

## National Policy on Women

Finally a national women development policy. From the initial looks of it, it is a good plan. We congratulate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for being so bold and prompt as to have given us a national policy on women within 8 months of being in power. There are several significant features in the announced policy. However, the one that specially interests us deals with ensuring one third representation of women in all the local government bodies. This is a decision of tremendous significance. Without putting women in the decision-making positions there is no way that status of women can be significantly changed. There is also a hint that women members of parliament will be henceforth directly elected. There is a view that each district will elect a woman MP. This will increase the number of women parliamentarians to at least 64. We strongly favour this view, and suggest that steps be taken for the necessary amendments to the Constitution before the current provision of 30 reserved seats expires.

Now that we have a policy, let us move forward with its implementation. It is our view that advancement of women is an integral part of the democratisation process of the whole society, and without a far better gender balance in every aspect of governance we cannot really bring about the type of changes that we think we need. Government must initiate what is called "Affirmative Action" in every sphere of the administration. Competent women already in service should be given special opportunity to rise in the bureaucratic ladder. Male members will oppose such a step, but with proper explanation and motivation, objections can be overcome. Special tax incentives should be offered to private organisations that employ more women and have them at decision-making levels. A special effort should be made in recruiting more women in the police force. This is a sure way of dramatically reducing abuse of women.

The policy gives us a good start in bringing about a gender balance. But we must warn that we never had dearth of good policies. It is their implementation that we always seem to fail. Let us not fail in this case. Can we expect opposition's cooperation at least on this score.

## Too Confusing for Sympathy

Amidst an atmosphere marked by consumers' confused consternation, authorities have forecast worse and longer spells of load-shedding in the imminent summer. While the enhanced demand for power consumption to beat the heat is quite logical, conflicting reports and authorities' failure to assure a degree of certainty over the pattern of the ordeal have been insufferable.

Load-shedding is more than a reality now. People are somewhat resigned to the fate of suffering due to the countrywide power shortage which is believed to be some 350-megawatt now. What the consumers, quite naturally, find difficult to put up with is the total absence of any schedule whatsoever about load-shedding periods. Patternlessness seems to be the only pattern. We understand every explanation the authorities have to offer as a rationale of the current disorder but this is not something they can play on for an indefinite period of time.

We only know that the present crisis in the power sector is an outcome of the drastic fall in the supply of gas and the conking out of a number of power plants. And although the plants that have gone out of order can reportedly be repaired by next November, nobody knows when those that are presently functioning might go out of order. Besides, we do not know how the gas crisis is going to be tackled.

With the donors making it quite clear that they will not invest in the emaciated sector bedevilled by red-tapism and systems loss, the government has to be forthright with its actions to deal with the situation. Although much has been said about importing power from India, the government is yet to sound concretely and pragmatically on the prospect. The privatisation bid with a view to sorting out the traditional evils of the sector along with enhancement of efficiency in service seems to be affected by similar stasis.

What bothers us most is the lackadaisical approach of the government over such a serious issue. The facts and figures given by it on power production and its shortfall smack of contradiction and have already given rise to a controversy. Coupled with physical suffering this cacophony of confusion has already affected quality of life.

## On the JMB Periphery

Rehabilitation of the settlers affected by the construction of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge has, for a long time, come to be deemed as a disturbing reality amid all the euphoric optimism over the great vista of communication and opportunity the huge linking construction is going to open. The government has responded to the incidental but vital issue by unfurling a massive rehabilitation programme earmarked at Taka 234 crore.

The amount will be used as compensatory money for the ninety thousand poor people whose habitat on the sides of the river banks have been affected by the largest bridge of the country. The doling out arrangement to the unavoidable sacrifices of the development project is one road that, we believe, has been chosen after great deliberation and exhaustion of all the options.

Bangladesh's overwhelming population and the comparative inadequacy of land have apparently prompted the government to settle for the money-for-land arrangement instead of the donor suggested land-for-land prescription regarding compensation.

Since this rehab fund along with the additional Taka 24 crore earmarked for the ecosystem protection will be actualised from domestic sources, one feels extra caution should be taken for the proper utilisation of money. Spending money as compensation here will mean withdrawal of fund from some other development projects in the country. Any mismanagement or irregularity around this plan will not only give rise to a chain of economic problems but will also tell on the credibility and efficiency record of the government.

# Netanyahu's Brinksmanship

*In the recent past, Netanyahu's clever action to open a passage through the Holy Dome of the Rock triggered bloodshed. The Israeli Prime Minister's latest decision to instal Israeli settlers in occupied East Jerusalem is aimed at grabbing whatever he can to legitimise his conquest of 1967.*

PRIME Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes in brinksmanship. His latest, trying to grab East Jerusalem in barely disguised ploy of establishing Jewish settlements, is by far the most dangerous of its kind.

The Oslo accord between Palestine and Israel laid down in unambiguous language the parameters of the deal between the two adversaries. Following the historic handshake between Chairman Yasser Arafat of Palestine and Premier Rabin of Israel the Peace Process was put firmly on track. The handing over of Hebron in the West Bank was a part of the deal. Yet Netanyahu after assuming the Premiership reopened settled issues and caused bloodshed between the two sides. After much humming and hawing the Hebron accord was signed recently through which Israel has succeeded in gobbling up some territory for its 400 settlers.

Given the highly charged emotional content on the issue of Jerusalem, the mediators and particularly the USA has wisely left the question of Jerusalem for future negotiations. Jerusalem is the meeting ground of the three largest monotheistic faiths — namely Islam, Christianity and Judaism. All three hold Jerusalem as their spiritual seat. For Islam Jerusalem was the first Qibla towards which the first Muslims bowed their

heads before turning to Kaba. In the recent past, Netanyahu's clever action to open a passage through the Holy Dome of the Rock triggered bloodshed. The Israeli Prime Minister's latest decision to instal Israeli settlers in occupied East Jerusalem is aimed at grabbing whatever he can to legitimise his conquest of 1967.

He has given a two week time before going ahead with the settlements. He is no doubt testing the waters in the Middle East and the USA. He will reflex his



## The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

target on the basis of the reaction in the Islamic world and particularly the Arab world.

Predictably the reaction in the Arab world has been one of outrage. In practical terms a meeting of the Security Council has been called. The US has urged the Israeli move although the language does not appear strong enough.

By bringing Jerusalem on the agenda Benjamin Netanyahu has quered the pitch of the Middle East Peace Process. Parallel with the negotiations with the Palestinians, Syria and Israel have been taking up positions regarding a

settlement. The issue is relatively simple. It is the withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights of Syria in exchange for diplomatic ties between the two states. The negotiations started some time ago but sputtered to a halt due to Presidential elections in the USA and in Israel which was won by Netanyahu by a whisker. Syria and Israel have been mapping their positions before starting serious negotiations.

By bringing Jerusalem on the front stage Netanyahu is

territory by Israel for Arab recognition. Whatever emotion has been involved has been the adjustment of boundaries in exchange for diplomatic recognition.

Jerusalem is an entirely different matter. Jerusalem must not appear on the agenda until the deck has been fully cleared between Israel and the Arabs. And that process is nearly complete. On the top of the agenda is a settlement between Syria and Israel, which in its train will inevitably bring a settlement between Lebanon and Israel. Israel will have no reason to hang on to South Lebanon in the name of security concerns.

It is only then that the question of Jerusalem can be addressed. Here it is not only the vacation of Israel of conquered East Jerusalem. Here what looms large is the spiritual content of the issue. Whereas Islam and Judaism have been vocal in registering their spiritual claim over Jerusalem, the voice of Christianity has been remarkably mute. Is it because Christianity has found her abode in the West? What is certain is that the Peace Process has moved so far forward that it has become an irreversible process. Rather than nibbling at Jerusalem and putting the Peace Process in jeopardy the Israeli authorities would do well to leave Jerusalem for the entire international community to come to grips in God's own good time.

## CRIME, TERRORISM, VIOLENCE

# Role of Police in a Civil Society

By Dr A K Monaw-war Uddin Ahmad

IF we pick up the leading national dailies, everyday we go through the painful news of crimes that take place in different parts of the country. These are rather a normal phenomenon of city life. This might be equally true about the rural society. But we do not get much news from there, like that from the urban society. When I regularly visited my village home in Mymensingh, a few years ago I used to hear disturbing stories of crime and violence. Recently when I enquired, some villagers told me that the situation was now much better than the recent past. However, only a few years ago crimes, particularly kidnapping of young children and demanding of ransom money were acute problems of Phulpur, Haliabhat and Nakla thanas of the greater Mymensingh district.

In one incidence a high school boy was kidnapped and the agents of the kidnappers asked for a few lakh taka. The local police showed reluctance in taking any action in this regard. The poor father of the boy, a school teacher, tried his best for a month to rescue his son but in vain. Finally along with his college going daughter he

extremely important to conduct a systematic investigation/research into this particular behaviour of the police force, particularly in its lower sections.

The incidents of kidnapping of women and particularly minor girls and their subsequent gang rape and murder are reported almost everyday. The matter becomes dreadful when such incidents take place under police custody. There is an old saying: "The responsibility of the police is to restrain/repress the evil and to serve the courteous." The police are a symbol of peace and the citizens should feel secure and assured when they see them on the streets. Unfortunately the recent incidents mentioned above have tarnished the image of the police to such an extent that now people are hesitant to go to them. In yet another incident a few days back, some policemen picked up some students (fasting during Ramadan) to the Nilkhet police fair. It is deplorable to observe that no valid reason those students were physically beaten. Can the police at all impose physical torture? A senior teacher of

dently.

It is well-known that the police department plays an important role in the dispensation of justice in criminal cases. They carry out investigations, collect evidence and submit charge sheets to the Courts of Magistrates. If, as a result of investigation, a *prima facie* case is made out, the police submits its report. The magistracy may take cognizance on the basis of the police report. If there is no evidence, the police submits final report and the magistracy may accept its report. Thus it is very clear that the collection of evidence, the foundation of a criminal case, is the primary responsibility of the police. The crucial role of the police can be easily discerned from this. It is in this context that rape and murder under police custody are very alarming.

There are some other relevant issues that must be analysed in this context too. According to law the police is supposed to produce an arrested person to the Court of a magistrate within twenty-four hours. There are cases when police does not comply with this legal requirement. They do not even

in Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University in early 1996. And as such this contributed to the fall of the regime.

As mentioned earlier most of the members of the police force are more humane than they might appear at first sight. The pertinent question is: how to make this civil force/institution of the country a people oriented service to promote welfare of and establish justice for the citizens of the country? Before venturing into a discussion of this a few other problems should be highlighted in this context. One point must be appreciated that the police is a civil force, i.e. it is a type of civil service. Therefore, the nature of its administration should be of a civil type. Those familiar with the actual day to day functioning of the police know that the thana police administration and its relationship with its higher authorities is like that of a jungle.

It is against this background that I would like to make the following submissions for the kind consideration of the appropriate authority:

(i) The cultural environment of the hundred years old police department should be changed in order to make it a noble in-

*The role of police in maintaining peace and tranquillity in the society cannot be overemphasized. Since colonial times, thana police has been the effective bottom layer of the government administration*

managed to meet the then Prime Minister and now Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleida Zia at Dhaka and told her the details of the story. Begum Zia immediately asked the appropriate authorities to take stern action against the kidnappers in order to rescue the boy. Thereafter the district police administration asked the thana administration to take necessary measures. It was so gratifying to note that the kidnappers were arrested and the boy was rescued before his father and sister could return home from Dhaka after briefing Begum Zia on the incidence. It is only natural that this family and the local people are highly appreciative of Begum Zia and the thana administration. Some villagers have told me that the locality is at present very peaceful as the criminals are now in the jails after having been tried in the Courts.

The role of police in maintaining peace and tranquillity in the society cannot be overemphasized. Since colonial times, thana police has been the effective bottom layer of the government administration. At times it appears that the police force of the country happens to be the most important civil institution. It may be mentioned here that Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) is also a special police force under the home ministry. Its commanding officers work as officers on deputation to BDR. The main responsibility of the BDR is to maintain the border security of the country. They are also called for internal security as and when needed. The regular police force and the BDR — both working under the home ministry are one civil institution that shall have to play the most vital role of maintaining security for the people. Needless to mention that peace and security are two pre-conditions for further socio-political and economic development of this country.

In recent years several incidents have seriously undermined the prestige and dignity of the police force. The Yasin rape and murder case and that of Shima Chowdhury under police custody along with several such other unfortunate incidents again under police custody have raised serious doubts about the honesty and integrity of senior police officers of Bangladesh. The Yasin case in addition has also raised mistrust about the uprightness of medical doctors. It is, therefore,

Dhaka University rushed to the police fair and he with the help of an Assistant Commissioner of DMP saved the students and ultimately set them free. When the boys told the police that they were fasting, the Sub-inspector said to the constables, "They need little more lftar." This is a story of Dhaka University Campus. In this continuing, the days are not too far when people might start thinking that the police force is nothing but a government mustang force of the country.

Having said all these negative aspects/stories about the police force, may I acknowledge a few positive rather more humane aspects about them. When Nuban Ahmed (a Lecturer in Economics at Dhaka University) was found injured in Manik Mian Avenue in late 1995, it was two police officers (probably in the rank of Inspector and Sub-inspector) who took him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. They arranged everything for him and brought the family members to the hospital. When I talked with these two gentlemen I was highly impressed. I found them concerned and shocked for the incidence. Subsequently we organised a silent procession to submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister regarding the murder of Nuban Ahmed. A female student of the Law Department, faint near Bangla Motors, Mr M. A. Halim, an Inspector of DMP on duty, rushed and said to me, "Sir, I am on duty here. Please take the girl to the hospital in my car." Thus the police car took the girl along with some of us to the Dhaka University Medical Centre. It was interesting to see that the girl got frightened when she woke to find herself in a police car.

Of all the people I have met in this country, I have certainly found policemen the most humane in nature. At the field level they come across a cross-section of people. They are very experienced and also knowledgeable about human nature. It is, therefore, my humble opinion that they can be productively used for noble purposes in society. One of the good things about the police department is that in the recent years fairly educated boys have been recruited at the Sub-Inspector level. Thus we can see many University Masters graduates in the police stations. Their educational background has put them in a comfortable position. It helps them in performing their duties rather more confi-

stitution so that it can control the wicked and protect the law-abiding citizens.

(ii) The magistracy must be made independent from the executive branch of the government so that it can provide effective supervision to the criminal investigation works done by the police department.

(iii) If necessary new laws should be formulated regarding police remand in order to protect human rights. Laws must be made and implemented to prevent police from undertaking physical torture upon and arrested person. Clearly spelled out criminal procedures must be specified against such police atrocities.

(iv) The service conditions of the police should be made more stringent in order to deter them from rape and murder under police custody.

(v) Each thana police administration should have a separate women police-cell. The women must be under the custody of women police. The arrest and interrogation of women generally should be done by the women police.

(vi) Once the magistracy is separated from the executive organ, each unit of police administration should be placed under some sort supervision by the magistracy particularly for their criminal investigation works.

(vii) The recruitment of a proportionally larger number of police from among the women should be made in the near future or from now on.

(viii) The present logistic support for the police force is extremely poor. This should be considerably increased and improved for each thana.

(ix) The salary structure of the police should be a separate one. In a way it has a special importance like that of the judiciary.

(x) There should be a police unit for each union under the officer-in-charge of the thana.

Along with the implementation of the above mentioned recommendations, it should, however, be reiterated that the interaction between the police and the general public must be increased, because the success of the police force in establishing peace and tranquillity in the society will depend largely on the mutual interaction of the police force and the rest of the society with each other. The prospects of a prosperous Bangladesh will depend crucially on this mutual confidence.

# Dhaka Day by Day

## Changing Faces

### of Dhaka

by Sharmillie Rahman



Exclusively foreign, price too is forbidding

Remember what Dhaka used to be called a couple of decades back — the city of mosques. But now it's a different story all together. Even the least observant of the Dhakaites can detect the change in the air. Dhaka is fast outgrowing its old reputation. Shedding off the ascetic austerity Dhaka is on its way to donning a new splashy look. At night the splendid array of neon lights outshines the fair moon, flashing every colour of the rainbow on our faces.

Contributing greatly to the colour and splendour of the city, stand the multi-storied shopping complexes. These commercial centers are sprouting unchecked all over the city's face, gradually becoming the prominent features of the town. No wonder, some of the Dhakaites affectionately call their city "the Hong Kong of the south east" these days. Around the Dhanmondi area alone, these centers congregate in huge numbers. Side by side with the already existing complexes there are more under construction. Nevertheless, the empty spaces around the commercial (even residential areas) are also future sites for similar ventures.

As far as I remember back in the 80's the opening of the air-conditioned "Century Arcade" located at Moghbazar became the talk of the town inviting the shoppers to shop in a comfortable atmosphere. Attracted by the glitz and glitter people flocked in outrageous numbers. Shop-owners continue to employ various stunts to allure their customers into buying their products. A recent addition to the league — Eastern Plaza is fast turning into one of the busiest shopping centers in town as well as the favourite rendezvous for the teenagers. It has an enormous collection of almost everything to satisfy the demands of a civilized community but apart from this it is mostly frequented by the glitterati who detests running around from New Market to the Elephant Road under the blazing sun.

Now let's take a small tour around one of these much publicized shopping centers. As you open the door to one of the shops and step inside you are greeted by a scented air with the

glaring tubelights (all too many) beating the daylight outside (not to say out of you). The air inside feels thick with the presence of too many objects. There are the salesman far outnumbering the customers, then there are also the articles, far too many of which are stacked mindlessly on the flimsy racks. As you move around making your routine inspection of every items you can feel the fine hairs at the back of our neck being fanned by the breath of an indiscreet salesman following you around like your shadow. Finally with the chosen item in your hand you reach the right counter (after quite a few futile attempts though). But hearing the price you are choked with a tremendous shock — it's exorbitant! "Cool down, you can always bargain", assures the salesman. After much haggling you reach a consensus, the salesman drools with anticipation while you gleam with perspiration as the note changes hands.

I am sure everyone of you would agree to have shared such an experience as described. As you might have noticed, these glitzy shops proudly display various ensembles of foreign products, it would be a rare feat if you ever came across anything local. These shopping arcades are always teeming with people, most of them window shoppers whose tight budget do not allow anything more than seeing and touching. But the reality beyond this world of buying and selling is certainly not as appealing. With easy access to the much coveted foreign articles at competitive prices the middle class city dwellers are gradually turning their backs to local products. As a result, local manufacturers have to content themselves with catering to a small section of the lower middle class. Though the daily onrush of buyers in any one of these centers shows evidence of a flourishing business, does it also indicate a growing economy? I doubt. The regular customers come from the affluent segment of the society. These massive structures stand erect as symbols of class distinction. Outside their immaculate glass doors the half starvedurchins still prance around in rags and tatters.

## OPINION

### Lessons from Mandela

Habibul Haque Khondker writes from Singapore

The Island Ballroom of Shangri-La Hotel in Singapore is a long way from the infamous Robben Island Prison of South Africa where Nelson Mandela spent 28 years of his adult life in his struggle against apartheid. Mandela addressed the Singapore lecture on the 6th of March organized by the Institute of the Southeast Asian Studies. In an hour long speech and the subsequent question answer session, President Mandela of South Africa recounted his experiences of a long struggle and shared his views on democracy and nation building. The long prison term has not broken him. He has emerged a much stronger man morally and spiritually. He took the high roads of forgiveness and reconciliation then the low roads of revenge and animosity. He bears no grudges, no rancour, no bitterness against his enemies. He has forgiven his tormentors and jailers and has extended his hand of friendship and reconciliation to his erstwhile enemies.

As President Mandela walked into the ballroom, the one thousand strong audience gave him a standing ovation. Flanked by a small white personal security and a host of other dignitaries Mandela exuded a blend of humility and greatness. His speech was spiced with self-effacing jokes. He was a man at ease with himself, a man at peace with himself. He is, in the words of Mr Tony Tan, the Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore who chaired the session, "A living legend."

Ostensible, Mandela came to the miracle economies of Southeast Asia to learn from their experience of rapid economic growth. But at the end taught his distinguished audience few lessons on democracy with a sense of humility, that characterize only the truly great personalities of history. He shared his views on life and emphasized the need to focus on the positive rather than wasting time on the negative things.

Revenge, he said, would not change the status quo, it would only reverse it. The point is to change the status quo. His message was "do not humiliate your opponents".

In order to consolidate democracy Mandela has ensured that the principle of separation of power, especially an independent judiciary is institutionalized. Mandela, a truly moral leader, is a builder of institutions. He helped set up a strong Human Rights Commission composed of internationally known jurists. Under the leadership and moral authority of Nobel laureate Bishop Desmond Tutu, he set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He set up an equivalent of an Ombudsman and a Constitutional Court as the supreme authority to oversee that the integrity of the constitution is never compromised. In effect, he tied the hands of his own ANC government so as to build a polity where democracy and the right of the people regardless of ethnicity, religion and political affiliation remained secure. He is the builder of a rainbow society. Yet Mandela does not want to cling to power. He admitted that many of his comrades are more talented than him and that he should give way for them, he kept insisting on the collective leadership that has made possible to keep South Africa on course. His ability to strum off praise showered on him and his direction for them to follow a collective nature of leadership in the ANC spoke of his humility and his democratic spirit. It is his utter honesty that allowed him to recognize the talents of the White minority and their contributions to the independent South Africa. President Nelson Mandela's virtues of honesty, forgiveness, tolerance and love need to be emulated by all the democratic leaders, not only of the fledgling democracies but also the established democracies of the Western world.