

## Lawlessness and Eid

Devils never run short of pretexts, so goes an old Bangla adage. The incorrigibly corrupt and criminal therefore are not expected to discriminate a festival that is at once sacred and takes its inspiration from the greatest of sacrificial spirits from the normal course of life. For a few days before the Eid-ul-Azha, a flurry of activity revolved around selling and buying of sacrificial animals. But with every passing year, this marketing operation has been turning into a nightmare, thanks to illegal extortion. Informed observers have said that this year around tolls paid at several points might have contributed to a 10 to 15 per cent rise in the prices of sacrificial animals. How a sacred occasion was turned into a mass-scale extortion!

What is the message then? The message is quite simple. It is a further confirmation in clear and loud terms of the endemic problems of lawlessness. The law-breakers have become so daredevil that they are refusing to differentiate between ordinary and special occasions. The rise of anti-social elements is posing a great threat to our economic and commercial sectors. The death of two businessmen on consecutive days in the city just before the festival exposed the vulnerability of commercial life here. Attacks on cash counters or on people carrying money and the systematic toll collection from sellers and buyers of cows are not isolated incidents.

In fact, the extortionists and muggers are, in most cases, the same people. It is essentially a law and order problem that has grown in an inverse proportion with the failure of the law enforcing agencies. In the face of an increasing crime rate the authority seems to have given up. At least that is the general impression. As a result, society as a whole seems resigned to anti-social activities out of frustrations. It is therefore time that the authority made a serious effort to salvage its reputation as a crusader against the anti-social forces. People need to be convinced that the law enforcers are on their side and are sincere and tough in dealing with the goons. This society, known for its tremendous courage, has recently become powerless and helpless before a surge of terrorism of social, economic and political variety. Can we expect all political parties to devise ways to rid us of musclemanny?

## Haemorrhage in Kashmir

The burning to ashes of the Islamic shrine at Charar-e-Sharif in Kashmir coincided with the Eid-ul-Azha festival. No wonder passions ran high: The backlash continues with bleeding. The only conclusion that onlookers can derive from the tragic eruption of violence is that the perpetrators designed it to be so. But this again, to us, sounds like a snap-shot view, because it has been basically a rude reminder of a cauldron-like violence-prone situation in Kashmir. Choice of dates and occasions may help dramatise things but it hardly goes to the heart of the Kashmiri problem.

Foreign news media representatives allowed into Charar-e-Sharif after violence had taken its toll quoted Indian authorities as saying that militants penetrating from Pakistan did it while local Kashmiris are said to have blamed the Indian security forces for the acts. Such trading of charges between the local Indian authorities and the Kashmiri Muslims on one level and between the Indian government and the government of Pakistan on another level, has been the standard reaction on either side following any violent eruption in the Kashmir valley.

While this has gone on all the time since 1948, it is the Kashmiri people who have suffered and bled but got nowhere near deciding their own fate which, in conjunction, have raised a worldwide concern for their human and political rights. In addition, the region which has seen two wars between India and Pakistan over Kashmir dreadfully visualises the spectre of another military confrontation between the two.

The Kashmir situation has gotten so embroiled over time that it no longer admits if any black-and-white perception in terms of existence of India-leaning or pro-Pakistani elements in Kashmir. The demand for a separate homeland has gained ground. Against this backdrop, time has run out for the tried out palliatives, rhetorics and 'getting the world to see what is happening there,' etc. Let there be a tripartite meeting of the parties concerned. The intent expressed in New Delhi on the occasion of the SAARC summit for talks between India and Pakistan should be followed up.

## Welcome BSRS

The specialised financial institutions and the banks in private sector have, by and large, cut a sorry figure in industrial lending during the 1994-95 fiscal which is nearing its end. With that knowledge, it sounds as a good, somewhat relieving piece of news that the once smeared BSRS which had been put out of operation since 1985 for being overburdened with unrecovered loans, is now getting ready for resumption of work. Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS) as a development finance institution (DFI) can make a useful contribution to the process of industrialisation by advancing loans to new entrepreneurs with limited capacity to commit money upfront. It was supposed to be lending expertise with the money to help set up small and medium size industries. However, it turned out — not as an isolated case though — to be a den of corruption and political influence-peddling of variegated sorts.

Since the BSRS is decidedly staying in the public sector after a privatisation bid has floundered on the donors' lukewarm response to the funding need to re-structure it, it has all the use for its past pitfalls to learn from. At least in one area the DFI looks well-launched: under a new re-financing scheme the government has helped reduce BSRS' cost of funds enabling it to ask for lower interest rates from the loanees in future. The other point of strength for it seems to be the cleaner slate on which it is going to deal with the government and a multilateral donor agency whose previous loans worth Tk 108 crore it has paid off.

In its new lease of life the BSRS will have two difficult bills to fit. First of all it has to rehabilitate sick industries and then bring into conclusion the loan recovery cases that have grown dusty on them during BSRS' long hibernation.

# The West Remembers Fall of Hitler. What should We Do?

**While Europe celebrates the fall of Hitler and Allied victory, the rest of the world can hardly sit back in comfort and remain complacent about the potential threat posed by doctrines similar to Nazism and Fascism. These vicious doctrines are often inseparable from autocracy and racism and are based on prejudice and hatred.**

THE Western World is commemorating in full splendour the fiftieth anniversary of the fall of Hitler. I said, the Western World, because the event is hardly causing any ripples in Asia, Africa or Latin America.

Of course many countries in these continents were directly or indirectly involved in the war against Hitler but there is little emotional involvement in recalling the event. In those days most of them were under colonial rule and had no say in the matter and some of them, such as India, even revolted against the British and launched the famous 'Quit India' movement in 1942.

It was an awkward moment for the British Raj. Though the movement was ruthlessly suppressed, it certainly hastened the end of the Empire. Half a century has dimmed the memory of these anti-colonial struggles and today former colonies are taking part in the celebrations as free nations without it seems any rancour. Even the President of Bangladesh, powerless though he is, has flown to London to join the glittering state functions and other festivities.

The heads of states of the allied powers including President Bill Clinton has taken part in the four-day ceremonies in four capitals, starting in London on 6 May where Britain's wartime Queen, Elizabeth the Queen Mother, joined thousands of veterans. In Paris the leaders joined the outgoing President Francois Mitterrand (as well as the president elect, Jacques Chirac) underneath the Arc de Triomphe to watch as military units paraded down the Champs Elysees. They travelled to Berlin where Chancellor Helmut Kohl presided at a commemoration of the Nazi surrender. The emphasis in Germany was on

the country's renaissance as a democratic member of the European Union and the NATO. Thereafter, in Moscow, the state and government heads and their retinues have attended ceremonies that are described as the most lavish since the coronation of Czar Nicholas II in 1896.

It is quite natural that different nations have different memories of the war which we usually describe, following the Anglo-American practice, as the Second World War though the Russians remember it as the Great Patriotic War. They believe, and I think with much justice, that the West has underestimated their role in defeating Hitler and his Nazi hordes. Their role, one must acknowledge in retrospect, was one of unparalleled sacrifice and heroism.

Twenty seven million people of the Soviet Union perished. Of this huge number, two-thirds were civilians. In the Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union, 1700 towns, 70,000 villages, 6 million homes, 32 thousand factories, 65 thousand kilometers of railroad and 1000 collective farms were destroyed and burnt. The figures are indeed staggering but not surprising because in March 1941, in declaring war against the Soviet Union, Hitler said, "We will certainly destroy the Russian army and the state. This will be a war of destruction." Obviously he meant what he said. The death of 27 million people is not only an convincing testimony of the brutality of the Nazis but the total resistance offered by the Russians regardless of loss in human or material terms.

Those who were old enough to remember the progress of the war in Europe in the early forties will surely recall the great battles fought by the Russians in defending Leningrad, Moscow and Stalingrad. In November 1941, Hitler's forces had reached the outskirts of Moscow about 30 kilometer from the city and the whole world was breathlessly waiting for Moscow's fall. But the Russians stood their ground. In defending both Moscow and Leningrad the civilians, without exception, not only joined the Red Army in fighting the invading

the northern coast of France by the Allied forces under the leadership of Gen Eisenhower. From that point onwards it was only a matter of time. Germany surrendered unconditionally on 8 May, 1945.

Fifty years after the war ended, one can see, in hindsight, its utter futility. Why was it fought? Why such a great nation as the Germans got caught in the madness of a demented man? What did they want to do after they won the war? The explanation, if one can come up with a rational one, is that Hitler wanted to establish the global supremacy of the

While Europe celebrates the fall of Hitler and Allied victory, the rest of the world can hardly sit back in comfort and remain complacent about the potential threat posed by doctrines similar to Nazism and Fascism. These vicious doctrines are often inseparable from autocracy and racism and are based on prejudice and hatred. One finds them in different parts of the world though they may appear in new and misleading garb. In Germany the Neo-Nazis, a small minority, are again raising their head and in Italy the Neo-Fascists have reappeared. In fact, in Italy they have become a political force to reckon with. But I am thinking about the rise of totalitarianism in the guise of religious fundamentalism in different countries, particularly in South Asia. Religious fundamentalism can assume as brutal a form as the bigotry and chauvinism of the racists. Regimentation, forced conformity with a particular set of ideas, beliefs and practices, denial of human rights and the persecution of those who dare oppose the system are essentially what these fanatical groups are preaching.

Nazis and Fascists followed the same brutal techniques. Do we not see these trends in many countries of Asia and Africa? In fact, anti-fascist forces have every reason to feel concerned.

In Bangladesh politics, for instance, the religious right has paid lip service to democracy but its activities do not inspire any confidence in their commitment to democracy

and human rights. They believe in regimentation, armed cadre and brutal suppression of all those who oppose them. One witnessed these methods being applied by the Shibir activists in Chittagong and Rajshahi Universities. Admittedly, these elements are still not strong enough to bid for state power but they are biding their time and maneuvering to undermine the democratic forces by all possible means.

In India, the BJP, a Hindu fundamentalist party, has steadily gained ground. Secular values and principles, championed by Nehru and enshrined in India's constitution, does not seem to have prevented the rise of this party which is essentially based on hatred and religious chauvinism. The rise of the Shiv Sena in the Maharashtra state in the last election should be an eye-opener to those who do not perceive or appreciate the gravity of the danger posed by these Neo-Fascist forces.

Eternal vigilance, we are told, is the price of liberty. Looking around the world and surveying the scene in the sub-continent I consider it to be a matter of urgency to remain alert and united in resisting the anti-democratic forces. Europe has paid a heavy price for its failure to stand up to the danger when there was still time. Must we permit these hydra-headed monsters to rise and spread their tentacles in our societies? Recognizing the danger, president Bill Clinton, addressing American veterans said: "you could not banish the forces of darkness from the future. We confront them now all around the world and painfully, here at home." In Bangladesh too the forces of darkness must be resisted before it is too late.

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



Germans but played as important a part as the military.

The battle for the defence of Stalingrad lasted for six months in which the German forces sustained massive losses of men and war materials including 2000 tanks, 3000 aircraft and over 70,000 transport vehicles. Ignoring Hitler's orders, the German Commander surrendered with over 300,000 troops. This was the real turning point of the war. The successful defence of Moscow, Leningrad and Stalingrad raised the morale of the Red Army and signalled the beginning of the end of Hitler's mad adventure. On 6 June 1944 the long-awaited second front was opened along

German race. Reflecting on this, Mr Hans Dietrich Genscher, who was foreign minister of Germany from 1974 to 1992 said, "Fifty years after World War II, the Germans have drawn lessons from history. War, prejudice, hatred and nationalism must be overcome including the new national egoism in Europe today, a central danger for the continent because it could lead to new nationalism and then chauvinism. Because this egoism begins in the hearts and minds of people, we must struggle together to draw the right lessons from history, from the dark chapters but also from those that give us hope."

# Use of Government Transports in Bangladesh

**The present mess in the use of government transports may be cleared by curtailing private use of government transports to the maximum, privatisation of government transports, expansion of public transports in the private sector, and finally, improvement of traffic management in the city area.**

THERE is hardly anything right in the manner in which government transports are being presently used in Bangladesh. It has nothing to do with this or that government. This situation has evolved over a period of time from bad to worse. Let us focus on the Secretariat to illustrate this point. It is well known that the Central Transport Pool under the Establishment Ministry is a hot bed of inefficiency, waste and corruption, fuelled by unhealthy trade unionism and vested interests. Officers entitled to full-time use of transports are virtually at the mercy of the drivers, mainly because as employees of the Central Transport Pool they are not under the direct control of the officers they are working for. Many unhappy incidents have taken place over the years on this account, and this state of affairs still persists. Misuse and theft of fuel is quite rampant, despite various checks and balances on paper. Similarly, maintenance is extremely poor, and vehicle parts are being pilfered and sold all the time. And yet, every year, a considerable number of transports is being acquired under the auspices of the Central Transport Pool, either as replacements or additions.

There are also other gross violations of the rules regarding the use of government transports. Firstly, many high-ups would use transports in addition to the one they are entitled to for full-time use. Secondly, many mid-level and junior officers, entitled to use government transports for official purposes only, are using them full-time, which obviously includes private use. Both these wrongdoings are generally fuelled by pressure from the family. Besides setting the worst possible examples, such practices are also robbing them of their moral right to discipline drivers and other petty officials involved in corruption.

inefficiency and high-handedness in the use of government transports. There are also problems with the rules themselves. For example, the payment rate for private use of government transports is so nominal that it is not sufficient even to cover normal maintenance. Similarly, the overtime rate for drivers is a pittance which has remained unrevised for many years.

It seems to me that at a time when the whole world is supporting privatisation and downsizing of government, we are still languishing in the false complacency of yesteryears. Indeed, we can ill afford to have such a huge number of transports at the disposal of the government, particularly when we have demonstrated our utter inability to manage these. It is from this perspective that we have to take a number of urgent steps to improve the existing situation. Firstly, fulltime use of government transports by officers should be discontinued from a specified date. But before that all those officers enjoying this facility should be provided with loans on easy terms to purchase personal cars. At the same time, they should be given a cash equivalent of the rule they are now provided with. Free driver services should also be given, but the driver should be placed at the disposal of the Ministry of the Officer, rather than retained with the Central Transport Pool as is the present practice. This will, to some extent, ensure the driver's accountability which is now very lax. It will also break up the unhealthy trade unionism in the Central Pool. In the second phase, loan facilities on easy terms for purchase of cars of a smaller capacity should be extended to mid-level officers, but without

any entitlement of free fuel and driver. Below that level, officers should be given loans on easy terms for purchase of motor cycles. The magnitude of proposed loans should be realistic in relation to the market prices of vehicles. In the short run, the loans may pose a burden but in the loan term these should lead to a satisfactory situation for all parties.

## Making Government Work

by Analyst

Secondly, the government should forthwith stop purchase of transports, with a moratorium for a period of at least five years, after which the situation may be reviewed. A small number of cars of the Central Pool should be distributed among various Ministries for use by foreign dignitaries and for other official work according to clearly laid down procedures. In other words, the Central Pool should be broken up into a number of small transport pools under the Ministries. The smallness of the pool should enable its strict supervision and monitoring by the Chief Accounting Officer of the Ministry.

Thirdly, there should also be a ban on the fresh recruitment of drivers, and those drivers retiring should not be replaced. However, their overtime rate should be substantially increased, and particularly those drivers serving VIPs should be given priority in housing allotment. Fourthly, the remaining cars of the Central Pool, that is, after distribution among the Ministries, should be sold out in open auction to members of the public. The Central Pool

should ultimately be wound up and its officers and staff should be absorbed in other Ministries. Fifthly, the existing rules regarding private use of government transports will have, to be more stringently applied but this can be done only when people at the top are not themselves violators of the rule. A fresh circular from the government on this issue, followed by wide publicity, expressed

arranged now, so in the short term, the problem of traffic jams and congestion (adversely affecting the movement of office goers) will have to be remedied by gearing up traffic management in terms of better service by the traffic police (including use of volunteers on an honorarium basis) so that they can ensure stricter adherence to traffic rules by drivers and members of the public, proper registration of vehicles and issuance of driving licenses, etc. These measures are such that they can be implemented here and now, provided the government ex-

## OPINION

### Holy Traffic!

M M Ahmad

BRTA's go-slow process on the eradication of fake driving licenses, vide Star staff report (April 19) is only a small niche of the overall modern traffic control system not yet introduced in Bangladesh, transitioning from the bullock-cart stage to computerized fuel-injection technology in motor vehicles. It is shocking to read daily about the death and injury toll due to motorized traffic accidents on the highways. The mysterious silence of the administrators and the public vehicular apex bodies is not all mysterious, as this is the standard we have come to expect from all concerned in not discouraging the numerous deaths and injuries on the roads. The newspapers give more prominence to abortive political news to increase circulation. The public awareness can only be aroused in this country by the politicians (what halo!), and the latter are not interested in non-political traffic!

The ministers speak daily to the public and in public, but it is one-way non-communication. Each minister may very kindly make time to meet the press once every week, and face the usual barrage of topical questions (not prearranged), so that the public feeling/view is ventilated, and the citizens feel a sense of security that the authorities were seriously working on the current problems of the nation.

We hear from the official sources that the mass media have been given complete freedom, but why the officers in the public sector shy of meeting the press? This outdated rule may be reviewed for amendment for the same of transparency in the administration. (The undersigned is directed to inform that [blah blah] in this information age; if the elected representatives of the people have no time, or are incompetent, in feeding the public on the measure taken by the ruling regime to set things right. The citizens are given no scope to grill the rulers. One-way speech is no communication — ask anybody anywhere in the world. There is silence all around

on the abnormal rise in traffic accidents. The Traffic Police is not talking. The Prime Minister is silent, along with her Ministers. The Ministries have nothing to say (life is cheap). Some condolence reactions are noticeable, then the great silence reigns till the next accident. What about preventive measures (instant, applicable from the next day), and changes in rules and procedures? The supervisory role is practically absent due to chronic shortage of staff and know-how. The prosecution and conviction figures are not released. There are no deterrent actions — the merry fatalities go unabated — mostly due to errors of judgement and non-observance of good-driving practices by the rash and non-disciplined drivers. A good driver, driving safely, can get involved due to the other driver's fault. When two bad drivers want to show off, the effect is fatal!

The insurance (compulsory) premium on public vehicles may be drastically increased, as a deterrent measure, with heavy discount for no reported accident during the year.

The public transport apex bodies (associations, samities etc of owners, drivers, conductors etc) are silent on traffic accidents, but talk loudly about raise of fares (they never issue condolence statement!) This is inhuman callousness silently tolerated by the public and the administration. The responsibility of the apex bodies may be reviewed, to ensure self-regulatory practices.

There may be meetings and seminars every week (for 52 weeks) on the traffic problems (including too many pedal rickshaws in the cities). Recently there was a Sports seminar at national level. This is a good trend, and such think-tank type of discussion may be extended to all the other sectors. At least one plenary session may be open to all citizens who request for the microphone to speak out. The daily timing of the meetings may be extended to late evening on demand.

In the last analysis, talking bunk is better than remaining silent!

## To the Editor...

### Economic use of electricity

Sir, My attention has been drawn to a news item recently published in a section of the press saying that as many as 34 ministries owe DESA Tk 1.3 billion.

Surprisingly enough, the Ministry of Jute, which has actually cut a sorry figure in upholding the image of our jute as 'the golden fibre', has topped the list of defaulters with an amount of Tk 505.21 million.

Such an enormous size of the outstanding electricity bills in a country where power is so scarce and per capita consumption of electricity is so low may be a matter of concern for every conscious citizen.

Virtually, the generated capacity of PDB is only 1600 megawatts. During the peak hours the country's demand tends to rise up to 2000 megawatts which shows a clear shortfall of 400 megawatts — the reason why the load-shedding has been a regular phenomenon almost everywhere

in the country.

The grid for the supply of power is said to have reached less than 20 per cent of the population of our country. In other words, till now about 80 per cent of our people do not have an access to electricity.

DESA's assigned task, as a matter of fact, is distribution and collection of revenues. The revenue collected by DESA is the major source of PDB's overhead and capital expenditures.

The indiscriminate use of electricity of various government, semi-government and autonomous bodies without accountability is questionable and cannot be allowed to continue for the greater interest of the country.

They ought to be made responsible for the payment of their bills. In order to keep a tight control over the misuse of this invaluable resource, the departmental heads of these offices should be held responsible and made accountable.

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, may we request our Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to

kindly put up this issue for discussion in the cabinet meeting and take necessary course of action in the future.

Nitin Roy  
North Bashabo, Dhaka

### RAJUK and rules

Sir, I have built with my own funds, the fifth floor of my residence situated on a 12 feet lane in Dhaka city. Unfortunately, my plan was approved for four storey only. When I contacted RAJUK to get my revised plan approved, they said that the plan could not be passed due to height restriction in relation to their road formula.

Now my question is whether these laws are made for those without, allegedly, connections and cannot manage the right persons only? A few hundred cases can be cited where houses exist in this city caring for no formula applicable, road or otherwise. In my case, I agree that there is a slight discrepancy but I ask RAJUK authorities to visit

the lane just opposite the petrol pump in New Elephant Road. The other day I went to a furniture shop there. Right beside the building where the furniture shop is situated, there is a seven storied building under construction which can be seen from the main road too. It particularly drew my attention, since I am a sufferer and noted that the floor has been extended on all sides keeping very little space at sides, front and back. I learnt from a worker there that a builder is making two seven storied houses side by side (the foundation of the second building was also complete).

I therefore, as a citizen of a democratic country demand that the authorities be fair in execution of the rules and regulations. If some people can get away by showing their thumb to RAJUK, then why are we deprived of similar rights?

I will continue to observe what steps RAJUK takes in this regard before referring it to a higher forum — perhaps the Parliament.

A city dweller