

Eminently Avoidable Burglary

Spooky as the burglary into 17 rooms of the national secretariat might have been — for the weird nighty prawl and the still unidentified motive — there appears, on a closer look though, very little that is mystifying about it. It brings out the whole larder — the food for thought, we mean.

The so-called thieves, who knows whose frontmen they were, plumbed new depths this time around, with all the time on earth, under the non-seeing, perhaps benign, eyes of the security guards. They broke open five collapsible gates and several security locks of the rooms making a record mockery of the highly protected building. Suspicion is strong and palpable that all this could not have been the feat of total strangers no matter how skilful they were. So, by implication, this was insiders' job. There are police posses at the gates as there are emplacements inside the secretariat building, let alone the guards placed by the ministries for each flank of the building. Since the Secretariat as a whole remains slammed shut to outside intrusion, if the breach had taken place at the outer gates there is no telling how serious is the security lapse. And if this has happened through an extended collusion between the professionals gaining entry and the inside security staff, then we are led to the inescapable conclusion that even the highly protected seat of government is no longer immune to organised crime.

Lately there have been two incidents apparently targeted at stealing valuable documents from some ministries. Earlier, in January some papers and materials were snuffed out in a make-believe fire incident at the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Last year, the Civil Aviation Ministry was rummaged. The motive by and large has seemed to be destroying or stealing documents. If that be so, it sends an ominous signal of almost a sabotage proportion in addition to the stories we occasionally hear about missing files and documents. Where annual confidential reports (ACRs) on officials were lost and vital information relating to trade, industry etc leaked, with impunity, we are face to face with the question: Have we run out of a safe place for a safe-keeping of records? At stake is vital national interest.

There can be an adverse repercussion of the security breaches in protected government establishments on the entire psyche pertaining to the law and order situation. The police at large and the public might be resigned to the fate that if something that grossly wrong could happen inside the national secretariat, with classified items, what if lesser crimes were committed outside.

Specially, on secretariat burglary, we suggest that with little effort, it should be quite possible to identify the culprits and bring them to book. We should have seen this happen already given the pattern of incidence since last year. Second, the intelligence gathering and physical guarding inside the secretariat should be fool-proof, these being so manageable there. Finally, we wonder why there is still no electric alarm bell network within the secretariat.

Sweet and Sour

The sugar question should have been a sweet question. Instead it has already turned into a bad and bitter one. In two sugar mills of Natore there is a pile of 21,354 metric tons of unsold sugar worth Tk 55.52 crore. Nothing is so far known as to how this stock would ever be sold and room made for new stocks to be manufactured. This hard-to-accept situation is, however, perfectly understandable. Smuggled Indian sugar sells for substantially less than what homegrown sugar demands of the local market. As long as this holds there is no reason why our indigenous sugar would at all sell.

The Natore situation is typical of the national sugar situation. Not one of our mills is selling well and there is talk of closing down at least two of them. Why? Is there a glut? Far from it, most mills have not gone for fulfilling set targets with the Natore mills trailing the same by about 6000 metric tons. There is demand in the market but not at the price our mills are demanding. Should the consumers be made to pay more by a stricter control on smuggling and bale out the mills? Who would then bale out the consumers? The economic philosophy now reigning in the country would have none of it. Market forces must have a free play and the choice must be the buyer's.

Our sugar is not only uncompetitive in our own market it is also oppressive in that its production is attended by a ban on the making of gur or molasses in the area of the location of a sugar mill. The double-edged oppression has as its victim the sugarcane growers who stand to profit more by making gur and the consumers who could get a sweetening agent for much less than the price of sugar. The question now is whether the mill should live for the society or the society for the mill?

This utterly untenable position would not be there if costs could be cut at the mills and price brought down to competitive level. Have all the avenues for achieving the required cut in production costs been explored and exhausted? Innovation and better management can do the trick — no problem is beyond the powers of an effective combination of the two. We are yet to hear of any innovation or technical breakthrough and any spurt in managerial acumen on the sugar front. Why is that so?

It is not ages that we were exporting sugar. What changed that in a matter of years? Sugar and onions and chilli and suchlike cases speak of trading interests mauling very badly the interests of production. A scaring example of individual's greed eating up the nation's good.

If government is convinced that sugar prices cannot be brought down by any means they can think of resorting to the lesser capitalist sin of subsidising cane production rather than persisting in the regular crimes of binding and beating the consumer and keeping sugar production enterprises completely out of competition. Command economy can still be found to be helpful at times. If sugar qualifies for such help, it is better that the help goes to the grower. But we believe costs can be cut at the mills offsetting any need for artificial respiration. Let the government choose sugar for giving a clinching performance buttressing its claims to effective governance.

Hebron Massacre must Not Derail Peace Process

Apart from age-old rivalry between Jews and Muslims in Hebron, the recent days were clearly marked by religious tensions. Israeli army responsible for security should have taken extra precaution as it was the beginning of the Jewish holiday Purim, the day of revenge, and on such occasions activities of ultra rightist Kach activist should have been under strict control.

HEBRON massacre of over 40 Palestinians in the mosque of the tomb of Patriarch reportedly by a lunatic American-born Israeli doctor Baruch Goldstein sent shock waves around the world. This senseless killing of so many innocent Palestinians engaged in Ramadan morning prayer in Hebron mosque was obviously done in a planned manner. Some reports say several people were shooting from different directions. Imam of the mosque who was leading the prayer said, shots came from 'several directions'. It can only be a planned operation because there were a lot of settlers entered the mosque? What was the Israeli army doing? One wonders whether it was engaged in security work or helping the shooting operation. Israeli army said the gunman got passed the guards by wearing an army uniform. Israeli army on duty must have known each others' identity and at least of those on duty in the mosque area; an unknown man, though in uniform, should have been challenged before he could enter the mosque. Moreover, why should an uniformed man, obviously an army personnel, enter the prayer hall when their duty is in the area outside the mosque.

Hebron Mosque guards' reports clearly reveal that Israeli army stood by while shooting took place. Israeli army spokesman Lt Col Yehuda Wedrifraub's explanation that 'soldiers stationed outside the entrance could not get in until afterward because of the "Pandemonium" was worthless. Pandemonium took place after the shooting and it was the duty of the Israeli army responsible for mosque security to immediately run into the mosque on hearing the first shot. This did not happen. Those who witnessed the massacre said, 'Israeli soldiers who usually guard the compound arrived at the scene late to keep Dr Goldstein from re-loading his weapon and opening fire again'. Thus Israeli army's role can not be

said to be beyond doubt. All these substantiate, at least circumstantially, the claim of the mosque Imam that it was a 'planned operation.' Israeli army's rightist group having failed to stop Israeli leadership to go for the peace deal with PLO might have hand in this. Israeli Prime Minister Robin wasted no time to condemn this and said, it was 'a loath some criminal act'. He has rightly ordered a commission for inquiry into the massacre but he should also take all possible steps to provide full security to the Palestinians. There are still reports of Israeli army's connivance assuring curfew Israeli settlers were allowed to move around in the area with automatic weapons in hand. This has been happening despite heavy reinforcements of Israeli Army. There could be no explanation for settlers participation in the security work when they themselves are responsible for this massacre. Even after such a massacre the reactions of the settlers were most unfortunate. One reportedly said, 'the number of dead in the mosque is not big enough. But anyway, it was a good beginning'. Another said he was not at all worried about what happened in the mosque. Some others said, 'they hate us and we hate them.'

Goldstein was reportedly in mental crisis for the last two months after a settler friend was killed by Muslim militant. He was an active member of ultra rightist Kach party and vowed revenge on Palestinians. He was a known anti-Arab settler. Even during early 80s, when Israel invaded Lebanon according to his friends, as a doctor he refused to treat wounded Arabs and openly said 'he had joined the Israeli army to help secure Israel and kill Arabs'. Surprisingly, despite such a record he was in the Israeli Army reserve and army took no action against him.

Moreover such a man with such mental situation was allowed to move in army uniform with automatic weapons in hand. All those led people to doubt Israeli army's role in Hebron massacre. Israeli army's role must be investigated for fixing up the responsibility.

The situation in the occupied territories has taken a serious turn. Hebron, though an Arab Town has a sizable Jewish enclave with many ultra rightist Jews. According to the Bible, the Tomb of the Patriarchs is the burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives ... the halls have been the object of conquest and reverence for Jews, Muslims and Christians.

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

Apart from age-old rivalry between Jews and Muslims in Hebron, the recent days were clearly marked by religious tensions. Israeli army responsible for security should have taken extra precaution as it was the beginning of the Jewish holiday Purim, the day of revenge, and on such occasions activities of ultra rightist Kach activist should have been under strict control.

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The Security Council has been considering the situation

forces. It is particularly so as Israeli army has failed to protect the Palestinians. Israeli army has been infected by rightist elements and has sought to be in trusted and given the full responsibility for providing security to Palestinians. Traditionally Israeli army has been totally brutal on Palestinians and in the present circumstance Palestinians will see them as enemies.

The question of Israeli sovereignty on occupied territories is at best irrelevant as the UN years ago asked Israel to vacate the occupied territories but it is still occupying the Arab land by force. Thus the US will not violate international norms by agreeing to stationing of UN observers in occupied territories. Moreover, without UN control the situation may go out of hand and whatever has been achieved in the peace negotiation is likely to be washed away by this disastrous action.

The pressure on Chairman

population can not be transferred within given period of time even if there is any decision to do so. Therefore, the immediate action that needs to be taken is to disarm the settlers probably starting with the radical groups immediately as Israeli cabinet has already decided. But Israel must respond positively to the demand of the Palestinians to disarm the settlers otherwise, Palestinians now seem determined to arm themselves and the result is going to be a total disaster. Israel and the US must take them into serious consideration. The very decision of Israeli Government to disarm all settlers, even if it takes time to implement, would go a long way to calm down the situation now prevailing in the occupied territories. Disarming will not be put the settlers in to any serious disadvantage as Israeli army will be in charge of their security. The weapons of the settlers have not in real sense protected settlers, these only provoked the opposite parties. If the settlers are disarmed, there will be a good case for actively dealing with the radical groups in the occupied territories.

In order to deal with the present volatile situation in the occupied territories and also to revive the peace process all concerned parties and particularly Israel and the US must show proper understanding. Bosnia syndrome exists and a similar type of decision is necessary. Oslo accord signed in Washington is not a Bible. It is necessary to build on necessary. Oslo accord signed in Washington is not a Bible. It is necessary to build on and expand the scope of negotiations keeping in view the developments on the grounds. Grave issues must be dealt with urgently, otherwise, the entire peace process is likely to be jeopardized. Arafat is fast losing his grip on the situation. Prime minister Robin and President Clinton together must run an extra mile to help Chairman Arafat and save the peace process. Settlers must not be allowed to wreck the peace which is achievable.

Janata Party are considered the upper caste hegemony.

UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav may dip into his support because he too is from the same caste. Kanshi Ram, who is attracting attention among Harijans, can also pose a threat. That may be the reason why Laloo has promised to give pucca houses to all the Harijans within the next five years. The outlay is expected to be Rs. 28,000 crore, rather an impossibility.

The real challenge is building up from the Kurmis and Koris, the two backward classes which are still on his side. They held a joint rally in Patna the other day. The turnout was estimated at more than five lakh. The mood of defiance was evident from the fact that when some in the audience wanted to raise the slogan, 'Laloo Zindabad', they were hooted down.

However disappointed the lower castes, they continue to pin their hopes on him. They believe that when returned to power next time, he will do something for them. Their disillusionment has not reached the stage where they have turned their back to him.

His advantage is that the combination of backwards and minorities he has built is still in tact. But what sometimes happens in such cases is that if one brick is pulled out, the entire structure falls. Will the rally of Kurmis and Koris in Patna turn out to be that brick? Laloo thinks he can manage. Others believe he is in real trouble this time.

The third and concluding instalment of 'An Optimistic View from Outside' will be published tomorrow.

They Resolve to Stay United, but...

The Centre believes that Bihar is the worst example of a financially mismanaged state in the country. The Finance Commission, which is yet to give its report, confirms this. The Reserve Bank is unhappy because the state is always drawing more funds than its limit of Rs. 74 crore; the overdraft often goes up to Rs. 120 crore.

In his favour: he has given a sense of identity to backwards and Harijans. He has lent them voice, and they believe that one of them, not the upper caste scion, is ruling the state.

How recompensed would they have felt if Laloo had only translated their trust into jobs, roads or hospitals? Instead, he has nearly destroyed the state economically, politically, socially and morally. No institution works because he does not allow any to function. The bureaucracy has caved in before his dictates since he does not stop at anything to punish a public servant who says 'no'.

Today the same population of three lakh lives cheek by jowl as if nothing ever divided it. The people have realised that it was the fear that had mastered them, the fear of goondas, who extorted money and even stoked riots to make them buy protection.

Now they have not only ousted the goondas but have taken upon themselves the responsibility of guarding the 246 mohallas of Hindus and Muslims. Adults among them, including women, take turns at night as chowkidars, while policemen sleep confidently.

Not only that, the two communities have jointly rebuilt homes, shops — and their lives — to begin afresh. And rising from the ashes is the Shahi mosque, which the Hindus and Muslims are reconstructing as a testimony to their resolve to stay united. So intertwined have been the two communities for the past three years that even the demolition of the Babri masjid in December 1992 did not create a ripple of tension.

Like Bhagalpur, many other parts of Bihar have trampled on conventional communal lines. Most of its credit goes to Bihar chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, who personally took charge of the state after the Babri masjid's demolition and saw to it that no untoward incident would take place in the state.

This is a plus point for him. He has lent another plus point

murdered. In a report, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) from Bihar, has said that 'the state appears to have miserably failed in discharging its primary responsibility of protecting the life and liberty of the people, especially in the interior areas. The people of the areas affected by the crime are left entirely at the mercy of the outlaws.'

Stories of corruption are

its due share from the kitty. It is true to some extent but he has to blame himself for the financial mess the state is in. His populist measures have drained the treasury.

The village chowkidar, a familiar figure since the days of the British, used to draw a monthly stipend of Rs. 150. After coming to power, Laloo made him a class IV employee and increased his emoluments

because the state is always drawing more funds than its limit of Rs. 74 crore; the overdraft often goes up to Rs. 120 crore.

An increase in the royalty from coal has been more or less offset by the removal of cess under the Supreme Court's directive. The development outlay is stuck at Rs. 12,000 crore, which is reduced to Rs. 6,000 crore because the state's matching grant is not forthcoming. This pattern has continued for the last two years. He could have managed things better.

Yet Laloo is the same person who started as the state's hero. The rest of the country also saw in him a man starting from the humble beginnings and going to the top. It was a hot-hut to White House story. As president of the Patna University students' union, he was in the chair when Jayaprakash Narain, a Gandhian, gave a call for *Sampooran Kranti* (total revolution). Having gone through the fire of that movement, Laloo was expected to adhere to some values, some norms and some cleanliness.

The question asked is whether Laloo will return after the Assembly elections, due in February 1995. It looks he may. He is still strong because there is yet no alternative to the combination of the backward, Harijans and Muslims he leads. The Congress and the Bhartiya

endless and somewhere along the line Laloo's name often crops up. The latest mode of obtaining money is through kidnapping. Huge ransoms are realised. Criminals have become audacious enough to kidnap magistrates, engineers, doctors, businessmen or their children from the heart of towns and cities. The PUCL recently sent three teams to visit the interior of Bihar, west Champaran, Rohtas-Bhabhua and Mokama-Tal-Barh. They have confirmed a spate of kidnappings and have also noted in their reports that 'the people feel helpless against the criminals and have no faith in the administration and the politicians.'

Laloo often blames the Centre for not giving the state

to Rs. 1,200, putting an annual burden of Rs. 54 crore on the exchequer. He has doubled old-age pension, incurring an additional expenditure of Rs. 115 crore. All pension recipients are not genuine. It is clear from the fact that UP, a bigger state, has only 2.3 lakh pensioners against 14 lakh in Bihar. He has also raised expenditure on the administration by increasing the number of districts from 39 to 52, dividing and redrawing them into sub-divisions and blocks.

The Centre believes that Bihar is the worst example of a financially mismanaged state in the country. The Finance Commission, which is yet to give its report, confirms this. The Reserve Bank is unhappy

our independence we have failed to celebrate the Shaheed Day on 8th Falgun every year. The day seems to lose its sanctity unless we celebrate it on the 8th of Falgun, which may or may not be 21st February.

We have changed many things like the spelling of our capital Dacca to Dhaka, so why can't the Shaheed Day be observed on 8th Falgun, according to Bangla calendar every year?

Motius Samad Chowdhury Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet

Interest rates in commercial banks

Sir, In recent times Bangladesh Bank has reduced bank rate substantially to enable the commercial banks to reduce their lending rates of interest. But as a reaction the commercial banks reduced interest rates to depositors greatly but interest rates to borrowers has been reduced only marginally. As a result the

main idea behind reduction of bank rate i.e. encouraging investment, has not been achieved. Hence, Bangladesh Bank should pressurise the commercial banks to reduce the rate of interest for borrowers substantially in keeping with bank rate.

At the moment, while investors are not benefited markedly, depositors are being discouraged due to low interest rates on their savings. So reduction in bank rate has not served any purpose so far as the economy is concerned.

The real beneficiaries are the commercial banks. Will the Ministry of Finance and Bangladesh Bank look into it?

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Police initiative needed

Sir, I would like to inform you that it's already more than a year since five dacoits en-

tered my flat at 30 Dilu Road, ground floor. All of them armed with daggers and a pipe gun rumbled my flat and robbed me of Tk. 2,50,000/- in gold, cash and new clothes. But till now the police have not informed me about their course of action in this robbery case. It was such a coincidence that the night guard was missing and was found sleeping in his quarters; he was arrested but was released the next day.

I wrote two registered complaints to the IG and DG of Police, but I did not receive any acknowledgement receipts till now from the Ramna Police Station.

I have also regularly enquired about my case with the Ramna Police Station, but was always given an unsatisfactory reply. Is this the kind of treatment our people deserve after losing their life's savings? It's a real shame; I shifted after that great loss and terror, which could never be forgotten.

Mrs. G. Gomez
24 New Eskatan, Dhaka

Highrise apartment buildings

Sir, Now-a-days it has become a growing trend amongst apartment builders to construct high rise buildings in and around some residential areas. It has undoubtedly created much resentment amongst the residents of these areas since such kind of incompatible constructions in a purely residential area usually creates problems in availing proper utility services i.e. gas, electricity, water and sewerage by the residents. Besides creating threat to already existing foundations of other residential houses around, these high rise buildings have already started to tell upon the