

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's 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 bails 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 by the student parties determined to give a foretaste of lest-you-forget our invincibility rating in armed power. Student cadres have become so itchy with the guns, so trigger-happy to prove themselves that they can not 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 jt. convenor 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 without 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 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 \$ 900 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 expatriates' remittances 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 bearing 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 go-

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) divest 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 fiscal 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-

losses of the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) to the tune of Tk 2.5 billion, which can save at least \$ 500 million a year (this writer has pointed out a number of times in this column what those items are), sell or close down the SOEs, increase the revenue collections by plugging the leakages of income taxes, customs duties and electricity charges etc., realise the outstanding bank loans of about Tk 13,500 crores which comes to over \$ 3 billion, introduce management efficiency in the entire banking structure, avoid recapitalising the sick banks, tighten the commercial and banking laws making-

INSIGHT

by
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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 draw-back 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 disruptions.

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

CLAMPING DOWN ON CORRUPTION

Rewards Offered to Tempt 'Accountability' Tipsters

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 being 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 Mujahid 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

queries and other facts given below, then such public pronouncement (*Keno Eal...*) 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 load 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 Raazan-1 is limping (even with half load) since its installation? E) When a fraction of generation is lost, 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.

A good governance always brings back lost glory, while an 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/mismanagements.

I have almost forgotten Mr Ashfaque's opinion until a quarter page ad-circular *Keno Eal Biddu Sankat* 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 Ashfaque's

sector is overhauled, the better. God save us from all this power crisis and its devilish undercurrents, as these are unhealthy for stability, progress and prosperity.

A R Choudhury
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accountability, but would ensure that no injustice 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.

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OPINION

Let there be Light

Munira Khan

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 for 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 *Surjhi 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 assures us that 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!