

How Crime-prone We are

A murder in every three and a half hours, a dacoity almost with the same frequency and a mugging in every two hours and 15 minutes. So a story goes, cataloguing the crime rates. No one could be blamed if he or she thought it to be a story from the other side of the Atlantic.

Over just a year serious crimes like dacoity, murder and mugging have registered two to four-fold rise. Socio-political stability has a lot to do with the rise in crime incidents. There is no sign that 1995 will bring that stability and hence there is every likelihood of this year's crimes overtaking the past year's tally.

In a situation like this how is the administration bracing itself to meet the challenges of the anti-social forces? Overly preoccupied with politics no government can fully concentrate on social justice and the law and order situation. This has happened last year and signs are clear the same will be the case this year also.

Close-to-life Films

Information Minister Shamsul Islam has obviously opted to play safe in talking about our nation's exertions in the film medium. He has preferred to play for the umpteenth time the old record about the need of making close-to-life - jibon-ghonishtho - films and the government's pledge to support this was repeated in toto to boot.

Successive governments have co-operated even as accomplices and abettors in the more than criminal operations mounted perennially on our culture and arts through celluloid. Look at the costumes and the setting, the subject matter and the period, the mainstream Bangladeshi film is something very truly out of this world.

This is stranger than a hundred entries in the Ripley book that you can buy everything produced everywhere in the world through our fast conversion to the market economy, films continue to be protected wholly not through a tariff wall but by outright banning of foreign films.

The Jinxed Box

At home BTV is a much maligned butt of derision if not jeer. Across the border it is, however, the name of a rather popular daily show in the Bangali-speaking zones of India.

No, it is not that BTV is scoring without having any real merit. Although it has recently taken a sorry plunge, the BTV plays, particularly the serial ones have been attracting vast audiences ever since the commissioning of its studios at the fag-end of '64.

The recent fall in the BTV's programme quality comes in tandem with the phenomenal spread of the dish antenna - the two threatening to wean away for good the nationwide audience so long tied down to the national TV.

But when that freedom will be here, that's a million-dollar question. None too soon, for sure. And contributor number one to BTV's growing unpopularity is the predominance of dry, almost dead, chunks of unabashedly overt programmes of political propaganda with no pretensions to show quality whatsoever.

EARLIER I pleaded that since money is going to rule, at the time of the next election, it cannot be free and therefore not fair, in spite of the best of caretaker government, a strong, independent Election Commission and whatever legal safeguards are adopted between now and the next election season in 1996.

And, that money will rule because of poverty. It is true that we have been poor in the past, but there were elections when money could not pull it out in favour of those who were moneyed.

Now in this highly homogeneous, one language, one culture and overwhelmingly one religion country, issues involving our basic rights to live will hardly ever come up for decision through the ballot. It could happen in an autocracy but the resolution would come through means other than the ballot box.

So long we remain poor, we will continue to live in a society of unequals where neither freedom will last nor fairness prevail. However, can we be poor but a democratic society?

Free and Fair Election

The struggle for a free and fair election is no doubt the struggle for a democratic society. However, if in the process, the civil society is lost - we are doomed for good.

No, it cannot be since poverty is not shared by all. Democracy, like charity, must begin at home. Our multiple standards within the household is the beginning of the breakdown of the freedom and fairness for which the streets are full of demonstrations as well as injured political leaders (thank God by rubber bullets only).

We are most undemocratic in our attitudes within households. We have no qualms about beating up our maids and servants. If the father is the autocrat within the household, the boss would tend to be the same in the office.

Out in the streets, the inequalities are so obvious. Taxes on the cars have been lowered so that fortunate few can afford them, streets are cleared of rickshaws so that cars can move faster while the number of buses remain few as usual.

Other countries experiencing rapid economic growth. Unless we can ensure 900 working shifts per annum, manufacturing would not be competitive in spite of low wage rates. These are significant considerations of national priority. Unfortunately, certain self-interests are working against the national interests.

The gross inequalities in our society cannot be removed overnight. Neither it can be done through politics alone. First and foremost, what is required for equity and democracy is sustained economic growth for at least the next two decades at eight to 10 per cent per annum.

The number of working days within a year in Bangladesh is estimated to be 250 only against 300 in all

and let us see how many shops and factories remain closed. Hartals mean rickshaw-pullers must go hungry, since there is no demand for their services even if they are allowed to ply. No body has any right to shut down the national economy, not even the government.

Recall 1971, Bangabandhu only gave the command on 7th March and the entire nation followed. It was spontaneous. If the feelings of the people are the same in favour of caretaker government - the way

training in political responsibility at the local level which is away from the centre and this relieves the centre of many of the decisions that need to be taken and perhaps can best be taken at the local rather than at the national level.

Our past experience on formation of local government was not very pleasant. Let's take the instance of Gram Sharker (village government), the lowest unit of the local government. The units were running the Gram Sharker, i.e., it must acquire the right to form Gram Sharker through its activities. If it is distributed like relief materials the same will become a meaningless institution.

Such is the criterion of forming effective local government and from this it can be understood that mere formation of a unit of local government is not a sufficient condition of its purposes. Therefore, it can be said that, where despite being a smaller unit the implementation of Gram Sharker did not work in the right way because of its super-imposed formation, how a Division can be useful to the people in the existing structure?

So it is high time to reconsider the utility of the movement for more Divisions. The concerned quarters may even suggest to abolish the existing Divisions instead of creating more. Let us fix our target to build an effective local government system for ensuring mass participation in development activities for growth and prosperity.

It cannot be ignored that there is no alternative to effective local government for ensuring participation of the people in the development process. But the participants should be given ample time to get prepared to be associated with the process, which was never allowed in the past.

It is worth mentioning here that the (Divisional) Commissioner of Chittagong is assigned to run the judiciary as Session Judge of three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts, which, of course, is an exception and as such cannot be generalised.

To the Editor...

Russian invasion of Chechnya. Sir, Russian President Boris Yeltsin himself had signed a decree on December 8, 1991 proclaiming the dissolution of the USSR. As a result all the republics of the former Soviet Union automatically got separated from each other and became independent.

We are surprised and shocked why the Russian President did not send troops to breakaway republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and now why on the one hand he is shedding crocodile tears and on the other hand he is shedding the blood of thousands in Chechnya?

We strongly condemn the double-faced policy of Boris Yeltsin and demand immediate withdrawal of the Russian troops from Chechnya. We feel that after the end of the cold war the Russian invasion of Chechnya is a threat to world peace.

We would request the UN Security Council to impose economic sanctions against Russia for her aggression and protect the freedom and human rights of the people and help solve the Chechnya issue through discussions.

O H Kabir Dhaka

other countries experiencing rapid economic growth. Unless we can ensure 900 working shifts per annum, manufacturing would not be competitive in spite of low wage rates. These are significant considerations of national priority.

Unfortunately, certain self-interests are working against the national interests. On the other hand, if there is popular support in favour of hartals, then let there be no coercion

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From the above it is seen that under the present structure, a Divisional headquarter does not have anything more to do for changing the fate of the people except discharging a few cases of land dispute. In that case what argument the organisers of Division implementation movement are putting forward to impress the people is not clear.

Considering the extent and nature of poverty and the ignored existence of the people

Down sharply...

At the moment the road-divider has been extended only a few miles beyond Mirpur. But this needs to be extended upto Aricha. Of course for this, the road may need to be widened. And widening the road for this purpose is well justified.

It may not be out of place to mention here that accidents on Airport road has declined sharply after the construction of a road-divider there a few years ago.

I appeal to concerned ministry to think about the matter seriously and do something in this regard.

Salch Ahmed Choudhury Dhaka Cantonment

Resignation of opposition MPs. Sir, The activities of our politicians, especially those who are in the opposition are very much distressing. These high dignitaries, as it appears,

to attend to his patient at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on a half day and as a result, the patient dies, it would not only amount to the death of an individual; with it, the civil society would also degenerate into anarchy - moving away from the common definition of civilized modes of behaviour.

When a car is burning, as an aftermath of a political outcry, please remember that CNN will telecast, BBC will also do the same and the picture will appear in several leading dailies all over the world. We have nothing to gain and everything to lose in the present day world of instant communication. To an outsider it would appear that it is not only a car, but perhaps the whole country is burning since the nation is one of the poorest in the world.

The struggle for a free and fair election is no doubt the struggle for a democratic society. However, if in the process, the civil society is lost - we are doomed for good. The sphere of autonomous institution, protected by rule of law, in which men and women may conduct their everyday business freely and fairly, must be established first and the system cannot be interfered with at any cost.

We must ensure free and fair conduct of our day to day life and in the process, banish poverty, enjoy reasonable degree of security of life and standard of living. This is the global set within whose context the issue of free and fair election must secure its validity.

OPINION

The West's Policy in Bosnia was Designed to Fail

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed in Princeton, NJ, USA

A review of the chronology of the recent events in the Balkans clearly demonstrates that Britain and France never really planned to confront the Serbs, their World War I and II allies; their plan has all along been to contain the Muslims.

When Lord Owen unveiled, with much fanfare, the Vance-Owen plan to divide Bosnia-Herzegovina into autonomous ethnic provinces under a loose central government in April 1993, and the Serbs rejected it through a referendum that Owen himself called "sham," who ate his word? Not the Serbs!

Then the US formed a contact group with Russia, Britain, France and Germany, divided the country into Muslim-Croat and Serbian entities, and challenged the parties to accept the plan or face punishment. The Muslim-Croats accepted the plan and the Serbs called the West's bluff yet again. The net result of the Serb's rejection was not punishment, but the loosening of sanctions against the Bosnian Serbs' sponsors in Serbia, on a dubious promise of cooperation.

In reality, the West has repeatedly told the Bosnians: we will not defend you, we will not let you defend yourselves! The UN created "safe havens" where unarmed Bosnians were going to be safe from Serbian shelling.

Britain and France steadfastly refused to level the playing field by lifting the unfair arms embargo against the Bosnians. It will result in more killing and will endanger their ground forces, they said. The Serbs now occupy the "safe haven" of Bihar, continue to destroy the lives and properties of thousands of innocent civilians, and have taken UN peacekeepers as hostages. What do the UN and the West do? They do not call in NATO air strikes, instead, with a straight face simply declare, "our policy in Bosnia has failed."

When Boutros Boutros-Ghali showed up for his much anticipated meeting with Karadzic at Sarajevo airport, Karadzic forgot to show up! Undaunted, the plucky Secretary General threatened, without authority, to withdraw the UN forces from Bosnia. He need not bother. The British will make sure that their agent, Lt. Gen. Sir Michael Rose, will carry out London's mission in Bosnia until all Muslims are strangled!

US Defense Secretary William Perry asserts that the Serbian gains cannot be reversed. Where was Secretary Perry when the lightly armed Bosnian army liberated close to one hundred square miles of territory from the Serbs only a few weeks ago? There is no telling what they can do if the arms embargo is lifted.