The Baily Star

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Ohaka, Sunday, August 27, 1995

Costly Insecurity

People of Chittagong City can be blamed for reacting in a frenzied manner to the recent high incidence of child-lifting. But on a second thought one might sympathise with them on their predicament, if not accept their taking the law in their own hands. Child-lifting is not a problem confined to Chittagong or any other particular city, even remote villages are not immune from this despicable malady.

So, why should some Chittagonians be beating innocent persons on this score? Not that they enjoy inflicting cruelty on an innocent victim, but they do it perhaps out of an extended sense of insecurity. People who feel insecure - in this case the insecurity concerns their dear children - are likely to be aggressive. Particularly when they know they are responding to a social malaise.

That by taking the law in their own hands they too are committing a crime is conveniently overlooked by them. But even a more serious point at issue - and in fact the cause behind the chaotic and anarchic situation - is that somebody is not doing his job properly. In this case it is the law enforcing agency that has failed to provide the needed security cover for children. Gaps in the exercise of social responsibilities and a breach of social trust or contract over the years seem to prompt some people to mete out summary punishment on mere suspicion. Their pent-up emotions spill over and, in the absence of the real culprit, they pounce on somebody else at the slightest provocation.

However, this is a dangerous drift for a society. The suspects must necessarily be taken to the police rather than be handled by a mob. That the police have urged people not to take the law in their hands may go unheard unless the law enforcers demonstrate their effectiveness in dealing with the child-lifters. The fact that mastans are taking advantage of the confusion to snatch people's valuables after branding them child-lifters shows what a big hole the law-enforcers will have to plug.

City's Livability

The feedback we have so far received on our Save Dhaka campaign is indicative of public impatience to see things happen in Dhaka city on the positive side of life. The experts' brainstorming sessions have no doubt helped churn out some implementable suggestions for an early upgradation of living conditions in the city.

Quite true, the recommendations that bear the potential for radically changing the face of city-life would require to be backed up by a strong political will to fructify. When the polls approach, a ruling party seldom ventures to take steps bearing politico-social implications lest the urban vote-bank be eroded. Since this is an election year the government is not quite expected to be at its courageous best in matters of dealing with the slums, hawkers, road encroachers, unlicensed rickshawpullers and noise and environmental polluters. There is, nevertheless, another way of look-

ing at it. The countervailing idea to weigh with the government may be to do something tangible to win the voters' gratitude and confidence for the coming polls. Besides, must everything be seen through the prison of electoral expediency when the livability of the capital city is coming under a thicket of clouds for all to be equally affected by? The population of the metropolis is estimated to be one crore 20 lakh in five years' time without a corresponding improvement being visualized in the services of public utility.

So, some steps must be taken without any loss of time whatsoever. These relate to cleaning up Dhaka city, forcing the vehicle owners and operators to use anti-pollution devices, which are quite reasonably priced, subjecting the industries to anti-effluence laws, phasing out unlicensed rickshaws and inducing import of transports in the private sector to replace dilapidated vehicles wholesale.

The government can, at least, make a start in the organisational parametre such as creating a single coordinating agency for all kinds of city development work.

Remembering Nazrul

Although nineteen years have gone by since the passing away of national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, research output on his works has remained at a lamentably low level. We have also noted a certain dearth of discussions on his life and works except on anniversary days.

All this is greatly regrettable because the ideals he stood for are gaining ground and getting vindicated with the passage of time. His literary lore revolves around emancipation of the downtrodden men and women and respect for gender equality — ideas that are closest to the hearts of the global intelligentsia today.

He was — more to the point — against all forms of fanaticism and bigotry at a time when the world was, in these respects, much less complicated than it is today, in a highly politicised and lethal environment.

So, there is a lot to learn from his literary philosophy. The Nazrul Institute must promote interpretative research on his works along modernist lines. It should not rest content with just a better presentation of Nazrul's

mementoes at Darirampur or Kazir Shimla. Nazrul will remain an ever-lasting memory through the thousands of lyrics, including stirring patriotic songs he has bequeathed not only to our literature but to world literary traditions as well. His works merit wider

translation into major world languages. Our debts to Nazrul Islam are not repayed by calling him the national poet. In fact, by conferring the title on him, we have accepted a greater responsibility to plumb newer depths of his works.

It's a Question of Our Respect for Law

It is hard to believe that the order of the Hon'ble High Court can be disobeyed by any

government agency in such a blatant manner. Instead of carrying out the order of the High

Court the agency victimized the person who sought redress from the High Court.

CCORDING to a BSS report, Prime Minist-🗘 📘 er Begum Khaleda Zia while addressing a group of lawyers on August 22 in her 30 Hare Road residence, said granted the license to Koko 3 and Koko 4. Since the cancthat there can be developellation was done without asment and prosperity only if signing any reason, the ownthere is rule of law and a democratically elected govers submitted a writ petition to the Hon'ble High Court ernment in the country. No seeking redress. Justice one can possibly dispute the statement of the Prime Habibur Rahman Khan and Minister. Rule of law, in my Justice Ruhul Amin ordered view, is a basic pre-requisite that the operating license on for any progress in the counthis route given to Koko 3 and Koko 4 must remain in When the Prime Minister of the country re-afabeyance until 27 August and Ghazi and Sadim should be firms her faith in the rule of law, one should feel pleased given the opportunity to continue to ply on the route as and reassured. But wait a minute, let us look at another before. They also asked the authorities concerned to report before we feel pleased with ourselves. The Daily Janakantha of weeks.

19 August published a front

portedly a profitable one, was

cancelled on July 18, 1995.

Instead, the authorities

administrative changes, it

was the outright abolition of

the Upazila system. The

original idea of making the

thana the nerve centre of

administration came from

Akhter Hamid Khan during

the Pakistan days in the

form of Thana Training and

Development Centre (TTDC).

Ershad took it up and gave it

a shape under pressure from

the donor community, who

felt that under his pure and

simple autocratic regime.

such a decentralization

measure was the only way to

reach out to the vast majority

of people living in the rural

implementing the upazila

system, he ensured that

through "vote dacoity" and

similar nefarious practices.

mostly gangsters and thugs

Upazila Parishad (UZR)

Parishad was elected directly

by the entire adult population

of the upazila, the Upazila

Parishad was vested with

resources and power to carry

out substantial development

F there was one blund-

er of Himalayan prop-

ortion in the post-91

page report sub-titled "Koko High Court was received by the Inland Water Transport 3. 4. vs Ghazi Express 4 and Authority (IWTA) on August MV Sadim". The story's 8, 1995. In the light of the heading is the Bengali world "Dapot" which is not easy to decision of the High Court the operators of the MV translate because words such as power or authority do not Ghazi wanted to resumed operation on 11 August and carry the menace of the Bengali word. Since the story tried to dock at the terminal. But the Ghazi was not allowed has not been contested (at to use the terminal even after least I have not seen a rebutthe order of the High Court tal), there is no reason to was shown to the authorities. doubt its veracity. Let me give The owner of the Ghazi the gist of the story. submitted a petition to the MV Ghazi Express 4 and Chairman of IWTA on 12 MV Sadim had been plying August. The Chairman, inon the route Dhaka-Bholastead of honouring the order Burhanuddin since 1980. It of the High Court, lodged a has been alleged that the licase in the Kotowali Thana cense for these two boats to and the owner of Ghazi Mr operate on this route, re-

show cause within two

Delwar Hussain was arrested

by the police. He was pre-

sented to the court of a mag-

The order of the Hon'ble

istrate first class who granted him bail and commented that the case was not properly filed because there was a clear decision of the High Court in the matter.

Meanwhile. Delwar Hussain's house has been attacked and vandalized. The story boggles the mind, does it not? It is hard to believe that the order of the Hon'ble High Court can be disobeyed by any government agency in

use of power, uncontrolled greed for money and a subservient bureaucracy only too eager to please the influential person who happens to own these boats. I must, however. salute the judiciary for its bold refusal to kowtow to the high and mighty, at least in

this particular case.

After I have narrated this story, let us talk now about the "rule of law" in this country, and what apparently

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria

such a blatant manner Instead of carrying out the order of the High Court the agency victimized the person who sought redress from the High Court. The government agency went out of the way to file a case against this man for the benefit of the owners of Koko 3 and Koko 4. What a sad commentary on the sense of Justice of our officials! One presumes the Prime Minister is not unaware of the ownership of Koko 3 and Koko 4. In this case the poor owners of the Ghazi and Sadim stood in the way of a powerful competitor. There was clearly a combination of reckless mis-

constitutes the "rule of law" in the eves of the Prime Minister. Do we really have rule of law in Bangladesh today? How should we evaluate the Prime Minister's speech of August 22? Did she mean what she said? Alas, she does not seem to be aware of the irony of her speech. While she extols the virtues of the rule of law, the order of the Hon'ble High Court was being flouted in a most cavalier

pect that her family members would be most sensitive to the demands and responsibilities of her high office and

would exercise special restraint even in their commercial dealings. But there is no such restraint. The Prime Minister's statements. I am afraid, about her devotion to the Constitution and the rule of law will sound rather hollow if there if there is such a gulf between what she preaches and what she and her family practices.

Our political leaders

incessantly talk about uphold ing the rule of law but they seem to accept the rising tide of violence in their stride. Every day we read reports about the murder of political leaders, kidnapping of businessmen and other violent crimes in Dhaka and other cities but nobody seems to care. The govern ment is far too busy luring opposition MPs and other politicians by offering them rewards" and possibly respite from the operation of the law. Does the Prime Minister want to uphold the rule of law by sheltering in her party persons against whom there are pending criminal cases or outstanding bank loans?

The hypocrisy of the whole exercise is so obvious that the nation is getting used to such double-talk and Normally one would ex- insincerity. The moral climate of the society as a whole is taking a nose-dive as a result of the cynicism and hypocrisy of the leaders.

political leaders are most at fault is of limited value. The moral decay stretches right across our society. It erodes all our most cherished values and notions of justice and fair play. No one can escape the damage it has caused to our national psyche. When politicians are up for sale like common merchandise, there is something terribly wrong in the country. Let me conclude this article by joining my voice to that of all low abiding citizens in saying that upholding the rule of law is the supreme need of the

Attempts to assess which

What is happening to the owners of MV Ghazi and MV Sadim does not represent an isolated case of the misuse of official power. It flows from the erosion of our fundamental values. If the Prime Minister had genuine respect for law, the bureaucrats would not have dared to disregard the order of the High Court, politicians would not be up for sale to the highest bidder and murderers - including the killers of Bangabandhu - would be tried and punished. We must therefore, as a first step towards renewing the sacred pledges upon which Bangladesh was founded and combating the moral decay that threatens to overwhelm our national institutions, give the highest priority to upholding the rule of law and inculcating respect for the law. The survival of our young democracy depends on it.

Restoring the Upazila Parishad

If the democratic government wanted, it could have worked out a compromise between the Upazila Parishad and the local MP by legally associating the two in some amicable manner. Other alternatives could also have been explored. But instead of doing this, it decided to abolish the institution.

activities, and all government development organizations at that level were made responsible to the Upazila Parishad. But in practice centralization of the worst kind emerged mainly because of the vitiated elections to the UZP. When the new democratic government came to power in 1991, the general expectation was that the upazila system would be retained, the existing upazila areas. However, while chairmen would be superseded and fresh elections would be held to bring into power genuine representatives of the people. Instead of doing this, the government supporting his party became unfortunately chose to abolish Chairmen. In other words, in the upazila system lock, stock and barrel. It was like theory, it was genuine throwing the baby out with decentralization, since the Chairman of the Upazila the bath water. Why did this happen?

think this took place mainly because of an overt or covert consensus among most MPs from major political parties. namely the BNP, the Awami

League, the Jativa Party and the Jamaat, whatever may have been the side shows of protest. The reason is not far to seek. Most MPs, irrespective of political affiliation, did not want any powerful rival in the constituency in the form of an elected Upazila Parishad chairman, wielding

considered impotent and uśeless. In fact, such rivalry was quite acute even during the days of Ershad when bitter fights between Jatiya Party MPs and Jativa Party Upazila Parishad chairmen took place in public on occasion more than one. It must however, be mentioned here

Making Government Work

by Analyst

substantial power over development resources to build schools and roads. As the saying goes in Bengali, how can there be two Pirs in the same household? Although the MP is meant exclusively for making laws in the Jatiya Parishad, in the concrete conditions of Bangladesh, he/she must have the last say in all development matters within his/her constituency. Otherwise, he/she would be

that a small minority of MPs cutting across the entire political spectrum wanted reform but not abolition of the UZP, but theirs was a muted voice, a cry in the wilderness.

If the democratic government wanted, it could have worked out a compromise between the Upazila Parishad and the local MP by legally associating the two in some amicable manner. Other alternatives could also have been explored. But instead of doing this, it decided to abolish the institution. Even this abolition could have been justified if the government could create some other de centralized institution at a different level of, administration. Unfortunately, nothing of the sort has so far emerged, and now there is obviously no chance that anything in this direction will happen in the remaining period of the present government's term. The Zila Parishad Bill never went through, and nothing was done by way of putting in place any local government institution at the village level. although this was championed vociferously by the BNP ever since the Gram Sarkar days. So, what we have now in place is a one-tier elected local government in the form of the Union Parishad, with nothing below or above. The Upazila (now called Thana)

cials departmentally, obviously with very little effective autonomy or coordination. Domestic resource mobiliza-

tion at this level, which could have been geared up by an elected local body, could not take any shape. A lot of physical facilities created during the upazila days lie unutilized or underutilized. The NGOs have come to fill in some of the vacuum created by the abolition of the Upazila Parishad, but obviously, with limited legitimacy, they can never be a substitute for an elected body like the Upazila Parishad.

If we sincerely opt for good governance, we have to carry out democratic decentralization. We have already lost a lot of time. Add to this the blunder of outright abolition of the Upazila Parishad.

Nothing will be gained now by blaming one another, particularly since the guilt is collective. When the next democratic government comes to power after the general elections, its top priority should be restoration of the elected Upazila Parishad through consensus, perhaps under a new name. After all, what is in a name?

Democracy and elections

Sir, Following the Government of India Act of 1935 which envisaged provincial autonomy and effective responsible government over a large sphere of affairs, we imported democracy in our country from abroad i.e. England. Held the first general elections in our country in the year 1937 and elected A K Fazlul Hug as the first Chief Minister of Bengal (now independent Bangladesh and West Bengal, a province of India) under parliamentary form of gov-

ernment. From 1937 to 1995, during the last 58 years, we have gone through many trials and tribulations. In 1945 we held the second general elections in the country which ultimately resulted in the (partition of Bengal in 1947 into two parts i.e., i) East Bengal province (now independent Bangladesh) becoming a part of Pakistan and ii) West Bengal province becoming a part of India.

The third general elections which took place in our country was in the year 1955. It toppled the Muslim League government of East Bengal province (East Pakistan) and also terrified the Federal Government of Pakistan. As General Mohammad Ayub Khan of Pakistan took over power in a coup in 1958 he held two fishy elections in the year 1960 and 1965 which strengthened the hand of the dictator. The 4th important general elections which took place in the year 1970 led us to the independence in the year 1971.

sovereign state of Bangladesh the first general election was held in the year 1973 but unfortunately it caused harm to our democracy and introduced one party (BKSAL) rule in the country. Thereafter General Ziaur Rahman and later on General Mohammad Ershad held a few pretentious and ostentatious referendums and elections in the name of democracy. We had the last general elections in

the year 1991 which was

In the independent and

held free and fair under the caretaker government of former Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.

Now, considering these numerous historical facts and figures and various socioeconomic and political problems of our country we strongly feel that the general elections of 1991 is the ever best and the most important one. But we are struck with wonder and feel shocked as to which direction the general elections of 1991 is leading our nation?

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Beauty contests and the philosophy of life

Sir. I would like to respond (briefly) to your writeup on the Parliamentary Committee's unanimous resolution against encouraging female beauty contests (Miss Bangladesh).

The basic issue is the philosophy of life. It differs individually, and in societies; and has been changing marginally through the ages (at core we behave as human beings).

The Eastern mind is not the Western mind; in morality, and in other, aspects. Materialism is a way of life, especially in capitalistic and industrial society. Plain living and high thinking is also a way of life, practised by the We, whether as Muslims

or as Bangladeshis, are following the capitalistic philosophy — at least externally and officially. Advertising and competition are the rules of the game. There is no competition in nature (philosophically speaking). Products are advertised for sale, and more sale. The evils of consumerism are surfacing after several generations of

capitalism. It is worth a second thought why a woman should expose herself and advertise her beauty publicly, and draw attention to it. For whom, and what for? There are other similar situations: one dresses for whom - for one's own satisfaction, or for others, or to conform to the

mores of the society? How society changes?

I pause here for some feedback, before proceeding

Spectator Dhaka

Stranded Pakistanis

Sir, This is in reference to the letter written by M Abdul Wahab Khan on behalf of a group of Stranded Pakistanis and published in a section of the press late last week of May. Much have been written on the subject "Stranded Pakistanis and formation of relief committees" by Abdul Wahab Khan and others on different occasions. We had the opportunity to read all the letters with interest and we fully endorse the views expressed by them. We also appreciate the suggestions but would like to add the following conditions to the criteria laid down by them in their letters.

No member of the existing relief committees be allowed to contest in the elections. Only new persons be entertained to pave the way for new generation to come forward and shoulder the responsibility.

No office-bearer or worker either from SPGRC (Nasim Khan group) or SPGRC (Ejaz group) be allowed to contest the election in order to avoid giving it a political colour. Let the new elected committee have its own neutrality for smooth functioning.

nominee, nominated by the Deputy Commissioner for each committee to work and supervise the overall distribution of relief as Hony Magistrate. We have every hope that

the district administration. for the sake of neutral and peaceful election, will undoubtedly agree with our proposal.

M Haque For non-locals of Geneva Camp Mohammadpur, Dhaka

The Unsung City Schools

administration is run by offi-

School education in the Mujibul Haque cities or in the 'urban' areas selves to this sacred profesis on the increase. As a matsion and at the same time be ter of fact, the increasing able to save themselves from number of schools, the new boredom. That sounds too ones, opening up each year fine, doesn't it? But wait. makes many a person to Wait, and try to think about surmise that 'schooling' is an the place the school has been excellent 'business' as if to make one believe that 'business' was 'evil' or it

worked like a 'curse' for a society as far as it was connected with 'education'. No one has as yet said that schools should run free of cost' or that there ought not to be any tuition fee at these educational institutions. Nevertheless, one wonders if someone really wants that schools must give or render education at no cost. How often one hear that city schools 'charge' an exorbitant fee each month from each student. !! It is a pity no one bothers to keep 'track' of those schools which close down after running for two to five years on their own due to financial constraints. With the closure of each school the poor students lose their 'friends' or class-mates as well their 'dear' teachers. Their hearts are filled with sorrow and the eyes with tears. No one cares to notice or bother. Yet, whenever a new school opens it is generally believed someone is upto making money at the cost of the little children, or

their parents. Yes, running a school in the cities is very. very, very, very difficult. Not because it is difficult to start a school but because running There should be a Govt. a school 'honestly' is almost impossible. In the urban areas teach-

> Rather it is one of the (most) easiest one. A school may avail teachers even without having to pay her or him regular monthly remuneration or honorarium. There is no secret about it. Educated persons who 'love' teaching join in an institution not because they are in need of money but simply because

they wish to 'dedicate' them-

ers are not difficult to get

'housed'. How much does the land-lord take (money) each month for his premises? What is the amount of money as 'tax' taken by the concerned authority each month? At what 'rate' does the school have to pay the PWD and WASA in hard cash'? What or how much does it cost to buy the equipment needed to run the school smoothly? Where does the money come from to pay the 'darwan', the 'ayah', the cleaner? And to think of what amount of money the landlord has to pay as tax for the income he makes out of the school rent, as well the

amount of money the school

authority have to pay on 'a

commercial' basis to the vari-

ous departments each month

is too complicated an issue to

solve. Regardless of what a school earns if those demands of the concerned departments are not met in time no school can survive the unrecognized or the unregistered privately owned schools! It is an open secret that the government recognized or registered schools function smoothly because of certain privileges they are gifted with or enjoy or ac-

quire. Each year these schools have their 'yearly admission tests' for the school going boys and girls. Some schools 'demand' monetary benefits from the parents openly - too openly, for it is in the good book of the authorities concerned that each school can and have the right to receive 'donation' and this is lawful.

There is a special depart ment that functions as a government organization keeping records of all the recog-

nized as well as unrecognised schools of the cities. Each school authority has to submit a record of the number of students studying in class I to class V, the number of working days, the number of percentages of attendance of the children along with the number of teachers the schools have twice a year. The schools get no benefit from supplying this data although the 'department' may in ways which remains a mystery. However, some of the recognised schools or the government-run ones do receive books and yearly grants from the Education Ministry on a regular basis. And yet, the toiling privately owned schools go on functioning as long as they can survive.

Mention can be made of the Government Laboratory High School that was on the verge of total closure but survives till today due to two generous guardians who saved it some thirty years ago.

It is painful to note that at this juncture unrecognised schools need recognition from the concerned authorities in order to function as a full-fledged high school that can or will receive the same privileges from the Boards under which the schools function. Without recognition no schools should be allowed to send its students to appear in the SSC examinations held each year under the Boards.

What an irony! There does

not remain the chance for a school to 'prove its worth' by way of being in a competition with those that have been recognized by the concerned authorities. And has any one heard of any school being 'derecognized or whatever the term may be, for poor performance? Whereas if given the opportunity there may have been so many schools that would have proved to be better equipped with better students and received 'public' recognition.