

Perfect Riddance

At long last the thoroughly decrepit and degenerate DUCSU and hall union committees stand dissolved by a single stroke of unanimous decision-making at the Syndicate inspiringly undabbled in political colours. The deck has been cleared for elections to DUCSU and hall unions which were forced into abeyance for a seeming eternity by the arbitrary continuation of student bodies which had run out of their elective tenures as early as on June 6, 1991.

Who is going to return those lost years to Dhaka University? The whole lot of upshots from that paranoid clinging to status quo of desperation and cowardice, of expediency and political subservience, and of arbitrary stranglehold and make-believe soiled the DUCSU's image as the historical vanguard of national conscience-keeping and the prestigious emblem of representative student politics in the country.

With no normal outlets left open for getting the relative strengths of student parties measured, armed physical occupation of halls became the order of the day to clamber on to the centre-stage of reckoning, or in other words, to be feared by all. The bottled-in rivalries had to erupt in association with extraneous elements, both outsiders and trafficked arms in a tandem. As if to emphasise the lack of propriety, sanctity and dignity of the DUCSU committee, its head and other office-bearers outlined their studentship status but ludicrously retained their positions in the central students' union! In their basically deferred status of an atrophy they degenerated as peddlers of political clout.

Let's now restore DUCSU to the students, to the teachers and to the whole nation. The student wings of ruling parties have shown predilections to holding DUCSU election in the hope that their protagonist party will somehow intervene to tilt the balance in their favour. Such a legacy must now be gotten over. It is a major test of political sincerity for Sheikh Hasina to ensure that DU elections are held freely and fairly. It is no less a challenge for the opposition party to stay away from any intrusive acts of influencing the results. The major political parties need to escape from the sensibilities that defeat in the students' arena is the end of the world for them. It is not. DUCSU or hall union elections are students' affairs and let these be so.

A Tale of Resurrection

Six years ago on this day newspapers were replete with news and rhapsodic visual of devastation caused by probably the most powerful cyclone of the century which battered the 500 mile sea-girt from Teknaf to the Sundarbans and Barisal.

Inexorable fate in the form of death spread its dominion overnight to set at naught all that man prides in and remind us Frenchman Blaise Pascal's observation that man is indeed a reed, a feeble reed. By one fell stroke of nature's blind fury the life of about three million people was touched and transformed as never before.

Once the wind that at its peak blew at a velocity of 240 kph and tidal bore standing 25 to 30 feet high subsided, the localities that only hours ago were abuzz with life had carcasses of man and livestock littered all over them. It was real reign of ruins everywhere. There was hardly any family which escaped the sacrificial claim of this calamity.

Were it not for the inner resilience of the living remains of this havoc, things would have never hummed again in the seemingly spoiled zone of silence. Not just on April 29 of 1991 people of the coastal areas have time and again shown this amazing flair to delve deep in their reserves of courage and conviction to swim and stay afloat against the wind. Sadly and strangely this inimitable characteristic of our coastal people has never again bloomed in normal times. One wonders how much headway in terms of progress as a nation we could have made if we could only relieve those crisis situation qualities.

While recalling an occasion of death and resurrection in the annals of our encounter with the worst of nature, we would urge the authorities to do everything possible to minimise the hazards of natural calamities for, there have been reports that despite having such a long legacy of disasters, a system that will ensure effective and dependable cyclone warning signals is yet to develop.

Nab Him

Chittagong perhaps comes to the fore for the sheer contribution of one man in the process of rot. According to a report published in yesterday's issue of the Bangla daily Bhorer Kagoj, the port city is now being held under siege of sorts by a criminal named Nasir.

Terrorists or outlaws moving at large is no news in the context of our socio-economic reality. But what strikes us as disconcerting is the reported liaison of some members of a leading political party and more alarmingly Islami Chhatra Shibir with the man accused in as many as eight murder cases. With terrorists like Nasir having easy access to sophisticated weapons like AK 47, it comes as small wonder that the student front of Jamaat-e-Islami has come to reign the educational institutions for almost an era. We are indeed alarmed and annoyed to learn that local police despite having sufficient and specific information of Nasir's professed intention to kill some political leaders, let alone common people and thereby discredit the government on grounds of poor management of law and order, are dragging feet to nab the culprit. We find their excuse of not having adequate logistical support as ridiculous. No matter how strong and equipped gangs they have, people like Nasirs are isolated agents of criminality. The bottom line is Nasirs should be behind the bars without any further ado or delay. And for that, if necessary, the local police should seek assistance from the central office of the law enforcing agency.

Caught in the Welter of Crime

by Chandra Shekhar Das

Apart from causing numerical rise to the criminal incidences, the other highly undesirable and unfortunate message this new streak is giving is a heightened sense of fear and insecurity among the citizenry.

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Criminal activities of late have been on such a clear course of ascendancy that the fearfully edgy existence that we all are managing at the moment, hardly leaves any room for exaggeration. Even then, nothing like statistics when it comes to forming an idea about the comparative significance or insignificance of an issue. According to a report recently published in a leading Bengali daily, some 20 thousand criminal incidents were reported in the last four months. This figure may strike many as quite a departure from the general impression that real number, from the look of it, should be considerably greater. It, however, matters little whether it is less than the real because the figure reportedly supplied by the police sources, is already quite high for the smug complacency of a civil society.

We have had an assortment of criminal activities in this period of time. On one of the occasions, the criminals made an execution stage of their 'commercial' rivals out of a public office to leave its walls holed with bullets and the floor dyed with gore. Tales of collective suffering are no less in number with the latest being the arson

at Maniknagar slums which left two killed and many badly burnt.

Perhaps, the pattern of crime that has seen the most consistent growth is that against women. Repression against women has shot up fearfully. In addition to daily ration of rape cases and the torture on wives by the incredibly greedy husbands and in-laws, the newspapers in the recent times have been virtually replete with news announcing the return of dreaded method of exacting revenge by the aspiring but rejected Romeo — acid-throwing. Luckily, almost a countrywide trend among some fathers to place ethical and societal obligation above filial feelings helped arrest the tide of acid-throwing incidents. Quite clearly, it was the scruples of some praiseworthy patriarchs than any extra-ordinary effort of the police which warded off the scourge this time, though for how long only time can tell.

The law enforcing agency is coming up with odd incidents of success here and there but obviously the rate of criminal incidences are much too high for any appreciation of their efforts. Apparently, we have reached a point where a thorough overhauling of the agency has become a must. In the cabi-

net committee meeting following almost immediately after the killing of political activists at Feni, Home Minister Rafiqul Islam reiterated the necessity of police reform. He made it clear that in view of the ever increasing trend of varied challenges in the law order sector, authorities need to adopt measures immediately and thoroughly so that criminal incidences do not find the law enforcers wanting either in number or in efficiency.

Despite this unequivocal utterance, reform as an idea in its most expansive sense is yet to take off. And any attempt of reform, apparently, has to start from the base. Because no service has such starkly contrasting and questionable structure of pay and other benefits down the hierarchy as has police. It is both a pity and irony that people in the service who bear the brunt of criminal intent and action out there in the middle and thereby are in need of decent amount incentive to be at the peak motivational condition actually have to struggle to keep their body and soul together while the high-ups literally wallow in facilities of all types.

With the pay so inhumanely and ridiculously low at the lower tier which is actually the crunch level, it is no wonder

police efficiency of late, has come under a cloud.

But the problem of law and order has other instigating influences than just the poor motivational and logistical state of police. Criminalisation of politics is perhaps the single most powerful factor that has contributed to the steady slump of the law order situation. Irresponsible behaviour of our politicians marked by a passion for penny wise and pound foolish theory and a chronic inclination for fishing in troubled waters have led to the sustenance of the criminals through constant change in their allegiance. Despite repeated vows by the political parties to disband activists with a criminal background from their folds, casualties owing to political rivalry, overt or covert, have contributed quite significantly to the sliding deteriorating law order situation, implying the invertebrate hypocrisy of those making

One thing is clear: law and order is not a single-factor reality that can be ensured by just raising the number of police personnel and modernisation of their gears. It is a collective onus where politicians, common people, students all have to chip in with their share of responsibility to ensure a society that will be — no, not without crime for, that is a rather utopian way of thinking, but certainly one where criminals

will not be produced as quickly as now.

largely Hindu preserve — would often end up with recruiting some Hindu teachers as well. Hindu students not being admitted but Hindu teachers being allowed on the staff — that was a basic contradiction the school suffered from and I too was performance made to partake of the same. For, one of the Hindu teachers was lodged in our own house.

But not much of all this proved to be effective. Sarkarhat continued to fare better than Nizampur except, however, in football — almost the only game the two pastoral schools knew of at that time.

For me, the contradiction had one more dimension. Two of the three pagodas — with their idyllic lawns, strew with variegated and odorous flower plants, — of our neighbouring Buddhist village of Damdama, were our principal recreation centres on holidays and during vacations. It being one of the largest Buddhist enclaves outside the Chittagong Hill Tracts and our own tiny village being, in a sense, only one of its two extensions, Buddhist boys were mostly the ones I communed with during my life's formative years.

Had there been no theory of thesis and antithesis leading to synthesis, I would have been hard-put indeed to find suitable explanation for whatever my mental make-up has eventually turned out to be. For some time — during the years I was a student and, subsequently, lecturer of the Chittagong Govt. High School. On way to our school, we were thus obliged to pass by what was almost the latter's yard.

Secondly, Sarkarhat School was no non-Muslim school either. It was cosmopolitan (my own youngest and eldest maternal uncles being on its roll and managing committee respectively) and — seemingly contradictorily on his own part — was founded at the sole initiative of that legal luminary Mr Sultan Ahmed. As land for the school was donated by a rich and aristocratic Muslim family of the area, so its primary financiers were Muslims. The couple — Nazar Ali and Roopjan (whence the school's N R appellation) — still exist in the school's nameplate.

But its jinx, as it were, was that non-Muslim students (Hindus and Buddhists) formed its major roll strength and, perhaps correspondingly, threw up more non-Muslims than Muslims with flying colours in the matriculation examination.

The Nizampur School's managing committee, on its part too, suffered from contradictions. In its zeal to make the latter outshine the former, it was on a ceaseless hunt for available talents in school-level teaching profession and — the profession, till then, being a secondary level institution.

What does all this tend to indicate? Simply that "there are many things in heaven and earth.....?"

Pakistan to a Middle-aged Bangladeshi

by Fazlul Kabir

For one thing, they turned into Pakistanis, their Bengalee entity standing consigned in limbo. Then they were systematically made to be oblivious of their distinctive culture, heritage and even mother tongue.

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When, however, they resolved to hit back, the process — a long and bloody one from state language movement to eventual liberation — turned out to be a saga. A very pithy element of this saga was christening this land as Bangladesh by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It had come about in early 1970 and what he had said beside the mausoleums of three of Bangladesh's national leaders at Suhrawardy Udyan still seems to ring in the air. Barring the Bay of Bengal, there was, at that time, indeed no other term to tell the posterity that this land was once called Bangladesh and its inhabitants Bengalees.

For those of us who are past fifty-five, naming East Pakistan as Bangladesh was especially poignant. For, with the break-up of One Unit in West Pakistan a few months earlier, all its four constituent provinces had regained their lost names. But not East Pakistan. It was not given back its previous name of East Bengal — a name by which it was called even by the Pakistani rulers till the day, March 23, 1956, on which it became a republic. Perfidy was the other name of whatever the Pakistani ruling clique had been doing to East Pakistan ever since partition and keeping its name un-

changed was apparently the height of its variety. We, who were in our youth's prime at that time, were avidly looking forward to something that would restore to us our Bengalee identity, as had happened to the Punjabis, Pathans etc. And — as if in a tryst with destiny — Bangabandhu's declaration had come precisely at that time.

To the Bangladeshis of my age group, many other such events are poignant, difference lying only in the degree. In my life, however, there is an event which is quite significant, if not poignant. I had no non-Muslim classmate during my school career.

I was about eight when the subcontinent was partitioned — sufficiently grown up to understand that, despite numbering not more than equal to the Hindus in a small village, ours was a community that suddenly won an edge over the other. Although equally steeped in near-all-pervasive illiteracy, the Muslims put on airs that, hitherto, were scarcely seen and the number of persons worth revering among their Hindu brethren, previously quite a few including some four or five money-lending kin (called mohajans), dwindled to one — octogenarian Kali Kumar Karmakar (popularly surnamed as Pundit in lieu of Karmakar), a teacher of the neighbouring

primary school whose students included the grandfathers of the village's quite a few boys of my age-group.

But not me. Nor the village's any Muslim boy since a few years prior to partition. In fact, I had no scope to know how a non-Muslim boy looked like in a classroom at primary or secondary level.

By the time I was born, the nearest secondary school was located about ten kilometres away from our village. A few years thereafter, a school sprang up at a distance of less than two kilometres from our house. I was, however, not to read in that school — but in another, situated at almost a stone's throw from the former.

The reasons were quite simple. I was a Muslim; our guardians were in masse Muslim League activists; and the school, set up by them in a burst of their zeal for Pakistan under the leadership of a towering and charismatic lawyer of the area, with a whacking practice at the Chittagong Judge's Court, was meant exclusively for Muslims.

How it was for me, at that formative stage of my life, to go to the Nizampur Muslim High School, rubbing a non-Muslim shoulder almost every third time. I cannot exactly say. What, however, I remember till today is that it was quite embarrassing.

First, although, during dry season, the two schools were equidistant from our house, during rainy season, the Nizampur School was approachable only by a road forming, as it were, a causeway through tracts of marshy lands and meeting the Dhaka-Chittagong Trunk Road right beside the spot where, like a nightmare for us, the Muslim boys — stood the Sarkarhat N R High School. On way to our school, we were thus obliged to pass by what was almost the latter's yard.

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What proof do I have? for the past year I have been telephoning people all over the United States only to discover that they're not there. They have been replaced by voice machines and answering services. If their voice machine doesn't respond, a secretary or an operator does. I would like to speak to Merrill

Yavinsky.

"Just a minute. I'll see if he's here."

"Why." I think to myself. "Doesn't his secretary know if he's there or not? Does he climb in and out of his window when he leaves the office?"

Yavinsky's secretary returns to tell me, "I'm sorry but he's not here."

"When he is there, will you tell him to call me?"

"I could not that but would you prefer to leave a message on his voice mail, so I won't have to be bothered?"

My next call was to Dr John Redhead. A voice answered by saying, "Your call is very important to us. While waiting for a response, please join in singing Handel's Messiah."

I was getting nowhere but I was not surprised. I called Mary Ann and Don Lynn in hopes of setting up a tennis game. Mary Ann's voice said, "We're not here right now, but we will pick up our messages when we get back from Bali." Another call informed me that Debra Jacobson was not at her desk. This aroused my curiosity. I asked the person answering the phone, "If she's not at her desk, can you give me some idea how far from her desk she is?"

This made the person really mad. She said frostily, "We are not permitted to tell you how far staff members are from their desks. It's against company policy."

I was determined to get through to someone just for the heck of it. My target was Karen Starr. I was told, "Mr Starr is on a conference call."

"Interrupt the call to tell him that I smashed into his car in the parking lot and I'd like to give him the name of my insurance company."

The toughest call to make is when the voice on the other end says, "This is Lucy Hackney. Either I am not here right now or I could be on another call talking to the roofer. Please leave your name and I'll get back to you unless the plumber calls me first."

Mort Slatkin told me his secret of how he gets someone to answer his call. He said, "I tell the person who answers the phone, 'If Clydesdale doesn't want to talk to me, I'm going to let my son marry his daughter.'"

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To the Editor...

"A Grand Opportunity Missed"

Sir, I must thank you for the commentaries "Wake-up call for AL" and "A grand opportunity missed" which were published on April 9 and April 16, 1997, respectively. These are very observant pieces of work, I am happy to notice that you are looking at things as it should be upon its true colour.

It is heartening, as views expressed by the newspapers have great impact on general public, so it should not be biased. I hope others will follow suit in this respect.

The government utterly surprised us by not inviting the leader and the members of the opposition political party at the reception of Bangladesh cricket team which was accorded at Manik Mia Avenue. In no way it could be accepted — it only belittled the government in the eyes of the people.

So, I hope the government, from now on will be sincere in its efforts not to disappoint the people in any way.

Nur Jahan
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

Sir, You deserve our appreciation and thanks for the commentary on 16 April, '97 under the above caption. The whole nation was unified by the glorious victory and was one in jubilations. But the way the national celebrations were conducted stifled the very spirits and blunted the character of it.

While grieving at the misfortune, we expect that amends would be made as so appropriately suggested at the fag end of your commentary.

Will people concerned please act?