six years, he would be deprived of the benefit of prize. Later on the time-limit was reduced to one year and the order was rescinded and the six-year limit was restored.

People purchase and preserve prize bonds of both the valuations with the fond hope to better their lot by winning prizes through periodical draws. The authorities should know well that the persons buying and holding such bonds do not get any benefit whatsoever, until and unless they succeed in winning a prize through draws. Yet they hold the bonds in spite of the fact that they could get certain corresponding benefit monetarily by investing the same amount in saving accounts or in any other form.

If anyone succeeds to win a prize, his entitlement to get the prize money should subsist