

## Let Us Get Started on a National Jute Policy Soon

Latest roundtable — and there have been several before — organised by this newspaper, on "Future of Jute: Problems and Prospects" held a few days ago at Dhaka, once again brought to focus some of the urgent actions needed to revive our once vibrant jute sector. The public commitment by the jute minister that he would organise a national dialogue, with the participation of all political parties, jute traders, labour leaders, banks and experts — with everybody having some sort of involvement with jute growing and trading — was perhaps the biggest gain of the roundtable. This was a timely announcement by the minister, and exhibited a desire on his part for moving away from the traditional partisan and 'ruling party knows everything' mentality. The speakers at the roundtable were unanimous in expressing their optimism about the future prospects of jute, made all more stronger by the rising demand, in international market, of natural fibres. The speakers were also unanimous in their view that this rising demand will not automatically lead to greater market for our jute, because our competitors are doing a much better job in selling their products. For us to be able to cash in on the rising awareness of the negative impact of artificial jute substitutes, Bangladesh will have to undertake a whole range of reform measures that will make our jute exporters capable of competing in the international market.

In addressing this vital issue, two types of reform measures will have to be kept in mind. The first deals with relieving our jute sector of the enormous accumulated debt burden which is heavily weighing down our entrepreneurs, and preventing them from becoming competitive. There are many factors that have led to this burden. There is no denying today that the nationalisation policy followed by the post-liberation government in 1972 wrought havoc to the jute industry. The euphoria of independence, and the myth of tremendous profitability of the jute sector led us to the assumption that there was nothing much to selling jute in the international market. This was the beginning of the decline that ended up with the present position where the World Bank had to come out with a jute sector adjustment credit of US dollars 250 million to get the wheels of this industry rolling again. This credit programme has several components including repayment of bank debt, privatisation of a few mills, streamlining of labour requirements, and raising the overall efficiency of the sector. The premise, on which this move is based, is that within the stipulated period the mills, enjoying the benefits of the reform programme, will be strong enough to be on their own. This, many experts consider, to be unrealistic. They feel that indications so far do not lead to any optimistic conclusion.

It is our view, reopening the question of the desirability of reforms will not lead us anywhere. A lot of expert time and money has been spent on formulating it, and our government is committed to it. What we should do instead is, to go full steam ahead in implementing the reform programme and take up separately whatever lacuna there is in it. And apparently there is a big one. The jute spinners, who have been left out of the benefit of the WB funded reform, say they are being put at an disadvantage, and in fact being made non-competitive, by this reform. This will end up making that viable group into a sick one. We urge upon the government to take a serious look into the argument of the jute spinners and take immediate steps to correct the anomaly.

As one speaker pointed out, this country once rode on the back of jute. It can do so again. But for that, we as a nation must commit our will behind reviving our 'Golden Fibre'. But we must do so, not on any emotional ground. But on the ground of down to earth, pragmatic, market considerations.

## A Heroic Death in Pabna

Perhaps Mamun was a fool to court death like that. Perhaps he had no other choice. What, however, is certain is that he is a hero, something in very very short supply at the present time. Going to fetch his sister home from her school, Mamunur Rashid, a 22-year old college student, stood against a group of goons teasing the girl. The mastans stabbed him to death. This happened on Wednesday at four in the afternoon and in the open gatefront of the Krishnapura Girls High School, Pabna.

Mamun's heroism is something that deserves volumes to be written about. But more than this his death cries for lakhs of young people to emulate him in his resistance to bullying and violence, trampling of the civic ethos that keeps a society going. And for the elders, his death can be meaningful only if they do a bit of heartsearching about the condition of the society, of our youth, and about all the factors contributing to making such a crime possible. Hasn't the strange and unwholesome ways of party politics contributed greatly to this phenomenon of young people degenerating into very short-living musclemen? Aren't our schools and colleges and their teachers merely going along with this suicidal development? The parents at home — all of these practising criminals have them — are they ignorant of their sons' latest acquisition of specialisation — stabbing and shooting, mugging and trifling with the honour of girls and women, drug addiction and extortion? Somewhere, somehow, some people, some measures or movements must stop this wholesale rotting.

The culprits involved in Mamun's murder must all be punished without fail and delay. Police are alleged to have been contributing to the towns being given over to mastan gangs as hostage, may be due to corruption but seemingly more due to political manipulation from high quarters. Judiciary fails to have its desired effect in the matter may be because of shortage of manpower and other necessities.

But are we looking for cures rather than going for prevention? As long as the causes of youth degeneration are not duly identified and effectively addressed, nothing will help. How big a part of our total youth force are engaged in education and how many are those that have a job? Can the combined figure come upto anywhere near 50 per cent of the force? What would the millions left outside do? The only way left to them is to become criminals.

While we send our condolences to the bereaved family, we reconfirm our faith in the youth of this nation and our commitment to do all that will keep the youth out of harm's way and help their growth into useful citizens.

PERHAPS it needs no citation that one of the most daunting challenges of the governments all over the world is to detect and deter the magnitude of crime and reduce the size of criminal activities. Be it Bill Clinton of the US or Begum Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh or any other ruler, the most powerful 'negative' of their governance, probably, emanates from a rise in the number of crime and criminal activities in their respective countries. Crime and criminal activities should never be construed as always positively correlated with the level of poverty and underdevelopment of the society in which the vices tend to occur. But as the rate of growth of crime and criminal activities in different societies appear to show us, the magnitude and frequencies of their occurrence seem no less pervasive and perplexing in the developed than in the underdeveloped ones. Hewing on this kind of statistics, many of the Home Ministers of developing countries are reported to boast of their performance as far as the degree of crime is concerned and our Hon'ble Home Minister is also said to have claimed a promotion on this score.

### Defining a Crime

At the very outset, one faces the problem of defining crime. It may appear silly to ask such a question but a solid definition is needed to get some teeth on its analysis. Apparently there are two schools of thought: one seeing criminal activities as immoral activities and the other viewing it as illegal. Are immoral acts criminal? It is very difficult to answer, that largely depends on who thinks what. Horse racing, homosexuality, drinking alcoholic beverages — all might appear as immoral and, therefore, criminal to some people but not to others. Are illegal acts criminal? Well, probably it is and defining in such a way we could, possibly, be closer to an acceptable definition.

# The Economics of Crime and Punishment

by Abdul Bayes

initiation. A criminal act is one the society has decided it is better off without and which it has therefore made illegal through laws, ordinances, and the like. It may or may not be immoral... Driving inadvertently 50 miles per hour in front of a school may be both illegal and immoral or may be only illegal and therefore criminal. Kissing a girl at a public place is neither illegal nor immoral in some countries and, therefore, not criminal offence but the same 'sweet' task could fetch bitter pills in Saudi Arabia where it is illegal and hence a criminal offence. It then follows that all illegal acts are necessarily criminal acts while all immoral acts may or may not be illegal and hence criminal.

### Classification of Criminal Acts

Criminal acts could be classified as (a) violent crime, (b) crimes against property, (c) traffic in illegal goods and services and (d) other crimes. While (a) includes murder, rape, armed robbery etc, (b) includes fraud, burglary, embezzlement, vandalism and the like. Traffic in illegal goods would include prostitution, gambling, narcotics, alcohol etc. The others' imply catch all for everything.

### The Costs of Crime

Although at times very much inaccurate to estimate, there is no shade of doubt that crimes certainly bear certain costs. Many criminal activities go unreported but if reported at all, it becomes very difficult to assign a dollar or taka value to the cost of that crime. Nevertheless, estimates of cost of crimes are necessary if decision making regarding crime prevention is to bear any fruit and have any degree of economic soundness. Like any other projects entailing cost-benefit analysis, a relatively accurate estimate of costs and

benefits is likely to result in a better crime prevention.

Economists tend to argue that the cost of crime should be measured on the basis of alternative-cost principle. The net economic cost to the society of crime, according to economists, is the difference between what GNP would be if there were neither crime nor crime prevention activities and what that GNP is with the current level of crime and crime prevention activities.

As in elsewhere current reports on crime in Bangladesh are solely concerned with the number of events and not with taka estimates of their costs. A calculation of cost, say of violent crime, would bring forth the loss of earnings (or value of production services rendered) of the victims and of those close to the victims. Obvious costs of crime against property are the values of destroyed or damaged properties. It is not clear whether traffic in illegal goods and services have any direct cost to the society since these provide utilities to the consumers on the one hand and spill-over costs to the society, on the other. Additional costs of the whole range of criminal activities comprise the costs of prevention, apprehension and correction since to perform those, such resources are required that have alternative uses or opportunity costs. For example, had there been no crime or lesser crimes, the government could use the taka amount of the crime prevention, detection and correction to the production of more milk and butter for the society. It is, however, interesting to observe that the act of theft or hijacking although criminal in nature, imposes no additional cost to the society since the thief or the hijacker gets well-off at the cost of the worse-off victim

### The Economics of Crime Prevention

More often than not, governments in power are accused of failing to combat the onslaught of rising crimes and also, more often than not, the said governments try to address the issue very seriously, as we are aware, to lengthen their 'length of services' to the nation. And going for this kind of job, the governments face the same economic problem e.g. scarcity of resources. It is, therefore, necessary to chalk out the 'correct' level of expenditures on crime prevention by any government or its units. To arrive at such a 'correct' level, the same cost-benefit analysis that is being used for the construction of Jamuna Bridge or Dhaka-Maoa road or any other project, is also applied. In this type of analysis, estimates are made up of the benefits of the activities, the costs required to deploy crime prevention-related activities and we look for the level at which costs of an increase in the activity begin to exceed the benefit of that increase.

The economic cost of crime is the value of the forgone goods and services that these resources used to produce before being drawn to the prevention of crimes. The benefits are the communities' best estimates of how much better-off the suppression of crime will make them — the value of the extra days of work as a result of not being raped, maimed or murdered, plus the value of property not destroyed or stolen, plus the value of the greater personal security they feel and so on. Needless to mention, the most vexing problem hovers around the estimates of benefits arising out of crime prevention activities. If the benefits and costs are

known, the determination of the correct level would turn out to be very handy. To be honest on this issue, suppose a teacher of the department of Economics of JU attempts to calculate the costs and benefits of crime prevention. He starts with considering whether there should be no crime prevention at all or a unit would be worthwhile. Suppose one unit of benefits of crime prevention is worth Tk 60,000 i.e. crime prevention keeps Tk 60,000 worth of GNP from being destroyed. Suppose again that the cost of police, judiciary etc to prevent such crime is Tk 40,000. Obviously, in this case, the prevention is better than the cure — the net benefit to the society is Tk 20,000. Thus moving from one unit onwards, the same teacher would get marginal benefits (MB) and marginal costs (MC) and remember that as the units are increased, diminishing marginal benefits would occur since most of the earlier units might have thrashed out the most painful crimes. So the teacher goes on calculating so long the marginal benefit of crime prevention exceeds the marginal costs and stops where MB=MC e.g. 'correct level' of crime prevention. A higher MB should encourage for more expenses on crime prevention while a lesser should discourage expenses. It is in fact irrational to stop when the MB continues to surpass MC and also equally irrational to continue to spend if the reverse holds good.

Now what should be appropriate mix of the expenses or, in other words, what economic principle should be followed in case of allocation to police, judiciary, rehabilitation etc which together determine the magnitude of crime prevention? Here, the economists tend to tell us, we should follow equi-marginal principle in the allocation of resources to police, courts and corrections

### Bangladesh Scenario

Do we follow economic principles in allocating resources to the prevention of crime? Perhaps no. This 'no' is based on available reports that the number of criminal cases to be handled by the courts is much more than their absorptive capacity. Justice is thus denied by being delayed. An equi-marginal principle would give better results than the present one. Attempts should be made to calculate the costs and benefits of crime and its prevention in Bangladesh because in a resource scarce country, one can hardly rely on 'guesstimates' of the amount of expenses so incurred. The taxpayers have the right to know how much of GNP was saved, say last year, as a result of the allocation of budgetary resources to that end.

### Epilogue

Head of Government: Do we follow economic principles on the allocation of resources to crime detection and prevention?

Concerned Minister: No, Sir, we use 'guess'.

Head of Govt: It is then criminal offence and I don't like it.

Minister: I think that way, too. But should we keep more money for its detection and prevention?

# Chalard Stops Eating in the Cause of People-power

Satyanarayan Sivaraman writes from Bangkok

Parliamentary defeat for government-backed proposals to democratise the Thai constitution has sparked suspicions that powerful military and bureaucratic interests still wield enormous behind-the-scenes power. It has also prompted a hunger strike.

LIVING in a makeshift tent on the pavement opposite the Thai parliament in Bangkok is a figure of whom the Indian apostle of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, would have approved.

Simply clothed, with stubble on his tired but intense face, social activist Chalard Vorachat is staging a hunger strike to change the constitution — a mission described as treason by opponents and utopian by some of his sympathisers.

Chalard, a leading figure in Thailand's fledgling democracy movement, is demanding the rewriting of the 1991 military-formulated constitution. His aim is to make the political system more accountable to the people.

Two years ago, a similar fast-unto-death by Chalard sparked off a massive demonstration against the take-over of the premiership by the then-armed forces chief Suchinda Kraprayoon.

The shooting of unarmed protesters by the military forced Suchinda out and brought the present Chuan Leekpai government to power through one of the country's fairest elections.

It was the failure of the Chuan government's attempt to push through a series of



Chalard Vorachat. Fasting for democracy

amendments to make the constitution more democratic which sparked the current hunger strike.

The failure has also prompted fears that powerful military and bureaucratic interests are calling the shots.

Among the reforms proposed by the government were a lowering of the voting age

from 20 to 18 years, improved public access to information, the setting up of an independent election commission, and an increase in the number of MPs to keep pace with population growth.

The amendment that aroused most controversy sought to reduce the number of senators in the upper house from 270 to 120.

Members of the armed forces and civil service, who currently make up much of the upper house, were to be barred from becoming senators and their power to submit anti-government parliamentary motions taken away.

Chuan's government claim their proposals were defeated because they could not get enough parliamentary support. But not everyone is convinced.

"The Chuan government is more dangerous because it deludes the people into thinking that since it is an elected body the fight for democracy is over," said Rittichai Jantanon, a Chalard supporter keeping a

vigil at the protest site.

The coalition of parties that came to power on the back of the pro-democracy vote in the September 1992 elections, he says, are more interested in clinging to their seats than in revamping the political system. "The government cannot do things in response to a single person's demands," Chuan told reporters soon after Chalard started his fast on May 25.

But the government's lack of response to Chalard's demands is also being seen as an indication that it has become subservient to the military-bureaucratic elite that has traditionally held power in Thailand.

Though groups like the Confederation for Popular Democracy, which played a key role in the May 1992 movement, do not entirely agree with Chalard's dramatic method of forcing political action, they are highly critical of the government's attitude.

The excuses made by the Chuan government for not considering Chalard's demands as

'feasible' sound disturbingly familiar to those given by General Suchinda in 1992," commented a leading member of the group.

The clash highlights the precariousness of Thai parliamentary democracy in which governments survive on the basis of their ability to protect the privileges of entrenched vested interests like the military, bureaucracy and business groups. One of the central reasons attributed to the government's inability to change the current constitution, argue critics, is its fear of a military backlash.

The military, better known for its ability to shoot unarmed student protesters than for valour in battle, has dominated every activity in the country from politics to business since the overthrow of absolute monarchy by a group of officers in 1932.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the military consolidated its grip over various institutions, first in the name of combating 'communist insurgency' and then to promote the 'three pil-

lars' of Thai society, "nation, religion and monarchy." Though numerous coups occurred during this period, most were the result of struggles between military factions rather than from any civilian threat to their power.

"The first real break in the military's grip came in 1973 when a massive student movement succeeded in toppling the regime led by Generals Thanom Kittikachorn and Prapas Charusatien.

The semblance of democracy was shattered three years later by a violent right-wing backlash that saw the killing of hundreds of student activists and the return of the military to power.

Pro-democracy forces tasted success in May 1992 when their demonstrations led to the removal of the General Suchinda government, giving rise to hopes that finally the military was being shown its place — as a subordinate to elected governments.

But if the present crisis is any indication, it may take many more "bloody Mays" before democratic institutions and values really take root in Thailand.

— GEMINI NEWS

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## 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.

### Alleged freedom of the electronic media

Sir, The grip on the state electronic media is such that the national political news is severely restricted to only that of the party in power. It is as if the other political parties do not exist and they do not create any news (not views). Even there is no clear-cut distinction between news and views, regardless of the party. The state and party news are mixed up.

Another distinction is not maintained: no discrimination is observed between state news and party news/views/publicity (the party in power). It is not fair to take up so much air time for publicising the activities of a single party, without providing even one per cent of the major news of other parties. This is not only monopoly but complete autocracy.

It has become necessary to point out that while views and comments can be made available any moment, one has to wait for a news break or event (a meeting, a killing, a demonstration, seminar, a hartal, a confrontation, a fight, etc). A news item is independent of the knowledge of it. What should be published and what should not be published is an elementary issue at the editor's level, and is not an issue under discussion here.

The issue is what is suppressed, and why. This suppression is superficial, and ineffective, as there are many alternative sources. Some of these sources (not news) might not be in public interest. The question is who are to sit over judgment, the impartial policy makers, the editors, or the readers. The Administration has never discussed this issue fairly and openly in public, that is, with the voters and the citizens, who have the right to raise such questions, and also have the right to demand an answer.

A more fundamental basic principle is also involved: what is democratic, and what is not. The issue has been evaded for more than three years: the stranglehold on the electronic media by those who talk about democracy every day, and these people are strangely the elected representatives of the people. As a member of the public, it is not at all clear to this correspondent; hence this plea for enlightenment.

MM Ahmad  
Dhaka

### Tasleema Nasreen

Sir, Haji Mohammad Rafiq Ahmed, a Swiss converted to Islam about 35 years ago, in a letter under the above caption from Bangkok published in The Daily Star of August 15,

1994, has said "Ms Tasleema Nasreen seems to be a just very silly lady. The less said about her the better. Allah will deal with her as He, in His infinite wisdom will see fit".

We also strongly feel that the less we talk and discuss about and the more we disparage the controversial lady is better.

OH Kabir  
Dhaka-1203

### Academic calendars

Sir, For the second year running (1993-1994) the University of Dhaka has published its Academic Calendar, showing there in the beginning dates and closing dates of the lectures, the dates of the examinations and the publication of the results.

The calendars are first steps towards the removing of bottlenecks, and session jams. The important step would be to correctly and sincerely implement the time frame indicated in the calendars. We have to take into account the forced closures of the lectures from time to time. In such cases the lectures can be held by taking additional classes along with the regular lectures. Furthermore, the holidays in the universities may be curtailed if needed. It is possible to reduce the 'gap period' between the holding of the examinations and the publication of the results.

Looking ahead we should also have Academic Calendars for all the colleges. Some of them are imparting post-graduate courses.

The session jams have sapped the vitality of the nation for more than a decade now. The universities are the

storehouse of knowledge and ideas, and these can take the nation forward. We are now on a self-destructive path; we must remove ourselves from the collision course. The universities in India and Pakistan are not politicised, and they are marching ahead. Can we not do the same?

Shahabuddin Mahtab  
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### Bank loan and defaulters

Sir, The Daily Star report [page 7 dt 16.8.94] on bank fraud and its punishment in Indonesia should serve eye-for, is it soul? opening purpose of the Government of Bangladesh. The government published a long list of defaulters who had taken bank loans and had not paid back. There was agitation among the defaulters who pressed the concerned minister and the government perhaps to keep quiet in the matter and freeze all further action against them. While the rich further enriched by the bank loans were apparently successful in keeping the government quiet in the matter, the ordinary people in the country became disappointed and disheartened. Because they hoped that the new democratic government was after the defaulters and would collect the loaned money which adds up to be near about one single year's budget money of Bangladesh! Alas! the poor people of the country had the first shock and shattering of their high hopes they had in the new government. The net feeling they had in the matter was that the government was for only the rich, and had only

the lip service for the poor. I am afraid the failure of the government to realize the bank loans is one very strong point against them and many would consider not voting for them during the next election.

When Indonesia can imprison the defaulters/defaulters, why Bangladesh can't do it is difficult to understand. This surely is not to be hailed by the defaulters of huge amounts of bank loans, but this is what the vast majority of the people of Bangladesh want to say.

A citizen  
Dhaka

### Family Planning

Sir, Population explosion is a big problem in the third world, specially in the sub-continent where population is making an alarming situation. Governments in the sub-continent place stress on family planning by introducing different types of preventive measures to check the birth rate. Population control has become a national issue in all the countries of the sub-continent with a pointed emphasis that progress and prosperity will not come about unless population is controlled.

It was interesting to learn through different newspapers that prime minister of Pakistan Bepazir Bhutto was expecting her fourth child. The basic criterion of family planning, however, is to have not more than two children. A question may arise in context of family planning that when the head of the government is not falling within the principle of family planning then how the common citizens of that country will be encouraged to

adopt family planning? Or does it mean that adoption of family planning is not necessary for the well-off or affluent?

Zafar Iqbal  
New Babupara, Saidpur

### Right to silence

Sir, The golden thread that runs through English justice, which forms the basis of our laws also, presumes innocence of any person till proved guilty. The right to silence follows logically from the principle that it is guilt and not innocence that has to be proved. The right to remain silent, especially when innocent men or women are charged with, in general gives them the right to protect their families, or friends, from a sense of bewilderment, embarrassment or outrage and helps them come to a reasoned decision to wait until the allegations are set out in detail and they have the benefit of considered legal advice.

It is also important to remember that the miscarriage of justice often starts with what happened during the initial police questioning, if allowed unchecked. Therefore, the right to remain silent must be encouraged in our judicial system before we talk of independence of judiciary and the like as advocated recently by the Chief Justice, Mr Shahabuddin Ahmed.

The right to silence is considered vital and a long-tried principle of freedom under the English laws — for that matter in USA and other advanced countries — and could be considered for immediate introduction in our judicial system.

Col Mirza Shafi (ret'd)  
Bawari, Dhaka.