

Challenge before Police

Extortions have become an established fact of life here. Reports published almost routinely show that lakhs of taka pass hands daily.

This raises the fundamental question, has the government leased out parts of the city to illegal toll collectors? Such toll collection is carried on in an organised manner by mastans who are divided into three categories.

The underworld empire's disproportionate growth has been lately noted with anxiety by the World Bank and development theorists at a high-profile seminar.

So musclemansy has posed a serious challenge to the nation. The home ministry and the law enforcing agencies must prove equal to the task.

Arms Recovery

Given the known levels of gun-toting and bomb-blasts, the arms haul made by the Home Ministry on December 21 and 22 looks like a tiny beginning in a nation-wide hunt for illegal weapons.

As for the arrests, the law enforcing agencies have ample latitude in a special campaign like this where the possessors, manufacturers and distributors are all going to be the target of police action.

That is from the legal point of view but there is another broader dimension to it which needs to be taken care of if the Home Ministry is to succeed in rendering the atmosphere conducive to free and fair elections.

The other basic requirement is that we seal the routes of arms smuggling and deliveries; otherwise the recoveries will be meaningless.

The whole campaign must be uncompromisingly serious because upon its success depends a truly credible national election.

Book Them

Swapan's death should haunt us for a long time. Without being a horror story it was ghastly enough to be weirder than one.

A youthful life, noticeably bright-looking for his economic origin, was cut short by three human-looking animal-types at a decorator's shop who could not think of any other way of recovering a lost spoon.

What makes the incident absolutely insufferable, and a veritable eye-opener to the abyss human sensibilities have hit in our context, is that he had to pay the price of a missing spoon with his own life.

They were morons alright, but what about the people in the neighbourhood who let it happen without even an attempt to call a halt to it or inform the police about it?

They were morons alright, but what about the people in the neighbourhood who let it happen without even an attempt to call a halt to it or inform the police about it?

THE BNP regime and its state media mouthpieces have sought to paint a picture of security, economic progress and institutional development under their rule.

— Fire in the Chittagong election office, 66 thousand identity cards destroyed.

— Gunfight in Azimpur-Lalbagh area. Over 150 rounds fired, terrified residents seek cover.

— Bombs thrown at several newspaper offices in the city.

— Youth murdered in Barisal. Quarrel over tender document.

— Young woman raped in Uttara.

— Two armed groups fight over a local club in Basabo.

— Chittagong Medical College closed sine die on account of gun battle between heavily armed Chhatra Dal and the Shibir activists.

— Four persons murdered in the city in two days and many more injured in violent incidents.

— On the second day of the hartal, armed activists of BNP and Jubodal attack Awami League workers, injuring many of them.

— Bombs explode in the Dhanmondi residence of Mr. Mohammad Nasim, the Organizing Secretary of the Awami League.

— The authorities announce plans to recover illegal arms and explosives. (Incidentally, few arms have been deposited or recovered so far.)

— Two and a half hour gun battle in old Dhaka. Bomb explosions and police lathi charges, 70 injured.

— Two groups of terrorists fight with guns in Nakhapara area.

— One lakh 27 thousand rifle shots were stolen from

Time to Take Stock of BNP Rule

Since the dawn of civilization, rulers have established their authority over their kingdoms and claimed the right to collect taxes. The subjects did not mind paying taxes as long as the ruler provided at least three basic services, namely, law and order, administration of justice and security from external aggression.

The Chittagong Police arsenal (This news item has, incidentally, provided an explanation about the source of arms in the possession of the terrorists in the Chittagong area).

The grim picture given above is regarded as a 'normal' state of affairs these days. After nearly five years of BNP rule this is the situation we are faced with.

Let us reflect, for a moment, on the responsibilities of a government. Since the dawn of civilization, rulers have established their authority over their kingdoms by force of arms and claimed the right to collect taxes.

By this very simple but basic yardstick, nearly five years of BNP administration has ended in dismal failure. Regardless of social or economic status, citizens today lack a sense of security.

There is nothing voluntary about it. It is demanded at gun point and it may run into lakhs. Refusal and even delay

in payment may result in swift death. Is this not what anarchy looks like? Who will tell the Prime Minister that she is presiding over a decline into a state of anarchy?

The affluent members of the society are engaging private security guards in a desperate and largely ineffective attempt to protect themselves. Armed with nothing more than a baton, these guards stand no chance against the heavily armed thugs.

Has the Home Minister given any explanation for this most blatant violation of the democratic political rights? Concepts such as accountability

must have, in the opinion of the home minister, become outdated.

One saw with dismay that thousands of policemen were deployed on 7 December when the Opposition wanted to demonstrate in front of the Prime Minister's office. In fact, according to unofficial estimates, no less than ten thousand armed police were deployed to provide 'security' to the Hon'ble Prime Minister.

One is certainly entitled to ask the Prime Minister why the Opposition can't demonstrate in front of her office? What is so sacred about it? I have seen demonstrations right in front of the White

country's transport sector. What is happening in Ghabtali and other bus terminals? According to a modest estimate, widely reported by national dailies, a ruling party leader has been collecting two and half crores of taka every month from the Ghabtali bus terminal alone.

Corruption of decision makers has reportedly moved to a much higher level. Huge amounts, in terms of hundreds of crores, have been collected on the plea of building up a war chest for the ruling party to fight elections.

Small wonder that interested people fought tooth and nail to block the parliamentary enquiry into the allegations of corruption against this government.

Corruption ministers and even presidents are being investigated, tried and punished in advanced countries such as Italy, Japan, Korea and Spain.

Notwithstanding claims by Begum Zia about the 'wave of development' (which few seem to have seen), this is how one must evaluate five years of BNP rule.

House while the police just looked on. Demonstration in front of No. 10 Downing Street, the official residence of the British Prime Minister, is so common and frequent that it hardly attracts attention.

I hold the BNP ministers and other party stalwarts responsible for the nation's plight. It is their wish to stick to power and to enjoy the 'benefits' of the office that is fuelling this rising spiral of violence, terrorism, extortion and crime in the country.

Just take a look at the

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



police has become a part of the vast crime network that the current rule has fostered in the country.

The spontaneous public outburst against the police in Dinajpur was a proof of the public perception of the role of the police in our society today.

Has the Home Minister given any explanation for this most blatant violation of the democratic political rights? Concepts such as accountability

Last Moments of Ershad

The night of 5/6 December was very crucial for us. It was obviously too critical for President Ershad. He hoped to reestablish himself by that night. But he had to look at the morning of 6 December with despair and hopelessness.

It was 6 December '90 morning when I woke up hearing the ring of red telephone. The time was 6:30 am. And it was President Ershad on the other end. He spoke softly in a choked voice.

President Ershad was caught so unaware and unprepared that it probably surprised his friends and well wishers at home and abroad. Once I thought for sure that he had well-planned preparations to extricate himself and family to safety in the event of unmanageable crisis.

frustration about the politics and administration of the country. He often used to tell me, 'Manzur, don't you understand how difficult and how problematic is it to run this country?'



Then on 1 I made sincere efforts to influence him to stick to his decision and leave office respectfully. It would also save the country from violence and disorder.

I could not influence the former President because of my weak position as a half trusted aide with no linkage with his inner circle.

his or his clan's interest. I noticed that after 1 December he avoided discussion on the issue of resignation in my presence.

President Ershad had many weaknesses and shortcomings. But most glaring of all was his inability to reject or resist pressures and influences of a vested interest group who were his own creation.

and insisted him to find out ways and means to stick to power till such time they were all ready.

On 1 December I insisted him to stick to the decision to resign and quit politics. He said that he would not do politics and would not contest in any election.

Gen Ershad was not a man to remain firm in decision and stick to commitment. He did not lack political acumen, foresight and clear perception.

in such a fashion and what was actually in his mind. But in one way that made our job easier, we could quickly and unitedly work in favour of his abdication.

Ershad lost credibility so much that none in the opposition camp trusted him and none had come out to his rescue.

Tomorrow: Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as Acting President

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.

A friend indeed!

Sir, Recently I read a news in a local English language daily that a dog had committed suicide three days after the death of his master because he could not endure the pain of losing his friend.

news that the dog had refused to take any food soon after the demise of his master. A friend indeed!

is not giving away life in love of a friend as it had been done by the faithful dog but the matter is — keeping the trust of a friend in heart and in action!

M Zahidul Haque Asstt Prof, BAI, Dhaka

World Children Day

Sir, According to William Wordsworth — 'Child is the father of the nation.' But unfortunately we have totally failed to ensure their rights as our future inheritor.

arranging discussions etc. So, we are far from our objective to protect and develop our next generation.

This day is observed elsewhere in the world to rehabilitate the ill-fated and aberrant children which are deprived of the light of education, proper guidance and a balanced diet.

Thanks mainly to The Daily Star for providing such valuable monographs on this important issue and for putting up the deplorable condition of children specifically the children of Bangladesh.

from the scourges of poverty, die from malnutrition and diseases. Particularly, children of slums and streets have to be named as 'Tokals' and strive hard for the survival. They collect papers and polythenes from the streets or even from dustbins.

Compulsory Primary Education' may compel and inspire boys and girls to go to the schools. Not only the government and the Ministry of

Social Welfare but social organisations, political parties, intellectuals and all classes of conscious people of the society should come ahead unitedly to rehabilitate such ill-fated and deprived children.

Thus, finally I want to add that today's child will lead the nation tomorrow. Fulfillment of all our hopes and aspirations depends upon how we are preparing them for the future.

Jabeedul Haque Department of International Relations Dhaka University