

Where is the End of it?

Crime is seldom innovative. Murder continues as a roaring success in Bangladesh and proliferates interminably. So with crimes of less and non-violent nature. But in an ideally competitive market crime situation, it must be creative as well to rake in derived results. Mastans, the chandabaz extortionist variety, dis-obliged by the contractors of the under-construction Tk 10 crore modern emergency annex of the Dhaka Medical College, have sent them letters threatening dire consequences. To make things adequately convincing they accompanied their letter with three rounds of bullet.

Thanks to a police system that nobody puts his faith in, the bullet-letter proved convincing. From September 13 work has completely stopped on the project. Although the project director, Dr Jahangir has sworn to go ahead in spite of this, the contractors are not as ready to risk going to the morgue which they are not building anyhow. When will the work resume? After payment of the ransom money?

This shameful affair has been fronted by a leading daily and the work stoppage has entered its 44th day. No action so far. What then? Will the project be abandoned? No, comes a hesitant reply. A police outpost would be set up near the construction site and only after that work would resume. The job is already three and a half years behind schedule and cost overruns have overshoot the money available.

But why do we need this police outpost? The police and their controllers, the Home Ministry, must be knowing the criminals to their innards or there is no need to keep them draining the taxpayer's money. The goons have already rampaged the builder's site office. If the police cannot do anything now to inactivate them, what will a poor outpostful of them will do against a determined attack?

Police failure to contain mastans having political fall-back cushion is pushing the country to an environment of total lawlessness and anarchy. We want our hole society to keep a wakeful vigil on what happens to the DMCH emergency annex.

Railway Reform

What we were afraid would happen, is now happening with fearful regularity. We are referring to the deadly railway accidents that are becoming frequent. Whatever may be the immediate cause of these tragedies, the real cause lies at the gradual decline of the railway system as a whole.

To take just one example of the miserable state of Bangladesh Railway (BR), out of a total 274 engines, 209 have passed the period of major overhaul. They are being used regularly with no plans for either replacement or repair.

Without going into the specificity of the recent accidents, we can draw an overall conclusion that they are, in the ultimate analysis, the result of a system in decline. A look at the state of railway compartments, railway tracks, railway stations, the goods trains, the signal equipment, and everything related to the railways, one is struck by the deterioration of every aspect of BR's operation. Except perhaps for a recent project to computerise ticketing at a selected number of stations, practically nothing has been done to modernise BR. With decreasing revenue, extreme mismanagement, over employment, misallocation of limited resources, improper financial planning and absence of a highly committed, determined and visionary leadership the once profit-earning Railway has become a serious burden on the exchequer.

With the growth of population, towns and cities and ever increasing need to move greater and greater amount of goods and people, BR should have registered a phenomenal rise. Yet, with every passing day, it has been losing out to the road transport, leading to greater loss and more burden on public exchequer.

Financial loss by BR, however reprehensible, is at least bearable. Loss of life through frequent accident is not. So BR must take all necessary steps to rejuvenate itself, the starting of what will have to be by ensuring safety to its users.

ROK Investors

A high-power 28-member South Korean investors' team arrived in Dhaka yesterday to make an on-the-spot survey to set up a 180 acre exclusive Korean EPZ. They are also likely to explore other areas of investment. But everything will hinge on how much progress is made on the Korean EPZ question. The agreement, in principle, about such an EPZ was made during Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to Republic of Korea last May. It is on the basis of that understanding that this Korean team is here. We extend a hearty welcome to them, and express our hope that they will find everything to their liking. We want to insist that all possible steps be taken to finalise this deal as quickly as possible. If we think that establishing an exclusive Korean EPZ is to our national interest — as it would seem by the PM's commitment — then we should do it as expeditiously and as smoothly as possible. Let not our usual bureaucratic procedures mess up this opportunity.

We urge all government departments and private bodies connected with the visit of this Korean team, to give it the top most priority so that a most beneficial deal — to both sides — is struck without any further waste of time.

We would also like to suggest to our visiting friends that they should not be unduly impressed or worried by the political stalemate, however unfortunate, and undesirable. EPZs are hardly, if ever, affected by the political turmoil outside.

America Today: The 'Killer' and the Healer

All that glitters does not, seem to be gold in today's America. Americans need to address the issue of racism more seriously now than ever before.

Society.

Devastating Statistics

By and large, the racial volcano in America is poised for an eruption. Both the President of America and the President of the Nation of Islam in America blamed economic inequalities and the erosion of social and family values for much of the woes that their society is confronted with. For example, in 1970, there were 3.8 million single-parent families in America which hiked to 9.7 million in 1990 and parked at 11.4 million last year. From 1990-94, black single parents increased from 61 per cent of families to 65 per cent; single white parents increased from 23 to 25 per cent. More devastatingly, families headed by black women outnumbered families headed by black married couples and 13 per cent of the black population, reportedly, consume 40 per cent of the total liquor consumption in America.

All that glitters does not, therefore, seem to be gold in today's America. Americans need to address the issue of racism more seriously now than ever before. Remember, as it is said, "a drop becomes a creek, a creek a river and a river a flood." So, the sooner, the better.

WO of the most talked-about persons of the recent few weeks in America are, incidentally, both black, or African-American as they are referred to here. One of them is OJ Simpson — a sometime famous American footballer who was accused of killing his ex-wife and her boyfriend. He was released after a jury found him not guilty. The other person triggering newspaper and TV news headlines is Louis Farrakhan — the leader of the Nation of Islam — who tends to claim himself as the healer of racial wounds inflicted by the century-old racial discrimination in this country.

Crime and Reward!

That OJ Simpson is the murderer of his ex-wife and her boyfriend continues to be deeply rooted in the Americans' mind. The notion reigned supreme following the facts and the 'fractures' that Simpson unveiled to his ex-wife both before and after the separation. The empirical evidences produced before the court, invariably led about four-fifths of the Americans to believe that OJ Simpson was the killer and, therefore, the culprit warrants capital punishment. But the jury — a majority of whom are reported to be blacks — de-

clared that OJ Simpson should be cleared of his allegations of murdering two persons and be allowed to roam like any other citizen of the US. To majority the Americans, such a verdict appeared as a bolt from the blue and the whole judicial system in American emerged to face a big question mark. However, OJ Simpson continues to be treated as a killer till now in the court of the public although not in the court of the justice.

It is, however, interesting to note that while the whites in America fumed over the judgement of the jury, the African-Americans rejoiced. A black-dominated jury, its verdict of acquittal to a black Simpson and the celebration that followed — all seemed to have made the desired one-eyed and also a mockery of the whole judicial system in America. The blacks would like to defend their rejoice by arguing that in the past as well as in the present, many "innocent" African-Americans continued to face an unjust trial that, by hook or by crook, tends to place the blacks behind bars. And, therefore, it won't be unethical and irrational to conclude

that Simpson is convicted not because that he is a killer but more because he is a black. Whatever might be the arguments for and against, the fact remains that majority of Americans now tend to value the existing legal system as apathetic to ensuring social justice and harmony. An urgent breakthrough is, therefore, now being fre-

ans and the Vietnamese fell under Louis's fiercely fire to dub them as "blood suckers" who, as Louis alleged, "profit from the black loan but do not give them back". Nonetheless, Louis Farrakhan managed to arrange about six hundred thousand people to the Mall in Washington where, a generation ago, Martin Luther King Jr is re-

Louis Farrakhan refrained from making any unwanted remarks but instead urged his black brothers to shun violence, go back home to preach the values of family unity, clean respective houses and promise to embrace each other with love and affection.

At the same time that Farrakhan was in the Mall addressing his fellow "black comrades", President Bill Clinton addressed a gathering at Texas University where he also made a reference to what was happening in and around the Capitol Hill. Clinton urged the blacks to "understand and acknowledge the roots of white fear in America — a legitimate fear of the violence that is too prevalent in our urban areas..." but at the same breath, Clinton also confirmed that "many blacks still face economic inequities and injustice including police brutality... African-Americans indeed have lived too long with a justice system that continues to be less than just." Mr Clinton concluded his speech by giving a clarion call to all Americans to clean the house of racism that seems to pervasively pervade American

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



quently voiced from both sides of the fence.

Blacks' Bloc

On the heels of Simpson's episode, events crystallised and a sense of racial polarisation got under way to sharpen. Amid swirling criticisms, a black leader Louis Farrakhan organised the "Million Man March" to Washington to press home his "agenda" of racial reforms. This time, not only the Jews but also the Arabs, the Kore-

ported to have evoked a dream that "one day, Americans would not be judged by the colour of their skins but by the content of their character."

The pre-March interviews of Mr Farrakhan, of course, allegedly lay far from the dream of the King, and albeit sparked heavy criticisms so much so that he was charged with tearing apart the American nation into racial pieces. Thank God, at the end of the March, it turned out that

Save Us from "Coffin" Politics

by Hasina Zaman

As dead bodies kept piling, public sensitivity kept sliding till apathy and cynicism have now come to replace the proverbial Bangladeshi tears and soft-heartedness. Death has become a concern of only those who can reap political benefits out of the sacrifice of some obscure lives.

angle. Triumph seeps through the camouflage of grief in the faces of these "sympathizers".

"Coffin"-politics (Kabir U Ahmed, "Only Political Prudence can Deliver", Daily Star 17 October, 1995) in our country dates back, I presume, from the early fifties, when the glorious Language Movement of 1952 resulted in police firing and three deaths. The mantle of martyrdom was draped across the coffins of the departed souls and monuments erected in recognition of their sacrifice. The government toppled in the aftermath, creating in the process a misconception that corpses were needed every time a change of government is to be brought about.

The Ayub era, Mujib era,

Ziaur Rahman era, Ershad era down to Khaleda Zia era, each contributed its share of dead bodies. The frequency of political agitation and the number of corpses have taken a steep climb upwards since 1971. Armed conflicts between rival groups within the same political party became as much a part of the political scene as conflicts between the government and the opposition, resulting in an increase in the loss of life.

As dead bodies kept piling, public sensitivity kept sliding till apathy and cynicism have now come to replace the proverbial Bangladeshi tears and soft-heartedness. Death has become a concern of only those who can reap political benefits out of the sacrifice of

some obscure lives. The question that one may legitimately ask is whether any political party responsible for the agitations and demonstrations can claim to have lost a son, a brother or a husband, an uncle or a distant cousin of their respective leadership in the course of these public street-demonstrations. The answer, I'm afraid, will be in the negative.

Those, who are made the sacrificial cows belong to the unknown families that form the bulk of our country's population. The lives of these people seem "affordable" "dispensable", worthy only as a means of creating the much needed waves upon the crest of which political rides to power become possible.

To illustrate the above

mentioned point, let us consider the tragic death of one Mr Shah Nawaz of Brahmanbaria. It was reported that this young man was seriously injured during a conflict between activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Chhatra League at Brahmanbaria. He was operated upon in Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital and on the advice of doctors there, he was being brought to Dhaka to undergo further treatment. He died on the way at Narsinghdi (The Daily Star, 17 October, 1995). Now, instead of carrying the dead-body back to Brahmanbaria to his family and friends, as would have been the natural course of action, it was brought to Dhaka like a trophy. The necessary processions, photographs and speeches had to be com-

pleted before Shah Nawaz's body could be taken back to his parents and ultimately, to his final resting place. This is what I mean by "coffin-politics".

We have come to a stage where we must think hard and ask ourselves how and when do we, as a nation, come out of this insensitive and callous way of shaping the history of our country.

Enough life has been lost in the past. Let us not further allow our political "leaders" to create situations where human life is at a risk, where death becomes inevitable and even desirable. Let us not lend our support to any move of any political party which puts a premium on political gain at the expense of human life and national dignity. We, as mature, responsible and conscientious citizens, can form a wall of resistance against the destructive and debased politics prevailing in our beloved country today.

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.

Urban transport project

Sir, It was surely a good news captioned 'S 121.7m Dhaka urban transport project proposed' published in your esteemed daily on September 24, 1995. At last the World Bank and the Bangladesh Government have come forward to salvage the capital city from horrendous traffic congestions. The proposed prescription is praiseworthy.

I would like to point out here that the prescription lacks the most important remedial measures. To my mind this important remedial measure is the discipline on the roads. For example, I had to remain stuck-up in my car one morning for half an hour on the Asad Avenue in front of the Green Herald International School. The traffic jam was limited to within 100 yards of the road. The only thing responsible for this horrendous traffic congestion was the lack of a traffic-sense among the drivers of the motorised and non-motorised vehicles. This was like a 'drive-as-you-like'. Nobody seemed to be aware that there is a 'right of the way' for the drivers on the road. Every body can't enjoy the 'right of the way' from all directions. Every body gets the 'right of way' in turn and so the traffic moves freely in one or the other direction.

It is difficult to understand why the students attending this particular school should be dropped right in front of the gate. If the parents/drivers make them walk one or two hundred yards to reach the school from the car, this traffic congestion could surely be avoided. I draw the attention of the principal of the school in this regard.

Similarly I had to remain stuck-up in my car from 8.15 am to 9.15 am on 24.9.95 at the road junction of Sattamashid road and Zigatola road. Again, there was no lack of road capacity and it was due to sheer indiscipline

that this intolerable situation on the street is happening all the time. There was a traffic light but nobody gave any attention to its presence.

Unless we can inculcate traffic rules and good traffic sense amongst the drivers even the 121-billion-dollar project would be of no help to ease this type of traffic congestion.

Prof Abdullah A Haroon, President, Bangladesh Society for Conservation of Environment

A practical suggestion

Sir, Begum Khaleda Zia said that she would resign 30 days before the next general election. She has announced it and has reiterated it. There is no provision, in the Constitution, of the proposed caretaker government with the Chief Justice as its head. The Constitution cannot be amended now and without the necessary amendment it becomes illegal to have such a caretaker government which can be lawfully challenged in the court of law. There is no guarantee that the next election will result in absolute majority of the party proposing the caretaker government with the Chief Justice as the head of the state.

In this situation, without the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Ministers, how the executive functions of the State continue and the elections are held. The practical suggestions are: (1) Only routine functions continue. It is a fact that each and every executive decision and order is not made by the minister but the Secretaries take decisions and pass order in routine cases. So there should not be any difficulty in respect of day-to-day routine executive functioning of the government. Thirty days of such routine functioning of the government will not make heaven fall. (2) Cases and matters which are

needed to be seen by the ministers and their decisions are essential should pend till after the election and positioning on the new ministers. (3) In cases which are so emergent that these cannot or should not pend till the new minister is positioned, the Secretary should submit the matter, through the Cabinet Secretary, to the President for orders. Such cases, naturally, would not be very many during the short period of 30 days. If at all. (4) The Election Commission should declare the Regulations, Code of Conduct, and other Directives of general nature and these should be contained in one place in the form of a booklet which should be circulated throughout the country in large numbers so that each literate person can understand the rules and regulations which concerns him or her, for participating in the fair election without fear, favour or prejudice. (5) To ensure voting without fear, favour or prejudice and as per declared regulations of the election, Police, BDR and the Defence Services contingents should be seconded to the Election Commission by orders of the President. Once seconded for the purpose of holding fair election, these contingents should be under the absolute authority of the Election Commission irrespective of their position in their parent organisations.

I reckon the above suggestions, if implemented, will not have any clash with the constitutional provisions.

A citizen, Dhaka

Cancer, AIDS, Ebola and....?

Sir, No dependable medication has yet been found out against cancer, AIDS, Ebola etc., and God knows what next? Millions of pound sterling and US dollars are being spent for continuous research to explore effective medication.

But the most easy way to get away from these diseases is to lead a strict disciplined life. You cannot probably meet any other woman except your wife. You possibly cannot indulge in a flamboyant life, a gay life, a living together without wedlock. Laws

have been passed for a man to marry another man in the West. Sodomy is so much spread in America that they are having HIV/AIDS patients in thousands every day.

Cancer can be minimised if smoking is made strictly forbidden. But when some sensible people have stopped smoking or reduced it to a great extent, the ordinary people are heavy smokers of cheap white bids.

Now a dreaded disease has come in the name of Ebola. The symptom of which is very high fever coupled with strong diarrhoea. By overnight the patient dies. The entire population of a village may be wiped out in a couple of days.

Thanks to Allah. We are Muslims in majority in our country. So we may not have to worry much about AIDS. But must we take care and train up our people.

Flt Lt (Rtd) Mohiuddin, Dhaka-1206

Whither security?

Sir, Now we are paying such huge amount of tax every year — road tax, municipal tax — but what are we gaining? We are rather losing day by day the little security we had. People are being called for joining AL, supporting hartal, and some are for supporting the PM. Can any leader provide us this much sense of security when a mother leaves her son or daughter for study, whether he or she is going to return home safely? If not, then what is this democracy for? What this independence means? Why was the long fight and sacrifices for our national language?

Despite being a lawyer, is the father of the lost son going to file a case against the Municipality or against the Govt? "No" — if he is wise. Because the democracy, which we have fought for, is a different kind of democracy, absolutely incomparable to any other.

Nobody seems to be concerned about the daily accidents and deaths around us. So please wake up, dear country men, wake up before you lose your most beloved ones, because accidents won't see whether you are the son of a police officer, or

you are the brother of a doctor, or you are the daughter-in-law of a powerful person. So wake up before it is too late!

Sharmeen, An ex-student of Chittagong Commerce College

The dracula nation

Sir, We have been in the past a bottomless basket nation and now with the dawn to dusk hartal calls, we can be called a dracula nation. We will creep out of our beds at dusk, have our evening breakfast and rush to our working places, at midnight we will have our midnight lunch and rush back home an hour before dawn to have our morning dinner and creep back into our beds again as the sun comes out. The bats, owls and moles will call a meeting to applaud that the Bangladesh nationals are their followers.

In reality this will happen, as we have seen most of the offices remained open all of Thursdays and Fridays for the month of October, to make up for the hartals that month. Therefore there will be no alternative from the 11th November other than to turn into a dracula nation. We would request the government to give enough police protection, ensure no electric failure etc., to enable us to work and shop at these dark hours. I wonder who the hartal harassed people of this nation will vote for in the next election.

The opposition's right to hartal is respected but their decision not to would be very much appreciated.

Pomy, Dampara, Chittagong

Chief Justice

Sir, Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina has demanded for elections under a neutral caretaker government headed by the Chief Justice. It is well-known that Sheikh Hasina termed the 1991 election under the government of Acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed as subtly rigged, but her plea failed to earn any support from people as the election was actually free and fair.

The judiciary in Bangladesh earned high es-

teem after the free and fair election in 1991 under the caretaker government headed by the then Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. I remember an occasion when a diplomat spoke highly of the respect earned abroad by the judiciary of our country.

It is, therefore, a request to our political leaders not to involve repeatedly the top-most personality of the country's judiciary in this political affairs as we tend to put them in a great deal of embarrassment just for the sake of our own benefits.

Motius Samad Chowdhury, Phultala Tea Estate, Sylhet

Shame, what else?

Sir, The khaki people have once again done it! This time, a minor girl of 14 years of age. When the raging fire over the recent disgraceful incident in Dinajpur has been barely cooled off, the armed bullies went on with their contemptible atrocities. This really tells how the overall law and order situation is fast deteriorating.

The brave 14-year-old boy of Chuadanga deserves all the credit for informing the local people, who too deserve a pat for timely coming to the rescue of the already-critically injured Marjina and for timely nabbing the rapists. We wished the local people of Chuadanga would have been more deadly and severe in dealing with the culprits, as putting them behind bars is in a way a safer and a good hide-out.

The people of Chuadanga and other districts should go on agitating till the "constables No 238, 374 and the other goon are severely punished without delay. Things must not slip away in the name of so-called 'trial'. This is perhaps why the criminal policemen take the advantage of their evil and corrupted designs. We feel that the DC, SP and the personnel belonging to entire law enforcing agency should feel shame for not protecting the lives of the citizens, especially, dignity and respects for our women-folk. Meanwhile, parents should not allow their young girls to go about alone. "Beware of Policemen".

A Scared Citizen, Maghbar, Dhaka