

Most Despised Crime

Incidence of rape has gone up in the country by leaps and bounds. The number of reported rapes — a minuscule part of the whole lot of victims — shows a dangerous rise. With this rise goes up another figure — that of even charged rapists going scot-free. The number of cases is astronomical but the number of conviction countable on the fingers. If punishment is there to deter crime, in this important area of crime that has totally failed. No wonder the habitual criminal continues with his act and the newly initiated one has only an unmitigated libidinous world of lechery before him calling for neither price of nor respite. That is the way to hell and we are on the fastest lane on it.

A workshop in Dhaka on Sunday called for a review of rape laws of the country. The existing laws make establishment of crime difficult and a distant possibility. One element helps the criminal capital. The victim girl is open to grilling to the lowest detail of the act and must verbalise descriptions of anatomy one has wholly been, under religious injunction and force of culture, kept away from. And the standard defence ploy is to go into her private and sexual life to prove with wild stories that she had been easy with her body. These proceedings have power to traumatise the victim as much as the actual crime had done.

And the defence takes all the chances there are to subject the victim to such hellfire experience over as many hearings as possible. Withstanding this is a regular heroic job but we have on the dock only a poor violated young woman.

When we reject this crime with the whole of our religion, culture and civilisation — why do we leave the rapist such wide quarter and impel the girl to shut up?

After the commission of a rape, all there is to do is to punish the culprit and mentally and socially rehabilitate the victim. Let her in no case be violated the second time by society for the only fault of being raped. If we cannot set our ways right about this most despised crime, we would hardly deserve a society worth living in.

Ctg Mayor's Posturing

The Chittagong City Corporation Mayor may have all the good reasons on earth to be aggressive with his 28-point charter of demand. Yet, what defies our comprehension is the rationale of the extreme to which he is taking his agitative flair at the moment. He has threatened to put up barricades against movement of goods from Chittagong to other parts of the country from January 20, should the government fail to respond to his demands in a declaratory commitment to meet them in phases. January 15 is the deadline with a four-day grace period to it.

Needless to say, the inward movement of goods comes under the blockade as well. In other words, the nation's port city is in danger of grinding to a halt at a time when the government is going through the fag-end of its lame-duck existence. The fact is that all eyes are focused on elections, and the supreme need for hammering out a mechanism for all-party participation in them is agitating the mind of the whole nation. What value can one really attach to a commitment given by an interim government whose days are numbered and is even otherwise circumscribed to give a pledge? Logically speaking, therefore, if the Chittagong mayor presses his ultimatum too hard, one could even suspect that the mayor perhaps is betraying a feeling that the BNP might come to power once again and be in a dispensing role. Since this could not be his genuine expectations because of his political affiliation, the bottomline may be construed as making a political capital out of it. His extreme action could lend itself to another unwholesome meaning which is that he is about to bring the nation's premier port city to a halt for securing the demands of a single city or, in an extended sense, a district. Chittagonians cannot like that bad name.

We are vehemently opposed to mixing city development or municipal work with politics, be it of the BNP variety or of the opposition mould. Chittagong's well-deserved development is only a matter of time before it happens. But happen it must through democratic means.

Truncated

In terms of being publicly or officially discussed, pedal-rickshaws are having something of a rival in the auto-rickshaws after the recent hullabaloo about the latter. So worked up do the authorities get in the wake of any public exposure of a gross management failure that they tend to be over-serious to set it right, and in the process, appear likely to miss the wood for the trees. A case in point is the report indicating that the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority is thinking of putting a lid on any fresh issuance of licences for auto-rickshaws whose prevailing high number in the city-streets is causing enough traffic congestion and pollution as it is.

It is a truncated approach to problems that are crying out to be addressed in an integrated fashion. Why not, we ask, order the extremely dilapidated transports out of the streets and get the ones cleared for the roads compulsorily fitted with the anti-pollution device? Then arrange only unleaded petrol to be put on sale? Go on, make sure also that public transports including the auto-rickshaw, are minimally comfortable to ride with enough seating space and leg-room inside them.

As for traffic congestion, we are past the stage of trying to solve it through palliatives. Since we can not contain the city traffic on the surface we have to either go above the eye-level or underground to ease it.

By a vote of 343 in favour and 149 against the European parliament in Strasbourg in France took a historic decision, they decided to make Turkey a member of the Customs Union from 1 January 1996. For Turkey this is a favourable culmination of an effort which began 30 years ago.

Ever since the first foundation of the European Union (EU) was laid in the early fifties, Turkey which has a small foot in Europe since the first World War that saw the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, with large areas under its control in Europe, has been striving strenuously for integrating with Europe. During the last three decades, EU has gathered momentum and has become a pole of attraction for Europe — West so far and lately East. From a modest beginning with six members it has now gained fifteen members while many are knocking at the door.

Turkey's efforts have been repeatedly frustrated for numerous reasons. Politically, the presence of Greece as a member with her dispute with Turkey on the Cyprus question, has been the most important. The large EU members and particularly Germany have been deeply concerned about the fate of the large Kurdish population in the south-eastern Turkey, where more than 200,000 Turkish security forces have been locked in battle with Kurdish PKK terrorists in a war lasting 11 years which has claimed nearly 12,000 lives.

As the campaign for Turkish membership of the Customs Union gathered steam, pressure on Turkey mounted from EU for improvement of her human rights record, and particularly towards MPs of Kurdish origin who were summarily jailed and their political party banned. In the recent past Turkey has taken

Turkey in Europe

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The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

some tentative steps in this regard and freed two MPs. Turkey has also softened somewhat her laws regarding arrest of activists for their 'free thought'.

The importance that Turkey attached to her membership of the Customs Union can be gauged from the fact that the outgoing Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and her coalition partner and Deputy Prime Minister Deniz Baykal carried the battle in all the capitals of Europe.

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other resolution which called on the Commission to report once a month on democratic reforms in Turkey which should find a political solution to the south-east problem and end its occupation of Cyprus. EU was thus putting Turkey on notice that although it was half opening its doors for Turkey, she would keep strict vigil on her activities. This is a vote of confidence to Turkey, declared the Chairman on Foreign Affairs of EU.

The European Parliament's vote will enable Turkey to obtain ECU 300 million for financial cooperation assistance. A columnist

has pointed out that the greatest benefit accruing to Turkey will be the flow of foreign investment which he confidently predicted would enormously increase from its present 12 billion dollars. Observers of the Turkish scene, who have seen the recent spurt of Japanese investment will not doubt agree with this forecast. The Foreign Editor of a large circulation Turkish daily Milliyet commented: Turkey has now ahead of her big targets and opportunities.

Customs Union was the device, unique in the case of Turkey, that was adopted as essential first step before she qualifies to become full member. The EU members have warned that they will watch Turkey's performance in not only her inflation-ridden economy but political, human rights and other

fields. EU will expect acceleration of reforms in these fields. Turkey will need to travel some distance before reaching her cherished goal of membership of EU. Turkey's tenacity and single mindedness in her foreign policy are a sure guide that she will persevere in her quest for full membership.

During the month before election Tansu Ciller and Deniz Baykal appeared to be campaigning for their political future from Paris and Bonn rather than Ankara and Istanbul. Indeed so intense was the campaigning that one opposition leader requested the European Parliament members to defer the vote because 'the Government would use a positive vote in their elections in Turkey'. However, Turkey's entry into the Customs Union ends a three-decade old effort and opens the prospect for her entry into EU. This would make her the first Muslim state into that essentially Christian club, whose attitude towards her has been at best ambivalent.

Where We were Then: Where We are Now

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

It is time we speak out that what is happening around us is contrary to the aim of the relentless struggle raised by the Bangladesh Movement in 1952 which culminated in the war of independence and emergence of independent and sovereign Bangladesh on December 16, 1971. A nine-month long Liberation War is still vivid in the memory of many, who should tell the new generation about the martyrdom of 30 lakh people and untold sufferings of 2 lakh women. About one crore people crossed the border, leaving their hearth and home and became refugees.

The people who were within the country were besieged, but did not lose heart to face the occupation army. Killing, torture, loot and plunder etc. by Pakistani army and their local collaborators could not deter the spirit of the Bangladeshis to make their motherland free from enemy occupation. Liberation Forces i.e. Mukti Bahini got shelters within the country to carry out their operations against Pakistan army, Al-Badar, Razakar and so-called 'peace committees'. Finally, the joint operation by Indian allied force and Liberation Forces led to the surrender of Pakistan army. In this war, it is reported, about 14000 soldiers and officers of the allied forces were killed. The allied forces were withdrawn from the soil of Bangladesh at the end of 90 days after independence. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman ensured independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh, established good relations with India and its Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. We should not forget this episode of our history of friendship with India.

Knowing fully well that liberation struggle was fought under the political leadership of the Mujibnagar Government-in-exile, and not under any army commander, it is

intriguing that any coterie would try to distort history, by making false utterances. People also do know that Major Zia urged them over Radio to join the freedom struggle under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the evening of March 27, 1971. It was an all-out people's war. Farmers, labourers, students and others from different occupations joined the war.

Now, let us look at the official figures of aid. From 1971-72 to March 1995, the total amount of foreign aid committed and released to Bangladesh was 34376 million dollars and 28427 million dollars respectively. Out of it, a total amount of 3309 million dollars was committed and of 2184 million was released during 1971-72 to 1974-75. The idea of placing these figures before the readers is not to compare between political regimes, but to enquire as to what is the outcome of about 29 billion US dollars spent in the economy, in terms of development and alleviation of poverty. Very little! According to the government estimate, declared by the finance minister, the current per capita income is 235 dollars. The unofficial figure, suggested by competent authority, is almost half of what is stated at the government level. Neither the Finance and Planning Ministers nor the Planning Commission and Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics appear to be serious to settle this wide divergence of figures. Of course, seminars are there. That's all! No agreed figure is coming out to understand the correct state of affairs. It is estimated that 76 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, having no food, clothing and shelter to remain at the subsistence level. High rate of illiteracy, to the extent of 70 per cent, has baffled the cultural progress of the people. Is that the progress we anticipated 25 years ago?

People put this question to leaders, bureaucrats and workers alike. Perhaps, they are all too busy in celebrating the silver jubilee, issuing statements to divert attention of the poor innocent voters, and, maybe, finding fun in political stalemate of about 22 months, instead of replying to the questions and caring for the down-trodden.

People are often taken aback to see how the same (but powerful and wealthy now) persons have forgotten their positions 25 years ago and give a disdainful look at the history, written in sacrifices and blood. On the eve of silver jubilee, it is pertinent to say point-blank how many of them could be president, ministers, secretaries, ambassadors, top-ranking officials, MPs and leaders, business magnates etc. had there been no successful end of the bloody struggle in 1971 and establishment of sovereign Republic of Bangladesh? We leave this question to their conscience, hopefully to prick them and imbibe them to share the fruits of independence, at least a part of it, with the bulk of the population. It will, then, raise the image of the country through their humane performance at home and abroad. Our neighbouring countries in the SAARC are moving fast, not to speak of South East Asian countries and East Asia, who have gone up far beyond our range in the last 20 years. Within the SAARC, the current per capita income of Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India are \$550, \$440 and \$310 respectively. The flow of foreign investments in these countries are enormous when compared to Bangladesh. Now, it is learnt the next Paris consortium meeting has been deferred, to see the post-election government and their policy prescriptions. Will the leaders, both political and administrative,

inform the voters what laurels they have brought for the country? Have they taken a note of the external reaction or, fully pre-occupied with electioneering?

In the higgledy-piggledy of government and politics, the sudden appearance of Taram Begum, Bir Pratik, unfolded a new horizon of hope and aspiration on the eve of silver jubilee of liberation war and independence. There is no lack of government agencies and NGOs — women also — in the country. But, nobody could inform her that she had been awarded 'Bir Pratik' for her heroic fight against Pakistan Army in Kurigram district, under Sector 11, along with East Bengal Regiment. All credit goes to a professor of Ananda Mohan College, Mymensingh, who on his personal initiative, found her out, and now the women's organisations have brought her to Dhaka to participate in festivities. Taram Begum, BP, rightly said that there were other freedom fighters also, who fought valiantly and remained in oblivion. She is very ill and poor. She resides in a thatched house, hardly gets two morsels of rice for her family. She knew what freedom meant and she fought for it. She did not hanker after title and fought for the country, without any other consideration. To the new generation, it is something unheard of because they are asked to toe the line of self-proclaimed leaders and not the principles. Secondly, Captain Sitara worked for liberation selflessly. People also pay respect to Captain (Dr) Sitara, Bir Pratik, for her valiant service during the liberation war, along with her elder brother Major Haider. She took retirement from Army in 1975 and now lives in the US.

Fortunately, these two shiny examples are now available to make the new gen-

eration imbued with patriotism and get some correct view of history, to step forward in this competitive world. They fought for the country, not considering of power, position and money. Politics means sacrifice and commitment to the country. Everywhere, it is so and it cannot be otherwise in

Bangladesh. Let it be felt by everybody, for peace and progress of our traditional country! Then, the celebrations for the Silver Jubilee will be of real meaning to the people.

The writer is an economist, and an advocate of Bangladesh Supreme Court.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Poor Some More

I was walking by Union Station the other day when I saw a man dressed as Santa Claus ringing a bell. He looked terribly familiar.

"Congressman Bleeder, what are you doing begging for coins?"

"I haven't been paid, and I need to get some cash for Christmas."

"Why haven't you been paid?"

"Congress voted not to pay its members until we come to a compromise on the budget."

"Why would you do something like that?"

"We didn't know we were doing it. Some dumb freshman congressman attached the amendment to a bill we passed giving each member of Congress a poinsettia plant for Christmas. Nobody read what was actually in the bill until our checks failed to arrive. It wasn't a joke — particularly at holiday time when everyone is supposed to be in good spirits."

"Perhaps the person who introduced the amendment was thinking of the 300,000 people who were out of work at this moment."

"That has nothing to do with us. The opposition is to blame because all they want to do is spend, spend, spend instead of giving the money to the wealthy taxpayers who truly need it."

"But maybe it will make you think twice before closing down the government. Although you'll probably try it again in the upcoming election year if you think it will play in Peoria."

The Congressman protested, "they can't do this to me. I have bills to pay and children coming home from college and my country club dues are in arrears."

"Maybe the people who were furloughed have bills, too."

"But they are not essential to the government, and Congress is. If it weren't for us, there would never be a balanced budget."

"Is there one now?"

"Not at the moment. But I just met with a senator from the opposition who was sleeping on the next grate, and he sounded very hopeful."

"How much have you collected in your cup so far?"

"I'm still short a few thousand dollars. The public discovered that I was a congressman and won't give me a dime."

"Can you blame them?"

"Congressmen need love, too."

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To the Editor...

Referendum on caretaker government

Sir, I am not a politician, nor am I interested in politics. But the trend, now I find, seems dubious. All these strikes are putting us in innumerable difficulties. For these, the prices of commodities and costs of transport have gone up considerably. The one that has gone up will never come down. The month of Ramzan is not far away. By then, there will be another round of unacceptable activities. If hartals are added, during Ramzan traders will have more voices than virtues. But end-users, like many of us, will get all the rubs. I don't know to whom we can vouch that they care for tax-payers' right.

The silver lining is hardly visible in the political horizon. The mainstream opposition is bent on the neutral caretaker government (NCG) issue. On the other hand, the ruling party affirmed that they shall never deviate from what is in the Constitution.

In the meantime, the opposition resigned, the Jatiya Sangsad has been dissolved, the countdown to the general election has started. So at present, amendment to the Constitution is hardly possible. Friendly countries' representatives are trying their best to bring these two groups to the negotiating table, but 'condition' and 'precondition' of both are keeping them away.

Since a "referendum" means — "referring of politi-

cal issue to a general vote by all people of the country for decision", so why this NCG issue cannot be solved by a referendum? Here, all people will be involved, and not any party, for the consensus. So none can have any objection. Moreover, besides these four parties (AL, BNP, JI and JFP), others may have some say on this issue. In a referendum, everybody will get an impartial chance to express views independently. So I feel, at this stage, we should go for a referendum. By that, the impasse will be over, and the people's mind and not the party's mind, will be reflected on this national issue.

A R Chowdhury
Uttara Dhaka

Statement of Gp. Capt. Saiful Azam

Sir, Having followed the news items, many expectations, wishes and suggestions from many quarters, I now feel the time has come to "almost" congratulate all the leaders at the apex of major parties for "nearly" finding a solution to the present political impasse. Then again, "nearly" and "almost" are very dangerous words in the English dictionary. What is "nearly" or "almost" done may mean "not done at all."

The bone of contention is whether the "Principal Adviser" to the President should be armed with the executive power of the Prime Minister. As and when the above matter is settled the people of Bangladesh may breathe a sigh of relief and go to "work" for their country and for their posterity.

We all want free and fair elections to ensure a "government of the people". Since the Prime Adviser is likely to be a non-party, neutral person it is important to debate whether he should be armed with the executive power of the Prime Minister.

If I speak as a person with some reservation of the intentions of the present government, I would surely take a stand to ensure that the Prime Adviser under no circumstances can be persuaded, threatened or coerced into serving any desire or motive of the government. If he has any executive power, there is a chance in a million that he may exercise this authority with ulterior motive in favour of one or the other — voluntarily or under duress, threat or for benefit.

Therefore the safest and the best way would be to unilaterally ensure that the "Prime Adviser" is not armed with any authority which may be misused to influence the people's verdict in any way whatsoever. I appeal to Begum Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina and the great people of Bangladesh to ponder over this matter, lest we all feel sorry for not having done this little service to our nation.

We want to congratulate the leaders. Please give us a chance!

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Save the migratory birds

Sir, Every year there is a strong article in The Daily Star, about the wanton killing of migratory birds by poachers and hunters. Not to speak of those amongst us who know about the ban and continue to gobble them up without hesitation.

While not wishing to undervalue The Daily Star's effort I must say it is not enough. Why not find out whether the sellers are aware of the illegality of their actions? Why not interview people who are only able to perceive of these birds as illegal delicacies and not precious guest birds? If we don't buy them, the trade will stop.

Finally, what is the method used by the Bangladesh Wildlife Society to campaign for the protection of these birds? We all know the main areas in the city where the birds are swung at eager customers. Why not picket there? Why not hand over the sellers and/or the buyers to the police? Or better still, simply confiscate the birds and set them free?

We don't think it's quite enough to 'campaign'; one has to take the necessary action to stop it. Not just today or this season but for all time to come.

Could one also please inform us of the address of the Bangladesh Wildlife Society as it is not listed in the telephone directory.

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OPINION

Mastani Economics and Parkinson's Laws

A Husnain

Parkinson's famous laws may be adapted to apply on the mastani economics prevailing in Bangladesh. The dependence on the mastans increases to meet the new or anticipated expenditures (to buy property, car, shares, or for Mammon-worship). The growth of the number of mastans is proportional to the demand for their services. Black money supports black money, and drives away good money (and men) from the 'free' (uncontrolled) market. Like bureaucracy, mastans always increase, never decrease, in the absence of sane deterrents. The enforcement is proportional to the pressure from the opposition benches.

In the street the opposition antics encourage mastani exhibitions. We are talking now of two types of mastans: economic mastani, and political mastani. The two are very closely inter-related. This relationship has to be researched and recognised in the academic papers — in real life this inter-active link

is never owned publicly (cf. the virtual reality of the computer world), except that the other parties are accused of one's own sins.

The bubble bursts when the pressure in the system inside and in the environment outside exceeds the capacity of the closed and open systems. Mastanism is an unstable phenomenon (virus vs. antibiotics). The rise or ride is temporary depending on the degree of indisposition of the political climate (the bureaucracy comes later). People get what they deserve or indirectly accept — Ershadism was tolerated for nine years by the public, and no more so it lasted for that duration. Unstable equilibrium does not last long. Other forces build up, as per entropy principles.

Core changes in the society may take place in early '96. We citizens, the silent majority, are the perennial watch-keepers for decades — the country belongs to the political mastans in spiritual garb.