

Yield no Ground to them

The home ministry has of late announced cash reward for handing a number of top terrorists of the city over to the police or for any information leading to their arrest. This desperate move is quite understandable against the backdrop of a none-too-happy law and order situation. But the authority's natural drive ought to have been to use its own gears to mop up the top order of the city or the country's criminal gangs. A few of them have already been caught but the success achieved so far is of little comfort because of two reasons: first, the chain of command in the criminal world is very entrenched and well-disciplined; second, and more importantly, the terrorists can easily manage bail to come out of their confinement. Legal loopholes, week framing of cases and lack of witnesses or supportive materials help them to walk out of the prison.

The way terrorists sought by the police on counts of several criminal charges receive bails give us reasons for serious concern. We feel there is a need for subjecting the bailable and non-bailable sections of laws — particularly in relation to terrorism, extortion etc — to a thorough review and fresh scrutiny. Speedy hearing of such cases at the court could be very useful in bringing the mastans into the pale of justice. This calls for strengthening the judiciary with more courts and competent judges. At the same time we would like to see that the public prosecutors are better qualified, trained and rightly motivated to take up cases where social criminals are involved. There is obviously a strong case for recruiting more investigation officers because the existing ones' work-load is too heavy to allow them enough time to pursue the terrorist cases seriously and in right earnest.

We make all these suggestions because some of the good work done by a few individuals or organisations is nullified by the lack of supportive mechanism—legal or judicial. It has been found that a most wanted criminal arrested by the police at great pains had to be released because of loopholes in the system. The interpretation of the laws on bail is clear but often the various conditions attached to them are not taken into effective consideration. There is no point granting bail to those infamous terrorists or culprits against whom there are innumerable cases of serious crimes lying with the thanas. To ensure that elements with such track-records, who pose serious threat to social peace and order, do not enjoy the benefit of legal flexibility, the existing laws need to be applied in the letter and spirit. Before we go for legal reform, can we concentrate on the application aspect of the laws?

Welcome DU-style

Freshers were greeted with gunshots on the Dhaka University campus day before yesterday. They had a jarring glimpse of what lies ahead of them. The welcome to the pure greenhorns who are yet to cross even the turf of admission tests should, in all fairness to them, have been in a persuasive forget-me-not-when-you-are-admitted kind of gesture; it was instead a violent show of strength in a fresh manifestation of the cult of campus terrorism in armed power. Student cadres have become so itchy with the guns, so trigger-happy to prove themselves that they can't wait to greet newcomers with traditional handshakes during fresher receptions their parties can hold at a future date.

The Friday facts on the campus speak for themselves. The DU premises hotting up with 'field preparations' by student parties ensuing in anticipation of the DUCSU and hall union polls — in the offing after a six-year shut-down — JCD and the leftist Gonotantrik Chhatra Union (GCU) clashed with an apparently resurrected Jatiya Chhatra Samaj (JCS), the student wing of JP. This left ten injured.

Not quite far from the eye of the storm also occurred the beating of a jtd. convener of the JCD, DU unit Selim by some BCL activists. Allegedly gunshots were fired by the BCL elements.

In the first incident, the student wing of Jatiya Party, the JCS appeared to have among its activist operatives several outsiders who played a visible role in the fracas. The Vice Chancellor sounded unhappy with the policemen's initiatives to quell the disturbance. A probe committee is expected to look into the episode as a mark of new seriousness of concern.

It is regrettable that the JCD is set to boycott the meeting which VC Prof Abul Kalam Azad Chowdhury is convening today. Not only that, it has called for a strike today in protest against Friday's violence on the campus in a doubly negative posture. They should cooperate with the VC whose attempts to involve all parties in solving DU's problems should be supported.

Shiny Prospect

Our luck in the tea business seems to be smiling, not quite in the shape of a spurt in the sales as yet, but only prospect-wise. To be on a surer footing than before at the international market-place with tea that is not particularly known for its flavour, colour being its ace just because the Indian and Sri Lankan output of tea has fallen due to droughts, is quite a twist of fortune we must be thankful to God for.

But there can be many slips between the cup and the lip. Good and timely showers over most of our tea gardens have ensured a high harvest for which import inquiries keep flooding into the offices of our tea managers. With the deeply-cutting crunch in the electric supply scenario we may lift the produce from the field but fail to process the leaves into tea in sufficient quantities to cater for the high demand pull.

The increasing domestic demand at a pace of one million kgs every year on a total output of 54 m kgs in an ideal year and with 26m kgs usually consigned for exports, what we face really is the most unsavoury prospect for ourselves having to import the beverage after 14 years from now.

The only option is to step up the per acre yield of tea and have its quality improved in spite of our tea gardens being not situated at ideally high altitudes which increase the flavour. The European Union can be a strong partner in progress for us adding to our local investments in the sector.

IMF Advice to Bangladesh Government

On the prevailing macro-economic situation in Bangladesh, the team has observed that there have been some improvements in terms of agricultural growth, inflation and balance of payments.

THE visiting IMF team has just concluded its negotiation with Bangladesh Government last week with any loan agreement. Newspaper reports have it that at the end of the two-week meeting with the government officials, the IMF team leader said at a press conference that it was just a "regular annual discussions with the government on economic development and policies and to discuss possible lending under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF)".

However, about six months ago, the government made it known to the public that it had applied to the IMF for a loan of \$500 million. It looks like the loan is still under consideration and that the maximum amount of the loan cannot exceed the set quota for Bangladesh of 392.50 SDR which comes to \$535 million. It cuts down the amount requested to about 60 per cent. Be that as it may, what would be useful is to examine the team's observations on the macro-economy and its advice to the government for future policy measures.

On the prevailing macro-economic situation in Bangladesh, the team has observed that there have been some improvements in terms of agricultural growth, inflation and balance of payments. It has pointed out quite rightly that the agricultural growth this year is mainly due to good weather than anything else. But fertiliser subsidy given by the government also played a role. Inflation, which is usually the main concern of IMF, is still in the range of about 3-3.5 per cent annual rate which is quite satisfactory. But if one looks at the last three quarters' inflation rates which shows an underlying upward trend as well as the government's heavy borrowings

from banks to meet its expenditures, one feels somewhat concerned that it may not remain low for long. As for balance of payments, both import and export growth rates over the two quarters have declined but export growth rates have been increasing marginally. Over the last year or so foreign reserves have declined from \$2.2 billion to about 1.8 billion and seems to be hovering around this figure. Therefore, there is not much of a danger signal there either.

However, this does not take into account the ever-widening cross-border trade or smuggling with India which leaves an annual deficit of about \$600 million (according to a World Bank study of 1994 trade). The country's top business chambers have been raising their voices over this alarmingly growing trade gap in recent weeks, especially in view of its effects on their industries. This has some bearings on the set of policy suggestions that IMF has given to the government which is dealt with below. Meanwhile, one wished that the IMF team had paid serious attention to this problem and prescribed some means of solving this problem or looked at the total trade situations of the country and prescribed appropriate solutions.

The IMF team has suggested that the government should i) adopt a cautious monetary policy, ii) increase its external reserve from its present level of \$1.8 billion which can finance barely three months' legal imports, iii) make vigorous attempts to improve savings, investments and industrial activities which are lagging now but are needed to achieve the gov-

ernment's target of 7 per cent rate of growth in the coming years as well as to reduce the level of existing poverty, iv) strengthen the banking system by realising the default loans, v) diversify or close the losing public enterprises, vi) further liberalise international trade, and vii) intensify fiscal reforms. These issues need some careful thoughts.

There is no doubt that monetary policy mix has to be much more prudently designed and managed in the coming months, otherwise the underlying threats will surface and give rise to an explosive situation. If that happens, then the macro-

economic stability which is an essential pre-requisite for non-inflationary development of the economy will be in a shambles. Apart from monetary-fiscal policies, there is also the need for deregulation of controls which are still prevailing, improving the efficiency of government administration and strict enforcement of the law and order in controlling the terrorists and toll collectors. The designing of such an optimal package of fiscal-monetary mix and other direct interventions will consist of the following measures: drastically cut down the redundant and wasteful current account expenditures of the budget including the

fraudulent practices severely punishable, strengthen the capital market and punish the stock market scums, reintroduce the one-year lock-in period for foreign investors in the secondary market, carefully adjust the exchange rates to maintain the export competitiveness, assist exporters and industrialists by giving all infrastructural facilities like stable supplies of electricity, gas, water, transport and communication links for production and marketing, further deregulate government controls on private sector businesses and productive activities, strengthen and overhaul the law enforcing agencies and strictly enforce

the laws and punish the offenders.

All these measures go way beyond what the IMF team has recommended but it excludes the team's recommendation of further liberalisation of trade. This writer takes the view that trade liberalisation since 1991 budget has gone quite far. By 1995-96 budget, the unweighted average customs duty rates have gone down from 57.54 per cent in 1991-92 to 22.52 per cent in 1995-96 while the import-weighted average customs duty rates have gone down from 24.14 per cent to 15.13 in the same period (Bangladesh Economic Review, 1996, page-38). There is no need for further liberalisation at this stage. If it is further liberalised, Bangladesh will be flooded with Indian products of all possible kinds and most of the newer industries will be annihilated.

However, exporters have been placed on a level-playing field by introducing duty drawback system which pays them back all customs duty and VAT they have to pay in importing raw materials, manufactured or semi-manufactured inputs, spare parts and capital machinery. Even the deemed exporters (who supply inputs to the direct exporters) are entitled to duty drawbacks. Special Bonded Warehouse system eliminates all these barriers and provides a very favourable environment for exports. Indeed, it is this system that has helped the phenomenal growth of the ready-made garments industry. Therefore, the real obstructions to promoting exports are not tariffs and taxes any more, rather the internal supply rigidities, lack of infrastructural facilities and disrup-

tions due to law and order situations and political turmoil. It looks like the country should first reap the gains from the existing liberalised tariff structures rather than launching into another phase of liberalisation.

The key bottlenecks are the thickets of internal controls, lack of infrastructures, lack of strict commercial laws and the law and order situation. If these can be tackled, confidence in the economy will improve substantially and domestic private investments will get an automatic boost. The government will not have to run to organise Investors' Forum to attract foreign investments. If the climate is favourable, foreign investors will rush on their own to invest in the country.

Finally, one observation will be perhaps most appropriate at this stage. Wherever road and communication links, gas, electricity and water supplies have gone, private investment is there. Just as when fertiliser supplies stimulated the farmers of the country to go for extensive dry season cultivation which has revolutionised the agricultural sector, so will the supply of the infrastructural package of road-communication-electricity-gas-water revolutionise the industrial scene of this country. The attention of the government should be concentrated in extensive provision of these facilities along with the stricter control of the law and order situation, then the speed of industrialisation will automatically be boosted. Except in some major capital-intensive sector, the country will not have to go to appeal for vast amount of foreign direct investments. There are enough domestic and expatriate investors who will run to take advantage of the new opportunities.

CLAMPING DOWN ON CORRUPTION

Rewards Offered to Tempt 'Accountability' Tipsters

PAKISTAN'S government has started an anti-corruption advertising campaign under the slogan "Ehtesab. Ehtesab. Ehtesab." ("Accountability. Accountability. Accountability.")

The advertisements urge people to perform their national duty by reporting corruption in government to the recently formed Ehtesab Cell, which is part of the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

A reward is being offered: 10 per cent of any proceeds recovered from the tip-off.

The Ehtesab Cell says it already had 560 government officials in its sights suspected of various malpractices, including embezzlement and misappropriation of funds.

Eighty-five have already been suspended and two others dismissed from departments including Customs, police, state-owned banks and inland revenue.

Ehtesab has been a national cry since Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party government was removed by President Farooq Leghari last year amid accusations of corruption and economic mismanagement.

The new Premier, Nawaz Sharif, whose Muslim League won February's general election, has declared a "holy war" on corruption. He says crooked civil servants are depriving the nation of two billion rupees a day.

"No-one should support any corruption official or show any favouritism towards any corrupt official, otherwise he, too, will be considered corrupt," Sharif has been quoted as saying.

The government is now drawing up a Bill confirming an Ehtesab Ordinance that was introduced during the period of presidential rule which preceded the election.

Despite the high-profile approach, Ehtesab has also suffered a setback, with the inability of Pakistan's high courts to deal with 55 cases referred to

The new Pakistan government has targeted hundreds of officials in an anti-corruption campaign. But Gemini News Service reports concern over the slowness of the legal process and the absence of politicians from the suspect list. Yousaf Rafiq writes from Islamabad



A scene from the British TV series 'Yes Minister'

them under the ordinance within the statutory 60-day period. The failure has led to concern that judgments may be challenged as long as unlawful.

"According to my knowledge, not a single case has been decided by the Ehtesab benches of the high courts," said the Chief Ehtesab Commissioner, retired judge Mujadid Ali Mirza.

Commentators have also noted the failure so far to establish evidence against a single politician.

The Nation pointed out that, if there were bureaucrats prepared to bend the rules for their

personal benefit, there were also politicians pressuring officials to break the law.

Past mass sackings in the civil service by incoming governments have reduced job security, leaving many officials feeling vulnerable to pressure from politicians to follow crooked instructions.

After the wave of suspensions in April, the English-language newspaper The News commented: "Every successful government wants to replace state officials with its own, thus making the exercise a matter of whim rather than merit."

However, Senator Saifur Rehman, head of the Prime Minister's Ehtesab Cell, promised that "not a single official has been suspended as political victimisation."

He said: "This is not the first and the last action against corrupt elements. Its objective was to take minimum action in the first go so that it comes as a deterrent."

He gave an assurance that suspended officials would be allowed full opportunity within the law, rules and regulations to defend themselves against charges. The government was committed to the principle of

accountability, but would ensure that no justice was done to any public functionary.

Because of the government's belief that low-paid public prosecutors have themselves been prone to corruption in the past, it is engaging the services of 10 leading lawyers to handle the cases. The accused will be subject to investigation at departmental level, and may also face prosecution in the high court.

Some observers have given warning that, if the alleged offences are not backed up by

solid evidence, the suspended officials may well be rehabilitated. A seasoned bureaucrat, speaking off the record, said few cases of suspension ever resulted in dismissal. "It is an established face-saving bureaucratic procedure," he said.

The provincial government of Pakistan's biggest province, Punjab, whose chief minister is Nawaz Sharif's brother, has announced that it is launching its own corruption clampdown.

In late 1995, Pakistan was listed as the world's third most corrupt country in a survey of international business executives carried by the Berlin-based organisation Transparency International.

YOUSAF RAFIQ is a reporter for Pakistan's 'Financial Post'.

OPINION

Let there be Light

Munira Khan

My grandson, who is 3-year-old, does not like nights and hates darkness. When night falls, he says to his grandfather: "Dada, tell the night to go away and call the morning to arrive." He has a profound faith in his Dada who, he thinks, would act and provide everything to make him comfortable. But then his Dada tells him: "Dear Dadu, you will have to wait and sleep for the morning to come because the Surji Mama (Sun) has started by a golden motorbike, has not reached here yet. When he comes, the morning will come." He seems to understand and repeatedly asks: "When; when will he come?"

I wish we all could have somebody whom we could also ask to remove the darkness out of our lives and give us light. Here, when I say we, I mean 'women' in Bangladesh. We wish to have many 'lives' to make our lives only 'livable' not to say 'comfortable'. We desire to live a life like other human beings in a proper manner, in a dignified way. We wish to have opportunities to be educated and then to be educated. We wish to have opportunities to work, economic independence, equal property rights, and equal social and political rights.

Although the Constitution has given us equal rights in every sphere of our lives, but practically we cannot get much of the opportunities to enjoy which the men do in the society.

How many schools and colleges do we have where girl students can have their education? I do not think we have half of the numbers the boys have. How many women are in business or in management of business enterprises? Not even five per cent! How many of women are engaged in government service? Less than 20 per cent.

What monetary security we the home-makers obtain after a long married life? Only one-eighth of the property after the demise of the life partner or nothing if one takes divorce. Can a wife get any portion of the property of the husband which she helped to acquire or preserve, if she wishes to take divorce or is compelled to be separated like those in western countries?

Practically, 'no'. But how we wish we could get it as our right. Then comes the most important one — the political rights. How many women are involved in politics, in the policy-making process, or give leadership in political arena? Very few. Since the birth of Bangladesh only 30 plus two or three ladies are representing women of

Bangladesh in the Parliament. Of them 30 are selected by the MPs who are mostly men.

We wish to make this figure 300 by increasing the number of MPs in Parliament from 300 to 600. Voters of all constituencies can elect one male and one female MP from each constituency.

And, why not? Nearly 50 per cent of our population and voters are women. We also wish to have more women ministers.

The other day, I heard one Justice's speech where he was telling that when a boy and a girl elope, if the girl's parents file a case, the girl is supposed to be sent in a 'neutral home' to stay until the case is settled. As in Bangladesh we have no establishment which can be called as 'neutral home' the girl is generally kept in jail, and she is to pass some years in jail with the criminals without committing any criminal offence. What a shame! What injustice and cruelty to women! The honourable Justice did not say whether the boy also suffers in the same way for the same romantic involvement.

Anyway, we wish for the sake of justice to women to have some 'neutral homes'. We wish we could stop trafficking of women to other countries. I can make the list of our wishes quite long. But I do not know to whom I can hand it over for the fulfilment of those wishes. So far we did not get any 'Dada' who cared enough to fulfil the wishes of women, to plan and to act accordingly to make the lives of women comfortable and respectable.

We know, like my grandson's demand of driving 'night' away for the early arrival of 'morning' cannot be fulfilled as it is a matter of time and nature; our demand and wishes also cannot be fulfilled immediately for many reasons.

But the 'golden motorbike' will have to be started by someone like Surji Mama. We wish to have someone who really cares enough, who not only speaks but acts, in whom we can have faith, we can ask without fear, with reliance to drive away the darkness around us. How we wish that somebody like my grandson's Dada as sure as the process has really started to fulfil the wishes and demand of the women of Bangladesh. That the golden motorbike has started and would reach soon thereby removing all darkness from our lives. It is a matter of time.

How we wish that somebody would say for us 'Let there be light', and then there will be light!

To the Editor...

To bell the cat

Sir, Third View by Mahfuz Anam on May 3 had some sound counsel for the political leaders who exploit their thousands of political workers in party interest. "Keep 'em engaged" (in people-oriented activities), because "an empty brain is a devil's workshop".

The current political culture does not encourage social or non-political programmes by these young workers in field and development activities. Agitational stance is the order of the day. This is an artificial pose with great systems loss in the long run (entropy).

What is visible are the political agitations and rallies from time to time, full of hate and animosity. What do they do the rest of the days? All have to earn their living, or get subsidies. Let us face the invisible question: how do you discourage or prevent rent-seeking outlets? In the philosophy of short-cuts, the value of the illegal return is not paid in full. This moral indebtedness exacts its toll later (the moral laws can't be bypassed or cut short).

Once nepotism and rent-seeking practices are condoned, the bad habit sets in with a vengeance. This culture snowballs, and soon goes out of control. From a political aberration, the virus infiltrates into the society, blunts the conscience, and erodes the moral. The deterrent has to come

from the top. What we see is all talk and no action. It is nobody's baby because the interest is greater than the principal.

Part of the contemporary political cultural weakness is the tendency to tell, and not to act. Sermonising and the gift of the gab are considered to be assets in a society with glaring disparity in the vertical hierarchy. Peer level social intercourse is not officially or formally recognised, hence the problem becomes more complex. Plain thinking is preached to those living a plain life.

Experience has shown that one solution is the eruption of a revolution after a certain stage is reached. The alternate cycles continue, as long as the swing of the pendulum does not become damped, to enable it to come to rest at the resting point, or centre (equilibrium).

There is an apparently simple solution: to bell the cat. Who will do that?

A Zabr
Dhaka

'Load shedding'

Sir, In the "Opinion" (Load shedding, DS, 22 May '96), Mr Ashfaq Ahmed put a number of questions to be answered by the then Minister and Secretary of Energy and Mineral Resources and by the Chairman, PDB. But none tried to defend those facts. At that time, the Care-taker Govt (CTG) remained

busy to please people and parties by an epoch-making govt-change through a fair poll. Hence, the judgement of Justice Habibur Rahman on the depth of power crisis was missed in the mirage of capability of the next government. CTG's wholehearted efforts gave this Govt of Consensus and Rule of Law. Presumably, the party now in power knew of the power crisis (people's hardship) on or before 22nd May '96. So, if they were sincere to solve it, they could do that with 'war footing' from day-one and not now (news item, DS, 26 Mar '97). If all actions and reactions suggested by elite and journalists were given due attention to by the Govt, then it could have brought some relief to the sufferers of power-starvation.

A good governance always brings back lost glory, while iconoclastic approach to regain, say, dynasty may work against. Moreover, the public servants should not have been allowed to propagate vile excuses to cover up their misdeeds/mismanagement.

I have almost forgotten Mr Ashfaq's opinion until a quarter-page ad-circular "Kero Bat Biddat Sarkar" of PDB, DESA & REB have started appearing almost daily in all the national dailies (I wonder, who allows such prodigality of public money). Does it enhance power output or reduce systems loss/load shedding? So, unless these apex bodies of power sector clarify Mr Ashfaq's

queries and other facts given below, then such public pronouncement (Kero Bat...) will be a perfect example of said covering up of misdeeds of the past.

Since gas and power are under one ministry, hence following questions come to us: A) Without materialising the plan to meet growing need and making provisions for its back-up, how those loads have been approved and connected — which has over-loaded the existing source? B) Whose responsibility is it to reduce the systems loss down to internationally acceptable limit? C) Who is to be directly blamed for poor site and equipment selection for a power plant? D) Why 210 MW Raozan-1 is limping (even with half load) since its installation? E) When a fraction of fertilizer factory's gas need may stabilize the pressure at the intake of a power plant, then why such step has not been taken at time of loss of gas pressure? F) If the Ministry was farsighted (a President (Ershad) who remained in power for longest period has doubt), then the decision of Tax-Free Generator would have come at least six months earlier.

I feel, the sooner the energy sector is overhauled, the better. God save us from all this power currents, as these are unhealthy for stability, progress and prosperity.

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