

Police: In Need of New Thought, New Approach

by Mizan Ali and Chandra Shekhar Das

Problems have gone unaddressed for a long time and our law and order situation has been worse off for that. It is really high time the system of police training was analysed and measures taken to understand where the fault lies.

POLICE is called the guardian of law. Created with a view to maintaining law and order in the civil society, its very presence should act as an automatic boost to the security of common people. Only criminals have reasons to steer clear of the members of the law enforcing agency.

This idealised vision of the law enforcers, however, may be too much to expect in today's world where man's poverty, greed and immorality are opening up new avenues for corruption every day. But then, if corruption has been on an upward swing as a possible threat to police efficiency, so has been the urgency and understanding of different states to upgrade and modernise the training of their law enforcers.

Police or the law enforcing agency in Bangladesh deserves a ready and ruthless critical scrutiny on two counts — in its image of predator rather than protector and its general inefficiency. Police here has grown the disreputation of being a source of terror than succour to the harassed or helpless people. More and more cases of police brutality are being heard these days. One of the more recent examples is Seema Chowdhury, an alleged rape victim of police. She died in February last while being taken to the hospital from the safe custody of Chittagong district jail. Earlier in October, the previous year, she was allegedly gang raped by some staff of the Razzaan police station in Chittagong district.

Another example which can be cited in this connection is the death of Tuhin, a young activist of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition in the parliament and principal rival of the ruling

Awami League. Tuhin was brought to the Ramna police station under section 54, which allows police to pick up any one on charges of suspicious movement. Tuhin died while being in the police custody and was reported to have committed suicide. A very unconvincing explanation under the circumstances, and most people were under the impression that police brutality led to the untimely death of this young man. Deaths like these are contributing to further apathy between people and police. Last vestige of confidence in police as the protector of law is fast waning.

This certainly has given a new dimension to the deteriorating state of law and order in the country. Many feel the gradual increase in the distance between police and people or the lack of cooperative or symbiotic communication between the two has played, catalytic role in the sharp rise of criminal activities across the country. Together with the lack of awareness among general people as regards their social obligation, this lack of communication have, according to the observers, have only added to the rise of the criminals. This is a very ominous sign for a civil society which values and believes in the rule of law. If we cannot reverse this reality, we run the risk of promoting private justice and consequently lawlessness and anarchy. Already the tell tale signs of such a possibility have shown its ugly visage in the form of mob justice, the most recent and grotesque being the lynching of six suspected cattle-lifters at Demra. More cases of people taking law in their own hands are being heard now than ever before.

This ironic reversal of roles did not happen overnight. It took years of negligence on the part of the administration to bring the police-people relation

to its nadir. But the saddest part of it all is that this process of decay always got and still gets faded out in the general and unqualified criticism over the alleged police failure to tide over an ever increasing trend of criminal activities. Hardly ever criticism was aimed at the right direction.

Over the years, the government of the day has made new laws to ensure safety of the people. Yet the incidents of rape, acid throwing and other brutalities on women and killing of people in broad daylight have continued to rise alarmingly proving once again that more than the numerical inadequacy of laws, it is their non-enforcement which is making the society increasingly prone to criminality.

Unfortunately, this aspect of our law and order reality has never really caught the imagination of our intelligentsia or those who think about the society. They have expounded theories to settle political disputes of the past but there is a single instance where they have helped develop some device to reduce the distance between police and people? What makes the police psyche so anti-people? Is there any scope to bridge the gap between police and the people? How can this be done?

From the look of it, the training method one gets exposed to when sent for police training in the four training centres and the only police training academy of the country is seriously flawed to start with. Emphasis in these centres is given only on the physical aspect and nothing is done to mould or train the minds of the future defenders of the society. The training system is totally militaristic in nature. Besides, training is provided only once or twice in life time.

The instructors of various police training centre institutes across the country are not properly qualified to train the new

generation police force. Many of the instructors sent to those centres consider it as punishment. It has been gathered that those who lack professional soundness are made instructors at the training institutes. The new recruits, allegedly also get exposed to the culture of offering and receiving bribe at the training institutes.

Many feel that the government should seriously explore the possibility of introducing a programme at the university level to help train the police and monitor their activities. With the traditional universities rather too burdened with student population and other problems, the open university could serve as an alternative option to meet the demand for quality training the police personnel.

There are other areas of concern also. Only 891 supervising officials, according to a report published in The Daily Star recently, are leading 93 thousand strong police force of the country, a ratio which is not deemed as balanced by the people in the know.

The operational budget of the police is declining since the fiscal 892-893 with the exception of 894-895. Allocation for training in the police budget is given the lowest priority.

But for sheer immediacy the problem which goes a long way to explain police inefficiency is the ridiculously low pay structure at the base. It really gives sanity a run in the woods to know that a constable who for all practical purposes puts up with the hazards of the profession, has a basic salary of Tk 1075. What reason on earth has he got to give honesty and morality his best shot?

These problems have gone unaddressed for a long time and our law and order situation has been worse off for that. It is really high time the system of police training was analysed and measures taken to understand where the fault lies.

ASEAN's Open Door Shuts Out Asian Moral Values

The dispute over ASEAN's decision to admit military-ruled Myanmar as a member has been portrayed as a clash between regional decision-makers and interfering foreigners imposing their own human-rights agenda. But that, reports Gemini News Service, leaves an important element out of the equation. Anil Noel Netto writes from Penang, Malaysia.

THE acceptance of Myanmar into the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has angered human-rights groups in other member-countries such as Malaysia. But local protests in Kuala Lumpur have been largely ignored by the controlled mainstream media who have projected the main opposition as coming from the West.

Critics of the move say that accepting Myanmar into the regional grouping while the country — formerly known as Burma — is still ruled by an oppressive military junta, would be tantamount to giving approval to the regime.

However, ASEAN leaders have agreed that Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos will be admitted at the regional ministerial meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 24-28 July to mark the group's 30th anniversary.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Abdullah Badawi says that ASEAN is admitting the three countries "to realise our forefathers' vision to unite the whole of South-East Asia under the ASEAN banner".

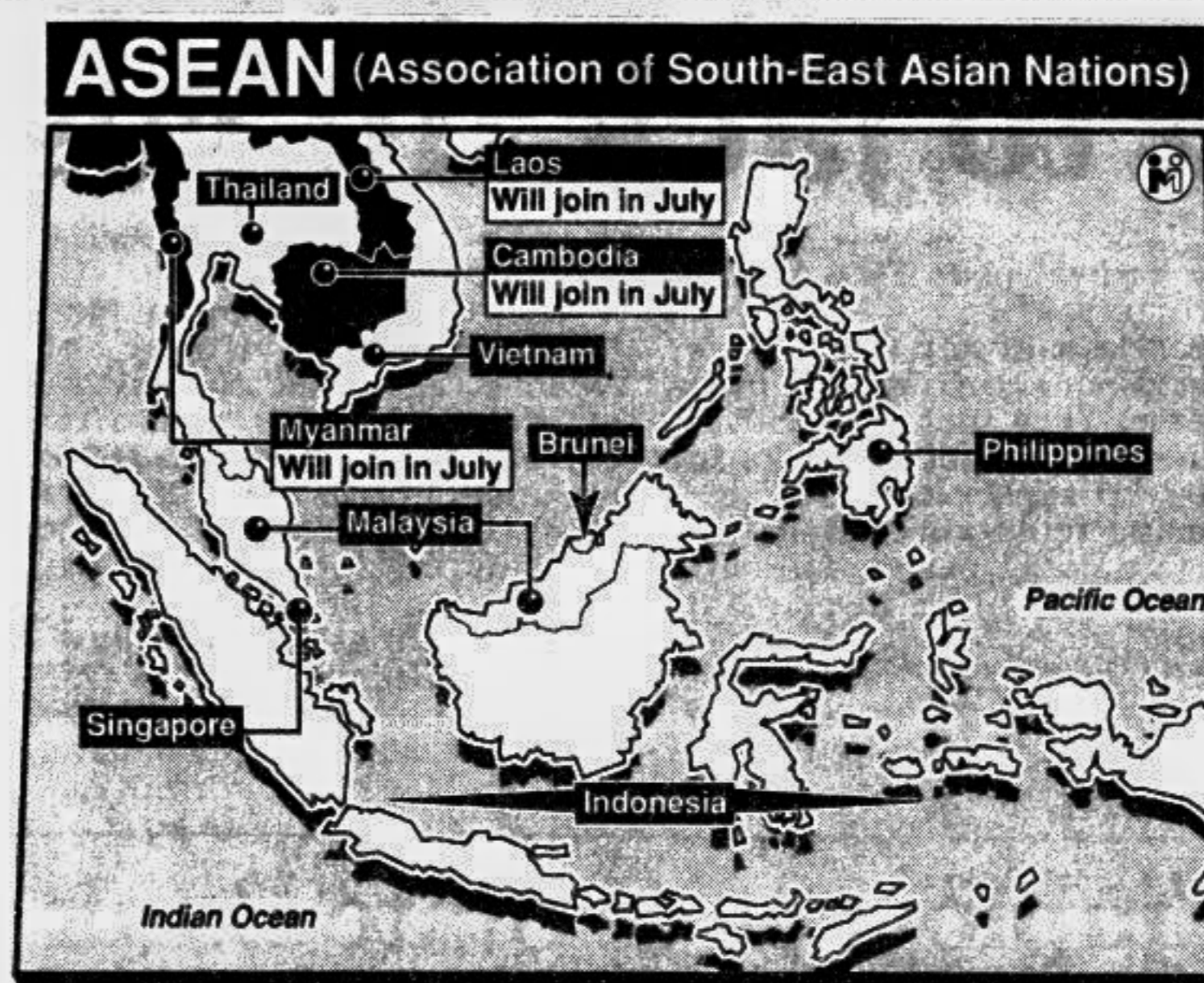
Malaysian human-rights campaigners have not accepted the decision quietly. Nine activists were arrested when they tried to deliver a protest to ASEAN foreign ministers meeting in Kuala Lumpur on 31 May. They were obeying police orders to leave the venue when they were bundled into a police van.

The next day, magistrates turned down a police request to extend the remand period and instead freed the nine.

The arrests stunned the campaigners.

"We don't understand how this can happen when we are obeying the police. Is this a sign that the rest of ASEAN is going to adopt the ways of Burma's junta?" asked one of those detained, Elizabeth Wong, coordinator of a local rights group, Suram.

Also among the nine was Fan Yew Teng, coordinator of the Burma Solidarity Group Malaysia, who signed the protest note. Fan highlighted the human-rights violations of Myanmar's military dictators and their contempt for international standards of behaviour.



"Dealing with a junta overwhelmingly rejected by the people of Burma and isolating their elected government is an unjust interference in the internal affairs of that country," he wrote.

The people of Burma, he added, had made their decision in the 1990 general election. The junta overruled the vote and placed the winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, under house arrest. ASEAN should not "crush their vote by propping up a brutal and irresponsible regime."

Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, speaking at a conference on "Muhammad Iqbal and the Asian Renaissance" in Kuala Lumpur soon after the nine protesters had been arrested, said Asia must promote participatory democracy, the rule of law and freedom of expression.

Pakistani poet-philosopher Iqbal had sought to show that Asia and Asian traditions are an integral part of human dignity. Anwar stressed that Asians must have a firm moral base. This, he said, "can be constructed by re-affirming our humanitarian ideals and moral vision."

The irony of these lofty words was not lost on activists such as Dr Mustafa Annuar, a social reformer. The Malaysian government, he observed, had consistently talked about up-

holding moral values. But, when it came to Myanmar, the leadership just "trampled on those values."

He said: "Anwar and company can talk about an Asian Renaissance until the cows come home. But the indecent haste that ASEAN member-countries displayed in admitting Burma as a member is simply outrageous."

Opposition leader Lim Kit Siang agreed. He said in a statement that if there was going to be an Asian Renaissance, it was more important to live up to Muhammad Iqbal's ideals than merely to debate them.

The Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement (ABIM) accused Myanmar's junta of suppressing the Muslim community there. ABIM secretary-gen-

eral Ahmad Azam said such suppression showed that its ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) had no respect for ASEAN's "constructive engagement" policy. (This policy operates on the basis that cooperation with the military will achieve more results than confrontation.)

"Myanmar's impending entry to the grouping should be postponed until the SLORC fully subscribes to the policy," he insisted.

"Constructive engagement has only helped Burma's military dictators," said Malaysia's Debbie Stothard, coordinator of the Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma. It had allowed them "to indiscriminately exploit the country's resources in the same way it has attacked the people of Burma."

The opening up of Burma's economy has not improved the well-being of the majority of its citizens, she argued. The international human-rights group Amnesty International reported that 1996 was the worst year on record for rights abuses in Burma.

These protests suggest that it is too simplistic to view the row over Myanmar's admission into ASEAN as a conflict between Asian and western approaches to human rights. Such a perspective would ignore the outrage felt by individuals and rights groups within ASEAN.

As one Malaysian campaigner put it: "It's not about whether ASEAN or the West is right. It's about human decency and conforming to civilised human behaviour."

The writer is a freelance writer based in Penang.

Double Delight

ENGINEERS have long dreamed of semiconductor chips that could handle both optical and electrical signals. But silicon hasn't been practical for processing pulses of light. And the semiconductor materials — such as gallium arsenide — are expensive or very fragile.

Now, hybrid optoelectronic chips have just moved closer to reality.

Researchers at Rochester Institute of Technology have found a way of enabling silicon to see the light. In telecommunications, this could end the need for the cumbersome equipment that converts laser pulses zipping through optical fibres into electrical signals required by silicon-based switching systems.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

Minimising Air Pollution

by Md Nasimuzzaman

THE main elements constituting our human environment are men, animals, plants, soil, air, water and sound. These elements might be either living or non-living. There should be an optimum relationship between these elements. When this relationship is disturbed or some of these elements are contaminated or polluted, environmental pollution occurs and becomes a threat to human life.

Air is an essential element of our environment and no life can survive without it, especially without oxygen — the most important constituent of air. Air may be subjected to various sorts of pollution at a particular level. Pollution of air in Dhaka city has reached three to four times higher than normal level and is causing serious health hazards.

Causes of Air Pollution: The main agent for air pollution in Dhaka city is motorised vehicles. Diesel-driven vehicles include heavy buses, trucks, lorries, railway engines, etc. Petrol-driven vehicles include cars, tempos, baby-taxis, motor cycles, auto-rickshaws, etc. These are the most important

agents for air pollution because in some engines, petrol is not burnt properly. Lead is added to petrol for increasing its efficiency but this lead does not properly burn which later spreads in their air.

Lead oxide is also mixed with air after burning lead. Both lead and its oxide are poisonous and are therefore hazardous. When someone inhales lead-polluted air, s/he will fall sick in the long run.

Some industries burn sulfur, lead, nitrogen and carbon compounds that produce unhealthy smoke and smog. Construction works done anywhere create particulate dust materials which mix with the air. In road construction, burning pitch creates unhealthy/hazardous smoke.

In some cases, solid waste and sewage are dumped near the residential areas and on the roadsides. When these wastes are fermented, putrefaction takes place that produces bad odour and blowing air carries that bad odour to the residential areas which is unexpected to the

inhabitants.

Effects of Air Pollution: Air pollution causes serious health hazards. Eighty per cent of vehicles plying on the road produce black smoke which contain carbon monoxide, lead oxide, sulfur dioxide, hydrocarbons, nitrous oxide, suspended particulate matter, etc. These substances are poisonous for humans and cause diseases of blood, lungs, throat, eye, nose, brain, kidney and skin. Particulate matter may contain carbon particles, dust particles and pathogens like bacteria, virus, fungal spores, etc., which may cause diseases of different organ systems. As a result, morbidity and mortality rates have increased and average life-span has decreased.

Preventive Measures: Air pollution has become a great threat to our environment. In order to keep the air free from pollution, we shall have to take the following steps:

a) All unfit vehicles, especially those that emit black smoke should be banned from the streets.

b) Punishment should be given to them who deal with rejected fuel and who use them in vehicles.

c) Public should be made conscious so that they try their best to prevent air pollution.

d) Bangladesh Road Transport Authority should be strict and sincere, so that no unfit vehicle gets fitness certificate.

e) Brickfields, powerhouses, industries, sewage and solid waste treatment plants, etc., should be set up as far as possible from the residential areas.

f) In mass media like radio, TV, newspapers, etc., causes and consequences of air pollution can be broadcast.

g) A combined effort of environmental protection agencies, city corporation authorities, administration (law enforcing agencies) and general public is required to keep air free from pollution.

It is not possible to keep air hundred per cent free from pollution. But we can minimise that by taking appropriate steps.

The writer is a student of Microbiology at Dhaka University.

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'Steps should be taken to stop illegal toll collection'

By Staff Correspondent

Illegal toll collection is a major obstacle to development of the commercial road transport sector. Everyday at different places of the country toll money was being collected illegally harassing the staff of the transports, said A. Gafur, general secretary of the Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association yesterday.

Gafur said, immediate measures should be taken to stop harassment by the unauthorised toll collectors. The transport owners are hostile to this activities of the toll collectors. He sought the help of Home Minister to bring an end to this situation.

In the past attempts were taken to stop paying illegal toll.

But the results were not satisfactory. The rates of illegal toll collection vary between Tk 100 and 200 per vehicle in the name of different transport organisations. No one protests this. Even police action is virtually absent. We have tried to talk to the toll collectors several times but that too failed.

Gafur said, this is a very good business without even investing anything. So long as they get money without any protest they will continue this 'trade'.

We received allegations from a number of bus owners that bus drivers were also the victim of ill treatment of the toll collectors.



A procession was brought out in the city protesting the imposition of additional taxes on the spare-parts of bicycles in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Construction work of Gazipur Shilpakala Academy to begin

The construction work of Gazipur District Shilpakala Academy building will begin soon, reports BSS.

State Minister for Youth and Sports and Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader said this while exchanging views with political leaders and government officials at Gazipur Circuit House yesterday.

Quader assured necessary steps in setting up youth development offices in all the five thanas of the district.

One robbed of Tk 1.36 lakh

By Staff Correspondent

Armed muggers snatched away Tk 1.36 lakh from a person near Kamalapur railway station in the city yesterday afternoon.

Police said, Aziz Chandra Pal, manager of a hardware shop in Moulvibazar, came under attack when he was passing Kamalapur area in an auto-rickshaw at about 1:30 pm. Aziz came to the city to purchase goods for his shop.

A gang of about four muggers in an auto-rickshaw intercepted the vehicle, in which Aziz was travelling, at gun point and took away Aziz's hand bag in which the cash was kept.

A case was lodged with Moti-jheel thana. However, none was arrested in connection with the incident till last night, police said.



Khandoker Ibrahim Khaled, Managing Director of Sonali Bank, inaugurating the computerised services of the bank's Sadarghat Corporate Branch in the city yesterday by pressing a button of the computer. General Manager M Nurul Huda and Deputy General Managers M Shamsul Haque and Jaglul Karim were also present on the occasion.

14th Rotaract Dist Assembly tomorrow

Rotaract club of Mohanagar North West sponsored by Rotary Club of Dhaka North West will host the 14th Rotaract District Assembly ARJON '97 tomorrow at BUET auditorium, says a press release.

The District Assembly is one of the two major annual programmes of the district. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a

message on this occasion convey her greetings to the participants and wishes every success of ARJON '97. Speaker of Jatiya Sangsad Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury also wishes the ARJON '97 a success. Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury will formally declare the assembly at 9 am.

In the closing ceremony of the Assembly reception to the cricket team of Bangladesh (ICC Trophy '97 winner) will also be accorded. Barrister Mainul Hossain, Chairman Editorial Board, Ittefaq Group of Publication Ltd. & Rtr. M. Jamaluddin, District Governor 1997-98 will be the chief guest and special guest respectively.

Kidnapped girl rescued: 2 held

A special squad of Ramna police rescued a kidnapped schoolgirl from a restaurant at Maghbar in the city early and arrested two young men in this connection, reports UNB.

Police said the arrested Jewel and Saifuddin alias Buddi abducted Nurat Jahan alias Mary 14 while she was going to school in Patuakhali town on June 6.

Later, they brought her to Dhaka in a private car. Jewel had proposed to marry Nurat, a class ten student of Patuakhali Government Girls High School, but her family refused the proposal.

Change in Biman Dhaka-Jeddah flight schedule

The schedule of Dhaka-Jeddah flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines has been changed due to unavoidable reasons, reports UNB.

The flight (BG 037) scheduled to operate today will now be operated combined as BG 049 on Dhaka-Jeddah-Doha route on Friday at 6:30 pm.

The Biman authorities have regretted the inconvenience caused to its valued passengers for the change in its flight schedule, said a press release yesterday.