

Why this Rowdy Behaviour?

The past week witnessed at least two disconcerting incidents of widespread vandalism — one in Dhaka and another in Chittagong — by music lovers and university students. Football hooliganism in both cities also had a share in the overall deterioration of law and order situation. Add to these the gun battles between two student organisations of Dhaka University and the gloomy picture becomes gloomier. One week's ugly developments should not necessarily be the order of the day but given the country's record on the issue, an idea can surely be had of the general trend towards a steady slide in law and order.

What happened in Banani — at and around Kamal Ataturk Avenue to be precise — is an aberration of music-mindedness. The disappointment of the fans who bought ticket for the concert, scheduled to be held at the Banani Youth Club ground, is quite understandable. But what is beyond understanding is the sudden turn of their musical passion into a frenzy which — even more surprisingly — got directed towards nearby shops and residential houses. Sure enough the organisers of the concert made a blunder by not taking permission from the concerned authorities and also, in the second place, not announcing a fresh date for the event.

Even then the unruly act by the fans cannot be justified. It is the last thing one expects from music-lovers. Frustration gave in to anger but the shop-keepers and residents nearby had not the remotest of connection with the concert. Then why make them the target? In an almost similar fashion, a section of students of Chittagong University went on a rampage at the city railway station because the shuttle trains between the university and the port city was late. The report did not say if the students had lodged any complaint earlier about the regular delay in the train service.

We perhaps can exclude the incidents of campus violence and soccer hooliganism on which we ran separate leaders. Yet all of these give an insight into our present day social psyche. Certainly it was not a premeditated plan of the music-lovers to go berserk. Only days before, youthful exuberance of the fans made them gatecrash into the auditorium of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, during a performance by Miles. That should have given the organisers an indication of what troubles they would be inviting in case of serious lapses like selling tickets without first securing permission for use of the venue for the concert.

Apart from the organisers' indiscretion, what should give everyone a headache is the increasing tendency on the part of people to take law into their own hands. The impression is that the score has to be settled now or never. Why the hurry? There are certainly some well-founded reasons behind this. First of all, people have learnt from experience that the wrong-doers are seldom punished and the law enforcers are either incapable of dealing with the culprits or simply turn a blind eye to the rising crimes. It is their credentials that have been seriously questioned in recent times.

Pent-up resentment and frustration suddenly explode if a large number of people gather and consider themselves as being wronged. If the law enforcing agencies commanded respect, an escalation of violence could be averted. So the message is quite clear. People want justice and the sooner the better. Piles of cases in courts have not helped the cause either. The need is to reverse people's no-confidence into an abiding trust in the dispensation of justice by the state machinery.

Revealing Exam Results

Normally, this year's good results of the SSC examinations should have done us proud. We ought to have been in a self-congratulatory spree paying some well-deserved tributes to improved school administration, successful teaching and serious preparation by the examinees. Unfortunately, our elation is subdued, the sense of achievement a good deal qualified. For, the credit outweighs the scale on the side of something quite different — the examination system itself stealing a march over other factors.

The senior teachers have themselves come out with a plausible explanation of the extraneous stimuli for the star-studded results which, in respect of the average students also, recorded an unusually high passing figure of 61 to 78 per cent. Even the first divisioners who, in many cases, obtained full marks in the multiple choice part of the questions scored either a naught or 10 marks or so in the essay half of the tests. Private tuitioning with suggestions of some 500 groups of questions offered for the objective part in each paper could be squarely banked upon by the taught to score full marks in this section. But when it came to the essay part, the student's ability was severely tested revealing his or her poor quality of understanding and presentation of the rudimentary concepts.

The relegation of English was one flaw in the system that set the clock back for any assured availability of hands able to write routine office memos or minutes. As if that is not enough, proficiency in Bangla now seems to be circumscribed by an over emphasis on objective tests which do not even require reading the books from cover to cover — thanks the question-bank! It boils down to something rather amusing: Are we to judge a student's calibre by asking him or her to furnish a proof that his achievement was entirely without the help of private tutors like in the case of top-per of the Jessore board Manoj Kumar Datta?

The results have provided some more food for thought. Out of 5,50,256 students taking the country-wide examinations, a figure which is about eleven times that of three decades ago, female candidates numbered slightly more than half their male counterparts. And, in securing the top ten positions, the ratio between the two is about the same. Dhaka and Comilla boards have had more first divisioners than second divisioners. Noteworthy has also been the break in the monopoly of high achievements by a few traditionally top-grade institutions such as the public school-type ten cadet colleges of the country, and Dhaka Laboratory School, for one, in the other category. Chittagong Collegiate School stands tall now, having secured 9 out of the top ten positions under the Comilla Board, a faint replay of what, in the olden days, used to be the glory of a school giving serious coaching.

Sri Lankan Election : An Experience for Adversaries

by M M Rezaul Karim

THE parliamentary election in Sri Lanka that was held on the last 16th August glaringly manifested the determination and strength of a people to march forward on their chosen path of democracy and freedom. The odds were heavy, the problems complex and obstacles enormous. The island nation, famed as a pearl in the Indian Ocean due, *inter alia*, to its inimitable shape, has been torn by the sectarian feud that broke into an armed conflict since 1983. The rebel Tamils in the northern districts of Jaffna and Vania as well as in the Eastern Province have deeply entrenched themselves in their areas of concentration where writ of the government in Colombo no longer holds good. The interminable armed conflict that ensued following the Tamil demand to carve a homeland of their own has already claimed over 30,000 lives, on both sides, and brutal assassination of a number of political leaders, the latest being that of Prime Minister Premadasa in May last year.

To hold a general election, not to speak of a free and fair election, in a situation of this nature, is no mean task. Nevertheless, the government has been holding elections on a regular basis at all levels — local, provincial and national — with a considerable degree of success, thanks to the enlightened spirit of the people.

The executive presidential system of government as it is in vogue in Sri Lanka has rendered the Parliament to a secondary position, through the latter still wields considerable authority and exercises numerous state powers. The present proportional representation system of election supplanted the "one seat, one constituency" election under the erstwhile parliamentary system since the election in 1989. The system envisages

election of a designated number of candidates in a district by political affiliation only on the basis of the total popular votes received by the respective parties. The allocation of seats among the individual candidates of the same party is done, however, by way of preferences shown by voters for their chosen candidates by marking the same ballot paper. At the national level, 22 out of the 225 seats of the Parliament are held reserved and allocated to political parties in proportion to the number of seats won by them in the election all over the country.

The essence of the proportional system of representation is the district-wise popular

were neither as widespread nor as intense as one had apprehended. Evidently, there were allegations and counter-allegations made by and against the principal contesting parties, the United National Party (UNP) and the People's Alliance (PA), of intimidation, armed threat, bribery, etc. At one instance, an opposition candidate told me that some armed people from the government party went to his house a few days before the polling and threatened the inmates, but he was not present at that moment. While I immediately talked to the DIG of Police in charge of the dis-

franchise. The turnout was a staggering 75 per cent plus of the total electorate. The peaceful atmosphere and the restrained enthusiasm pervaded the entire island, except for the North.

The election in the northern districts of Jaffna and Vania, in stark contrast to the rest of the island, was a total sham. Large territories in these two districts have been under the armed control of "the rebels" or "Tamil liberators". The polling that took place in the government held areas was again highly suspect, as the turnout was pitifully low and the free roaming of armed

seats in the 225-member Parliament.

The new Prime Minister, Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, holder of an unparalleled distinction of being a daughter of two Prime Ministers (both parents) with a slain father and a slain husband, is both an accomplished and magnetic personality. Before the general election she was the Chief Minister of Sri Lanka's Western Province (Colombo). She came out as the de facto leader of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party, the principal component of the PA, from among many contending rivals including her brother, Anura, who had defected to the UNP late last year, and her own

ment of the people together with a false sense of complacency on the part of the ruling party generated a discernible pre-election fervour for a change of government after 17 years of power. The change indeed took place but it was not a sweeping one, as had been anticipated by many.

There had been allegations, no doubt, of misuse of power and official facilities during the election by government leaders, but these were not so gross and widespread as to constitute a major issue of dispute for the opposition. We have seen ministers roaming around on the election day in a lone vehicle and that none other than the candidates and voters were allowed in the vicinity of the polling stations. We were told that some ministers even paid for the use of government vehicles for their election duty, while they were still holding office.

A principal advantage of the election process in Sri Lanka rested on its ability to appoint a highly capable, and efficient Commissioner of Elections to conduct the elections. A senior and undaunted civil servant, Commissioner De Silva carried out his functions most diligently since 1982 and commanded immense respect and confidence of both the government and the opposition for his fairness and impartiality. He has undoubtedly contributed a great deal to the smooth holding of the general election in Sri Lanka and to its making of a success story whose architect and builder were obviously its enlightened leaders and committed people.

The writer, who is a former High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Sri Lanka, went there as a member of the International Team of Observers during the last parliamentary election.

By and large, the polling officers and voters worked and behaved in a disciplined and orderly manner, under close vigilance of the agents of rival political parties.

tribe to find out what action had been taken by him, he smiled and said that he had also received another report alleging that the said opposition candidate was away from his home for carrying out a similar threat to his opponents at that particular time.

The election campaign was on its peak a few days prior to the scheduled election when a team of 44 international observers chosen individually from amongst eminent persons of 12 countries ranging from Canada to Australia arrived in Sri Lanka. There had no doubt been pre-poll violence, taking also a toll of some human lives, but these

Notwithstanding such disturbances and violence, the polling on the election day went off smoothly and without major untoward incidents. By and large, the polling officers and voters worked and behaved in a disciplined and orderly manner, under close vigilance of the agents of rival political parties. I visited 21 polling stations and several counting stations on the election day from six in the morning till well past midnight. I was assigned to the district of Pollanaruwa, part of which was the stronghold of the LTTE (Tamil Tigers), in the Eastern Province. Even there what I saw appeared similar in all places, witnessing as to how some of our fellow South Asians exercised their right of

groups of people around polling booths reduced the election to a farce. The two international observers deputed to each of these two districts recorded, in marked contrast to the remaining 20 districts, such anomalies vividly and dismissed fairness and equality of election in these two districts. The Sri Lankans were also under no illusion, as the major political parties accepted the situation there in order to ensure what they termed as "completion of the election" throughout the nation, as ordained by the constitution, without which the election results could not be officially announced and therefore the formation of a new government could not take place.

No single party won an absolute majority in the Parliament. The PA won the largest number of seats, 95, and with the support of seven members of the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) and an Independent member formed a coalition government with a bare majority of 113

mother Mrs Bandarnaika who is still clinging to the nominal leadership of the party (SLFP) despite her failing health.

Chandrika has an enormous task to accomplish — to fulfil her election pledges not only to secure a political settlement with the armed rebels but also to restore the true parliamentary form of government by abolishing the executive presidency, whose election is due shortly. The coming months would therefore be crucial for her and for the political future of Sri Lanka. Chandrika's political fate will also in the long run hinge largely upon her ability to redeem her pre-election economic pledges. This is no easy task, given her party's image of being left off the centre and the country's heavy dependence on Western aid for development.

It was interesting to note that as many as 88 of the 125 UNP members of the defunct Parliament held ministerial offices in and outside the cabinet with the rank of minister, state minister and deputy minister. The consequent resent-

New Data Debunk Asians' Image as 'Model Minority'

Ian Steele writes from New York

Poverty data have given Southeast Asians the highest rate of welfare dependency of any racial or ethnic group in the US

THE popular perception that Asian-Americans are a "model minority" in the United States may not be all that accurate.

New social data published in Washington challenge this view.

Poverty data for Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese have given Southeast Asians the highest rate of welfare dependency of any racial or ethnic group in the country, according to "The New York Times".

While only eight per cent of households nationwide received public assistance in 1991, Cambodians and Laotians on welfare in California reached 77 per cent — a figure that reflects their limited proficiency in English and relatively low level of education.

The reality for many newcomers to New York's bustling and seemingly prosperous Chinatown is that businesses in the area pay low wages and

provide no health benefits. About one quarter of all families in the district live below the poverty line.

This new profile of Asians in the United States is based on data from the Census Bureau, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and state governments compiled for a report prepared by the Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and the Asian American Studies Centre at the University of California, both in Los Angeles, to expose the stereotype of prosperous Asians.

Paul M. Ong, a professor of architecture and urban planning at UCLA, and co-author of the study, said the image of Asians as a model minority and public ignorance of the diversity of Asian-Americans, had prevented the group from receiving adequate consideration in national policy debates on issues like poverty, economic development and health care.

"It's been a problem in that people say, Asian-Americans, they don't have any problems," Dr Ong was quoted as saying. "What we're trying to do is educate people so they know there is more to it than just median income. This is a very complex population."

In many respects, the stereotype of successful Asians is true. The report shows that Asian-Americans have the highest median family income (US\$35,900), the lowest rate of unemployment (3.5 per cent), the lowest divorce rate of any racial group (three per cent) and the lowest rate of teenage pregnancy (six per cent). Between 1972 and 1987, the number of Asian-owned businesses grew by

1,000 per cent.

However, the report also notes that for every Asian-American family with an annual income of US\$75,000 or more, there is another making less than US\$10,000. For every Asian-American scientist or engineer, there is a worker making less than the minimum wage. Many Asian-owned businesses are said to suffer high turnover and low profits and the per capita income of Asian-Americans (US\$10,500) in 1990 was lower than that of non-Hispanic whites (US\$12,000).

The report also complains that well-qualified Asian-Americans encounter "glass ceilings" to advancement in their careers. Although they

represent a significant number in professions like medicine and engineering, discrimination on language and cultural barriers hinder their advancement into management positions. While Asian-Americans make up 34 per cent of all doctors and nurses at three major public hospitals in Los Angeles, they hold only 12 per cent of the management positions.

By disaggregating data, the report further highlighted the success rate within the Asian-American community. Although 47 per cent of Asian-Americans hold professional or managerial jobs, only 22 per cent of Korean-Americans do.

Dr Ong said that two decades after the Viet Nam war, the continued reliance of many Southeast Asians on welfare reflected the US government's focus on cash over long-term job training and the fact that the second and sub-

sequent waves of migrants came from rural areas and had few skills that would enable them to survive unassisted in the United States. Many had also been burdened by longer periods of detention in refugee camps and the trauma of their wartime experiences.

According to the Report, three-quarters of all Southeast Asian Adults on welfare in California have less than a high school education and have limited knowledge of English.

Dr Ong also said many existing welfare programmes had been designed to favour single-parent families and families headed by teenagers, whereas almost 90 per cent of Southeast Asian families on welfare were intact, with both parents present. A shift in welfare emphasis to job training, would help many of these people to free themselves from public assistance, he said.

— Depthnews Asia

A Bullet Aimed at the Media

by Anthony Hyman

One more death in a civil war which has already claimed 1.5 million victims would normally pass unnoticed. But a Gemini News Service correspondent who knew Mirwais Jalil explains why the murder matters.



Mirwais Jalil, murdered by Mujaheddin

tape recorder and microphone and enormous amounts of initiative, courage and energy. He

got into journalism by helping visiting correspondent, but quickly established himself as a reporter in his own right.

It will be asked why the death of one 25-year-old man should matter in a war in which 1.5 million Afghans have lost their lives.

It matters because the victim was doing a vital job informing his own and other people about the day-to-day realities of life and politics in Afghanistan.

Millions of ordinary Afghans listen to BBC broadcasts because of the reputation for objectivity won by the reporting of Jalil and other correspondents in Kabul.

Afghan commanders and party leaders like their interviews to be broadcast by the

BBC, but do not appreciate revisiting of their parties' indiscriminate bombing of hospitals and residential areas in the capital. So Jalil's murder is interpreted by many Afghans as a warning to journalists to stop criticising the armed groups currently holding power.

The impact of the murder may go even deeper.

Those who are weary of the problems and challenges of peacemaking in Afghanistan — and there are many such people in the United Nations and in individual governments — may well exploit the incident as further proof that the country is now reduced to such a state of anarchy that nothing more can or should be attempted to improve the situation.

Even the few international organisations still concerned with the problems of Afghanistan may rethink the dangers to the lives of their personnel, and further reduce or even close down their operations. The effect would be disastrous in Kabul, where essential services are maintained by a small number of skilled Afghans and foreigners.

On a wider scale, the actions of the leader or followers of one armed group may well be blamed on the Afghan people in general.

International attitudes towards Afghanistan have in any case hardened recently as a result of the apparently endless cycle of destruction in the capital.

What risks being overlooked is the progress made towards rebuilding in Herat and some other provinces now at peace, along with the return of over one million refugees from Pakistan and Iran.

Yet something constructive may emerge from the murder: the BBC plans to establish a trust fund for training young Afghan journalists, in memory of Mirwais Jalil.

The Afghan media is in disarray. A rudimentary television service still operates — when electricity permits, and several of the warring parties broadcast propaganda from their city strongholds. There is no newspaper, and Kabul University's journalism department is occupied by a guerrilla group.

One day, when peace returns, the country will need committed journalists such as Mirwais Jalil, and the fund may help provide them.

ANTHONY HYMAN is a British freelance writer and journalist, specialising in south and central 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.

BMA and doctors' demands

Sir, The Daily Star of 29.8.94 reports that BMA, led by Dr M A Majed, had been on the streets on way to the PM to seek intervention in the matter of the doctors' demands. One such demand is that the suspension order against 12 doctors of Tongi and Gazipur Health Complexes, who were absent from their place of duty, be withdrawn. The vigilance team, lawfully constituted to do the checking

if the doctors were working in the assigned places of their duty, detected their absence. Another important demand of the doctors, among others, is that the vigilance team should be cancelled. The BMA has threatened that, if their demands are not met, continuous strike of the doctors would have to be faced by the people of Bangladesh from 21.9.94.

Now, the question is — are the above two demands of the BMA and the doctors justified? What logic is there that a person found not doing his job for

which he has been hired would not be punished? Is any hired doctor/person immune from being punished for his gross negligence of duty? Absence from the Tongi and Gazipur Health Complexes of the doctors is definitely a gross negligence of duty. Does the BMA consider it otherwise?

About the demand of cancellation of the vigilance team — is it logical? Government, in its responsibility of running the Health Complexes and other establishments, has to monitor their functioning. The vigilance team is authorised by the Govt to detect the negligence, if any, of the persons hired for specific jobs and paid for from the tax payers' money collected by the Govt. The Govt, therefore, has the responsibility to see that the tax payers' money is not wasted/misused. Certainly, the

Govt. Servant doctors of the Tongi and Gazipur Health Complexes are guided by the official, moral and humanitarian norms to attend their duties for which they are hired and drawing their remunerations which the tax payers are contributing to the public exchequer. Their absence from duties cannot be justified any way, when the absence is unauthorised. And by all yardsticks one measures, the 12 doctors' absence was unauthorised. It definitely falls within the jurisdiction of punishment.

It is really surprising that the BMA, headed by Dr M A Majed who happens to be a reputed doctor and a leader, has not been able to see the default and negligence of the doctors and also supports that there should not be any monitoring and vigilance by a team selected by the Govt. It is also

surprising that Dr Majed succumbed to the pressure of the delinquent doctors and their colleagues of, perhaps, similar delinquent mentalities.

May Allah bless the people of Bangladesh and desist them from such illogical demands and actions as those put forward by BMA.

A citizen
Dhaka

Housing for govt workers

Sir, I was pleased to see the article by Suhel Ahmed, Director of the House Building Finance Corporation, about the housing of garment factory working women, a vital topic that has had far too little previous attention.

Your readers may be interested to know that an all-day workshop on the topic was

held on August 9 of this year, co-organized by Professor Nazrul Islam, Director of the Centre for Urban Studies, Mashuda Khatun Shefali, Executive Director of Nari Uddog Kendra (NUK), Centre for Women's Initiatives) and myself, a researcher on the topic as a Fulbright Scholar.

Suhel Ahmed and others presented well thought-out talks and useful comments at this workshop, the first to be devoted to this topic. There is now a community of people including Government officials, developers, factory owners and NGOs interested in collaborative approaches to addressing the housing problem of female garment factory workers. A summary of the workshop's proceedings is available from NUK, tel. # 325756.

Katherine Dunham
USIS, Dhaka