The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

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Challenge before Police

Extortions have become an established fact of life here. Reports published almost routinely show that lakhs of taka pass hands daily. Name any economic enterprise and/or venture, even at the lowest of tier, there is someone to take a slice off the profit or the capital itself. Even a roadside cobbler or a passing autorickshaw has to part with a few bucks or pay in kind.

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. There are, of course, mastans directly connected with politics or politicians. The three categories have their patrons in powerful men in society but at times may be hired by political parties. All these have appeared in newspaper reports from time to time, and neither the political parties nor the home ministry have ever contested this so far.

The underworld empire's disproportionate growth has been lately noted with anxiety by the World Bank and development theorists at a high-profile seminar. The rule of law has been seriously undermined and now the economic and development processes too are coming under an increasing threat.

So musclemanry has posed a serious challenge to the nation. The home ministry and the law enforcing agencies must prove equal to the task. Until they succeed in coping with the challenge, the idea may gain ground that the law enforcers, the powerful segment of society and the mastans form the nexus of an unholy alliance. However socially and politically expedient it may be to use their services for the time being, in the long run the mastan turn into a Frankenstein bringing down their creators. We should learn the lesson before it is too late.

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. The operation has until January 15 to recover arms which, according to the authorities, may be numbering more than one lakh in the country at the moment. Some 170 arms, 253 rounds of ammunition and 566 explosives were recovered with 1394 persons taken into police custody after the raids these being the tally for two days. At this rate of recovery, the haul-up of more than one lakh illegal weapons in three weeks' time - even assuming that the figure is correct — seems a far cry.

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. But then they must avoid acting on hearsay or mere suspicion, even unwittingly, far less become arbitrary or seen to

be as such.

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 whole exercise has to be seen in a purely law and order context with political or partisan considerations kept completely at bay. The police, army and BDR in a check-and-balance combine should be ideally suited to staving off political favouritism of any kind. At the same time, when the possessors, manufacturers and distributors of illegal arms go into hiding they must not get anybody to shelter or support them. Unless there is a completely depoliticised approach to the arms recovery it will be as half- hearted as the earlier ones, and perhaps a greater debacle in view of the stockpile of illegal arms.

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. They hung Swapan, their employee, upsidedown with a ceiling fan, beat him blue, even electrically charged him to extract a confession, and then left him to die groaning.

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. This basically goes to reflect an attitude on the part of those employers who believe that because they have hired somebody they own the latter's body, soul and everything. And, there is no question of human rights, no qualms for social ethics, law or anything at all. It is the master-slave relations they are habituated, and thus with taking us all back to the hoary mediaeval age.

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 culprits must now be found out and severely dealt with.

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.

economic progress and institutional development under their rule. An the Chittagong Police arsenal. examination of the headlines This news item has, inciof leading daily newspapers dentally, provided an explaof any day during the last two nation about the source of weeks gives us. I believe, a arms in the possession of the better indication of the real terrorists in the Chittagong state of the nation. On 10 area). There are other re-December, for example, the headlines were the following: 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

document - Young woman raped in Uttara

Barisal. Quarrel over tender

HE BNP regime and

to paint a picture of security,

its state media mou-

thpieces have sought

- Two armed groups fight over a local club in Basabo The headlines on 11 De-

cember 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

Headlines on 12 Decem-

- 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 Nakhalpara area.

- One lakh 27 thousand rifle shots were stolen from

T was 6 December '90

morning when I woke

cline into a state of anarchy? The affluent members of

ports about the killing and maiming of political and student activists as well as robberies and extortions on other pages 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. We are being told to accept that violence and extortion are a normal part of life.

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. The subjects did not mind paying taxes as long as the ruler provided at least three basic services, namely, law order, administration of justice and security from external aggression.

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. Women are afraid to go out on the street for fear of snatching, robbery, kidnapping and rape. Businessmen are robbed and murdered in broad daylight. Shopkeepers. contractors and even ordinary house holders have to live in constant fear of heavily armed mastaans who might appear at any moment at their door steps to demand his "chada". This 'chada' is not that 'chada' that we knew in our younger days. 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 de-

the society are engaging private security guards in a desperate and largely ineffective attempt to protect them selves. Armed with nothing more than a baton, these guards stand no chance against the heavily armed thugs. As regards the police. they generally arrive at the place of crime long after it has occurred and after the criminals have safely escaped. In any case, many people have come to believe that the

ity 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 Gabtali and other bus terminals? According to a modest estimate, widely reported by na tional dailies, a ruling party leader has been collecting two and half crores of taka every month from the Gabtali bus terminal alone. Even the ferry ghats are not spared. Every bazar is the domain of persons or gangs widely reported to be connected to BNP Jubo Dal or Chhatra Dal leaders. As regards contracts for construction or other development work, these are the target of such unseemly thuggery that no decent businessman can even collect the tender documents which are forcibly taken by the reigning BNP mastaan who alone can submit a quotation.

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 nall 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. No such scrutiny of the sitting government was permitted in Bangladesh. This point has a serious political implication that often escapes attention. If the regime shields its corrupt members, the public demand to try them is directed to the successor government. Every successor government is therefore obliged, as a result of public outcry, to investigate and punish the corrupt ministers of the previous regime. This means that Just take a look at the the only way to avoid being of power. The space in this article is not enough to make a comprehensive evaluation of five years of BNP rule in every sector. I have dealt with the law and order and corruption questions because these happen to be upper most in everybody's mind. It also impinges on the economic situation because investors are discouraged by the prevailing sense of insecurity. However. in terms of impact on people's life, its failures in the economic field is no less se-

Begum Zia and her Fi-

punished for corruption is to

hang on to power. Thus there

is seldom a smooth transfer

nance Minister have been tireless in proclaiming their so-called macroeconomic Inflation was SUCCESS claimed to be low and the reserve of foreign exchange high. What is the picture today? According to a newspaper report of 21 December. the current rate of inflation is over 9 per cent and rising Even Govt. statistics puts it down at 7 per cent. Actually we all know it is neither 7 per cent nor 9 per cent, it has already reached the double digit level. All that one has to do to verify this statement is to go to the nearest bazar and he will have all the proof that he needs. Finance Minister's much vaunted claims about the foreign exchange reserve needs, also, to be looked into. The reserve is going down day by day and will soon go below the \$ 2 billion mark. Where is the macroeconomic mira-

The BNP government's failures in the field of agriculture, industry, power and water resources education, health, poverty alleviation and rural development as well as in the field of foreign relations must be examined closely to bring out the real picture so that its incompetence, corruption and aimlessness can be brought to the people's attention. Any attempt to hide the true picture will only heighten the nation's risk and endanger its

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 Dinapur was a proof of the public perception of the role of the police in our society today. People believe that the BNP has reduced this force, paid from public exchequer, into subservience to party interests. The police attacked the Awami League central office while the President of the party was holding a press conference. Mind you, it was no street side fracas because the party office is located on the third floor. The policemen could not have climbed to the third floor without pre-meditation and clearance from the higher authorities.

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

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. But the BNP leaders do not seem to even understand the norms of a democratic society even if they are crying hoarse that theirs is a democratic regime.

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.

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.

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.

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 ber was very crucial for us. It a choked voice. I could was obviously too critical for understand his plight when President Ershad. He hoped only eight hours were left for to reestablish himself by that him to leave office of the night. But he had to look at President of the country. He the morning of 6 December politely apologized for waking with despair and hopelessme so early in the morning ness. Probably, he rang me to and said, "Manzur, do you confirm the end of his last still think I will be safe and hope. It was the final relief should not leave? Is the Army from anxiety. I could not begoing to save me and look lieve that the night we just after me?" His chocked voice passed was uneventful. Before and plain uttering touched going to bed I tried to keep my feeling I was in a fix and in touch with a few friends wondering how to console and colleagues in Dhaka Canhim. I said "Sir, have faith in tonment. The Cantonment Almighty Allah and leave was, more or less turned into everything to him. Surely he a fortress. Every possible will keep you safe. Please precaution was taken to don't worry." He did not thwart any attempt in favour prolong the conversation; of the deposed President. It talked about the timing and would have been a massacre other arrangements for the had anybody tried anything swearing in of Justice adventuresome on that night. Shahabuddin, I confirmed the Thanks to Almighty for an timing and said that all uneventful night. Now we preparations were going on could hope for a peaceful transfer of power. There smoothly. He dropped the telephone, probably, thinking could be no more delay, that talking with me would threat or obstacle in taking be fruitless. I felt sad for him. over of administration by the I wished to see him leave of-Chief Justice. fice with honour, dignity and President Ershad was grace. Whatever stains he caught so unaware and ungathered over the past for wrongdoing could probably be greatly cleaned if he displayed sincere and honest

prepared that it probably surprised his friends and well wishers at home and abroad. Once I thought for sure that he had wellplanned preparations to extricate himself and family to safety in the event of unmanageable crisis. Military rulers usually keep secret evacuation plans tied up with the some foreign countries. Many a time he expressed that time was fast approaching for him to step down. Once he even confided with me voic-

ing his disappointment and

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?" He said that none could rule a poor and underdeveloped country like Bangladesh for a long time. Here people were more prone to see quick changes in the government and always preferred anti-government stand. On 1 Dec '90 on board the helicopter when he told me that he was planning to resign I felt so delighted.

his or his clan's interest. I noticed that after I December he avoided discussion on the issue of resignation in my presence. Most of us around him as personal staff wanted a peaceful end of the present crisis. His close friends. relatives and cronies probably were not ready at that time. They could not support the way he was leaving the office. His party leaders except perhaps Mr Maudud and Mr Anis were not in favour of resignation. Therefore, it was more likely that the vested interest group around him advised



FALL OF GENERAL ERSHAD

by Maj Gen Manzur Rashid Khan (Retd)

forts to influence him stick to his decision and leave office respectfully. It would also save the country from violence and disorder. His abdication meant everything. The movement's sole objective was to force him out of office. His departure from the political scene would take off all heat so far built up and take a different

Then on I made sincere ef-

I could not influence the former President because of my weak position as a half trusted aide with no linkage with his inner circle. I carried no weight in the face of his so many close and trusted cronies who maintained other kinds of connections. He gave no importance to my suggestions or advice. Because my advice did not suit

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

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. This group had always influenced him in important decision making in his personal and national affairs. This time their unholy influence and pressure brought disastrous consequences for him only. If they succeeded in their last conspiracy to keep him in power the country would have faced catastrophic consequences They didn't favour Ershad's outright resignation from Presidentship and the poli-

tics. 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. I apprehended that he would change his mind the moment the vested coterie got access to him. He did exactly what I apprehended. They not only changed his resignation plan but also poisoned his mind They didn't stop there; they later tried to involve him in more dangerous game. Had he stuck to the decision of giving up the power unconditionally and going off from politics for good, things would have been different for him. That would have saved him from subsequent tribula-

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. But deviousness. hypocrisy and moral weaknesses became main attributes of his life and often led him to indecisiveness. He had some close confidants whose pressure he could rarely ignore resulting in reversal of decisions. He reversed decision of unconditional resignation in his 3 December '90 Radio-TV address. But again suddenly declared his resignation on 4 December night in such a manner that not only created serious disorder in Dhaka city but also could trigger a constitutional crisis. He ruined his future as well. I still don't know what prompted him to announce resignation

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. Since he offered resignation his followers in the Army could not immediately initiate any plan to reverse it. They were taken by surprise. Ershad lost credibility so

much that none in the oppo-

sition camp trusted him and none had come out to his rescue. He could not manage a power transfer through a respectable political negotiation. He earned bad name for illegal grabbing of power. wrong handling of the administration, misuses and abuses of power, creation of a political party, crafty handling of politics, use of military as power base, rigging of elections, misappropriation of funds and scandalous private life. There were innumerable allegations from minor to serious ones against him which he would be facing once out of power. Moreover, his repressive acts against political opponents would be haunting his mind making him scared of the coming days. Many political leaders and workers suffered badly in his hand. Political leaders belonging to any alliance would not spare Ershad. Undeniably he was terrified by the prospect of retaliation from his political foes and was obsessed by pervasive sense of impending predicament. He could not take final decision to resign in time due to the factors mentioned here and for the ill influences of the vicious circle around him. He also failed to take political advantage out of his forced resignation.

Tomorrow : Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as Acting

President

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.

A friend indeed!

desire of remorse through

resignation and subsequently

following a non-challenging,

noncontroversial, quiet and

simple life. Unfortunately he

tried to do exactly the oppo-

site to that spirit. He adopted

foul means to ascend to

power and to remain in

power; even now he tried the

same dirty tricks to prolong

The night of 5/6 Decem-

his stay in power.

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, a young school boy who drowned while swimming in a pond. Strangely, the dog committed suicide in the same pond by drowning himself. It was also stated in the

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

Unfortunate but true, man being the supreme of all creatures can hardly demonstrate such unique bond of friendship, I mean, friendship between men in most cases are dominated by selfinterest and selfishness. As the proverb says - "A real friend is one whom you can trust more than yourself". It

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. We have passed off the World Children Day on the first Monday of October only through chalking traditional programmes such as bringing out colourful processions and

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

This day is observed elsebilitate 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 October 2 Focus Page, we have been informed of today's challenge and next commitments.

Needless to say, each day millions of children suffer

from the scourges of poverty die from malnutrition and diseases. Particularly, children of slums and streets have to be named as 'Tokais' and strive hard for the sur vival. They collect papers and polythenes from the streets or even from dustbins. Besides, half a million mothers die each year from causes related to childbirth, so a good number of children have to become floating labourers of the street. As a result, having primary education and developing their creativity has become quite impossible.

'Compulsory Primary Education' and 'Food for 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 soci ety should come ahead unitedly to rehabilitate such illfated and deprived children Some social institutions and NGOs like Grameen Bank ASA, BRAC etc., can also play a great role to resolve this problem. Thus, finally I want to add

that today's child will lead the nation tomorrow. Fulfil ment of all our hopes and aspirations depends upon how we are preparing them for the future.

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