

City of Fear?

Crime situation in the capital seems to have taken a sudden nose-dive. From organised terrorism to isolated incidents of violence we have had a veritable medley of security-related urban worries spiralling in the past few weeks.

Hijackers reportedly cut the veins in a female college teacher's hands last Wednesday apparently out of frustration from drawing a blank. It happened in daylight on Bailey Road, one of the supposedly more secure roads in Dhaka, and two armed policemen, the report said, were in sight of the spot.

Not long after we came to know about the formation of vigilante group by businessmen at some areas of the older part of the city as a last resort to the seemingly irredeemable problem of extortion and terrorism, we were reported of a replication of the act at Shantinagar bazaar.

There is a big difference between the apparently similar development at two different areas. Shantinagar, in contrast to Badamtali and other areas adjacent to river Buriganga, as the local policemen explained in a funnily irresponsible manner the other day, does not quite offer an easy escape to the invaders by water. Besides, it is only a few hundred yards away from Rajarbagh police line, the sprawling barrack for the members of the law enforcing agency.

That it does not matter to have a police pocket and personnel around was amply proved only a couple of days back when a *chanda party* or extortionist group exchanged fire and blasted bombs at the Shantinagar bazaar around four in the afternoon. A rickshawpuller received bullet injuries but things could have been really worse in a populated place like market and in Shantinagar of all places.

Hot on the heels of this frightening incident took place an armed clash between terrorist groups at the *bustees* overlooking the lone five star hotel we have at Karwanbazar leaving one slum-dweller dead.

That Dhaka is no longer safe is an old story. The challenge is how to restore the lost sense of safety to its dwellers. If experience is any basis of inference then it can be safely stated that Dhaka is inexorably heading towards being titled, the city of fear.

The ministry concerned certainly owes the law abiding, terrorised people an answer.

Make Haste about It

Going at the present rate of thoughtless rubbishing all around, it would not be delving too deep in morbid imagining to say that unless some means are found urgently, Dhaka's denizen would soon be worming their way in acres of stinking dirt and fetid cesspools. Here is a happy tiding capable of putting that nauseating prospect at bay. Two foreign companies have reportedly submitted waste management plan to the Dhaka City Corporation.

It is a very interesting and hope-generating package of integrated waste management programme comprising collection, treatment, transfer and incineration of wastes into energy, compost and land-filling materials.

It promises to address all the major problems now plaguing Dhaka city. What we have now to take care of the refuse is only a few dumping grounds. They already have had their share of filth and by piling on them relentlessly we have brought ourselves perilously close to an environmental disaster. One reason Dhaka's air has recently achieved the dubious distinction of being one of the most polluted in cities is its pervasive piles of odorous dirt. City's drainage system is on the verge of collapse due to that curse of civilisation — the abominably imperishable poly bags.

We urge the DCC to push this project through the bureaucratic and business woods to a quick and effective operation. It should realise that Dhaka as a modern city simply cannot rot in dirt. A great deal of success of this cleanliness business boils down to iron will and determined approach. From a city once referred to as dying under the burden of refuse and rubbish Calcutta has undergone a near miracle to be a subject of global admiration. It has been possible because of the unwavering determination of the Calcutta city authorities.

As a paper we have time and again tried to infuse this will and sense of urgency into the DCC as our collaborative effort of Save Dhaka, Clean Dhaka campaign in harness with the scouts and BUET would show. This waste management is one timely and useful proposal over which the DCC cannot simply afford to stick to its old habit of not delivering the goods.

Behind the Prices

A price pressure has built up, thanks more to reprehensive talks about salary increases rather than their materialisation in a radical form. The fuel price rise has had a part in it too by way of raising transportation costs, what with the announcement time disclaimers to the contrary.

Our good time and consistent luck with low inflation rate is fast running out. According to a financial daily report, the overall rate of inflation has reached 8.94 per cent while in the urban areas it has gone up to 14 per cent.

How much of the price hike has resulted from demand — supply imbalance caused by production shortfall, if any, or transportation bottlenecks of cross-river ferry disorders or *aborodh*s here and there, nobody knows for sure. Similarly, no tab is kept of the impact of speculative and manipulative trading on the price-line so as to arrive at a strategem for corrective intervention wherever and whenever necessary.

The tyrannical strangle-hold of extortionist collection at the *bazars*, *ghats*, highway stop-overs and city traffic points by *mastans* and law enforcement way-wards alike push the prices up so much so that all the other jacking factors put together are outdone by it. So, basically it is a law and order problem playing havoc with economic or market forces and re-writing the laws of economics into a new-edition book of vices.

Together They Keep the Candle Burning

Death of a friend diminished them. The pain and the agony also brought them together. For the departed, it was the climactic end of hopelessness and despair. For the living it unfolded a new horizon of hope — a horizon arising out of friendly existence together.

FEAR is a powerful force. When in darkness, we are afraid of demons and death. If we dose to light a candle, the darkness disappears. But fear numbs and coupled with despair it paralyzes.

It was a dismal evening in 1961. The tragedy of death struck a suburban village near Comilla town. The victim was a rickshawpuller and he was young. He rented a rickshaw from a rich owner and plied it day in and day out, sometimes till late in the evening. Yet after paying the rent, he could never earn enough to feed himself. Hungry and exhausted he died. His friends, also rickshawpullers themselves, were sad and worried. There was no money to buy the shroud for covering the dead. So they got together and pooled their meagre resources for the final rites.

After the burial they came one by one to the make-shift tea stall of their friend Mr Yasin. Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan, the father of the Comilla Cooperatives, was also there. As they shared their worries and the fear about their own lives, Mr Khan suggested that they might like to opt for solidarity. They agreed. They decided to save 25 paisa each day and create a savings fund. They trusted this literate friend to keep the books and open an account with the local bank.

Over the next year or two the savings grew. The consensus decision of the group was to buy a rickshaw with loan from the bank against the collateral of the savings account. Mr Akhtar Hameed Khan stood guarantee and the first loan was disbursed. The group again decided who the first recipient would be and a repayment scheduled for him. The lucky member paid back the loan even before six months were out. The group bought one more rickshaw and then another.

Empowered by their solidarity, they graduated from rickshaws to tractor-trailers and trucks. They pooled together the farmland they had and installed a tubewell there. The tractors were used for the ploughing and they grew rice and field crops the year round. They also rented those out to farmers in neighbouring villages. Once the ploughing was done, the tractor trailers and the trucks were used for transportation of goods. They also invested in brick-field. Construction business in Comilla town was booming then.

As for the farming enterprise, they shifted over the years from monoculture to mixed cropping. Why? Because, a village elder says, it confuses the pests. Also, soil is the mother's womb for the plant. Growing rice continuously exhausts the soil. If the mother is sick, the child could be still-born and if born would grow up sick.

Women members in the community also got together. They formed their own savings and credit group. With loan from the bank they installed a husking machine for milling rice, both their own and from the neighbours' areas. They nurtured their homestead gardens and produced vegetables for their own consumption and some more for selling in the market. They also process food and sell pickles and jams. Every house by the way has at least three fruit trees, usually

mango, jackfruit and guava.

One group is in charge of rehabilitating derelict ponds and stocking fish therein. After meeting the household needs, they sell the surplus. Another, takes care of the poultry and ducks. The breeds are indigenous. What is additional is better feed-management, as also the provision of scare shelters. There are also other enterprises like stitching together the embroidery, tailoring or dress-making. They have also transformed social practices by prohibiting the pernicious dowry system or for that matter child-marriage.

The younger ones among them who have completed middle schools, run feeder schools for the children who are still too young to walk the two miles to the local school. The older children are all enrolled there.

Some of them are barefoot doctors. Trained in the nearby Rural Health Centre, they are responsible for basic immunization and primary health care. Some are veterinarians taking care of the New Castle disease of the poultry. The bare foot doctors go around the village in bicycle — itself a radical happening.

There is, of course, the village mid-wife, an age-old institution. But she is now empowered with knowledge. She brings into the world the newborn with proper hygienic care. They also look after the pre-natal and post-natal requirements of the mother.

Young people in the community are organised too. Some of them have gone to the town for higher education, found employment there or elsewhere. Many, who reside in the village, serve the people they grew up with. A youth group, for example, has established a machine shop. It services the trucks, tractors and other equipment. The motto engraved on the top of the front door is, "Serve the People". They are entrepreneurs with social responsibility.

Professor Yunus has revolutionised the banking system by establishing the fundamental right of access to credit by the rural poor and the women. Can he consider catalysing a youth bank? It could provide the much-needed seed-capital to the enterprising young in the countryside.

Thus the story evolves of a community that dared to light a candle rather than curse the darkness. Death of a friend diminished them. The pain and the agony also brought them together. For the departed, it was the climactic end of hopelessness and despair. For the living it unfolded a new horizon of hope — a horizon arising out of friendly existence together. Yes, there are occasional clouds and sometimes gusty storm. The candle flickers but never dies. The miracle of human togetherness keeps it burning.

My Yasin and his friends in Deedar Samity may never have read William Butles Yeats. But they know precisely what the poet meant when he said,

"Think where men's glory most begins and ends.

And say my glory was I had such friends."



A Z M Obaidullah Khan

To the Editor...

Motorcycles: No double-riding

or less of its present size in all respects during that period.

Ashfaque Chowdhury
Gulshan, Dhaka

Kidney Dialysis Centre needs help

Sir, Child mortality rate in Bangladesh is much too high and its only the coordinated efforts of public and private sectors which can prevent the immature death of the underprivileged children in our country. To this end, Mrs Sultana Islam, a self-actuated social worker has set up a social welfare organisation, 'National Women Federation' in 1971 in the capital city.

For the last 10 years, National Women Federation has been successfully operating a four-bed 'Kidney Dialysis Unit' in the premises of Dhaka Shishu Hospital. This unit provides free of charge treatment for underprivileged children who would otherwise die of renal failure. However, this small unit is not sufficient to meet the demand of emergency treatment for a large number of child-patients. So, we intended to set up a full-fledged 'Kidney Dialysis Centre' with the expansion of this unit to provide modern life-saving treatment facilities for more children both from Dhaka and all other parts of the country. Meanwhile, the authority of Dhaka Shishu Hospital informed us that they would provide their full cooperation if we set up this hospital in the same premises with the upward expansion of the existing building of the hospital. But National Women Federation with its limited resources could not able to finance the project.

The project, if implemented, would definitely be able to save many precious lives of our children. In this context, National Women Federation is fervently seeking the full support of the prime minister in implementing this project and thereby help to save lives of many poor children.

At the same time, we urge the charitable and benevolent persons and organisations of the society to come forward with their generous support.

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Diana would've been happy

Sir, It was great to know that this year's Nobel Peace Prize has been jointly awarded to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and its coordinator, Jody Williams. Congratulations to them! There are very few organisations in this world who have campaigned for a cause so

effectively, and in so short a time to bring about a worldwide change in long-held opinions. Yet, even more significantly, this year's award is a fitting tribute to the work of Princess Diana towards the cause of landmines. It was baffling to see by just how much she had increased the awareness of anti-personnel landmines when she first visited Angola. Today, Diana would have been proud.

The day the award was announced was exactly 40 days to day she died, and therefore for the heart-broken like us, the end of the Muslim-period of mourning for the death of the Princess. It couldn't have been a happier day for us to remember her.

An anti-landmines supporter
(By e-mail) Dhaka.

The SSC students

Sir, It was during the third week of September, 1997 that in the letter column of more than two vernacular dailies, the dilemma concerning the holding of **SSC** examination of 1998 in February appeared with all clarity and concern. Even the holding of the exams and finishing it all up within the shortest period of time, that is, holding of two papers were also mentioned. The concern of the guardians and the students were equally apprehensive. It had also been mentioned in those letters that the textbooks of 1997 for the Class IX and X students were available in the market in July, six months after the new classes had started.

Now when a truce seemed to have beenfallen, all the authorities concerned including the education ministry, suddenly the education boards and the home ministry have awoke. It took more than 40 students, obviously the prospective SSC candidates, to go to the jail, nearly 50 or so private vehicles to be smashed up, innumerable civilians injured with the inclusion of a few policemen who were ordered to tame the unruly, so-called misguided young learners.

The secretary, ministry of education has taken the initiative to warn the rumour-mongers who reportedly is alleged to have succeeded in creating anarchy with ulterior motive. He has taken pains to explain and clarify that till now no decision has been taken regarding the SSC examination. He has also declared in the future, serious government action would be taken against those who spread rumours or fabricated imaginary months, dates, etc. concerning the SSC 1998 exams.

Does not the responsible people read the newspapers daily?

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A Modern Commonwealth for the 21st Century

by Tony Blair

The 54 countries of the Commonwealth account for one quarter of the global population and twenty per cent of the world's trade. In a single organisation the Commonwealth brings together every kind of country from G8 economies to the least developed... It is an important organisation for promoting free trade and prosperity.

SOME people say there is no future for the Commonwealth, that it is a collection of countries with nothing in common. They are quite wrong.

The Commonwealth is needed now more than ever before. The bonds which link us are extremely strong: history, values, culture and above all the English language.

The first phase of the Commonwealth in a way ended when South Africa became a democracy. The next phase of the Commonwealth's history must be different. The task of the Commonwealth now is to be bridge builders between the developed and the developing world — to advocate the future — the time when there is one world, a developed one in which all nations share.

The Commonwealth can set an example to the world. It is a moral compass in a world of insecurity — tackling the problems of human rights abuses, environmental decay and poverty.

This week Britain will have the honour of hosting the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh. Bangladesh representative, the Honourable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, will join me and other Commonwealth leaders to discuss how we can make our countries safer, freer and more prosperous places to live.



The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP

Prime Minister of Great Britain

Much has changed in the 20 years since a British Government last played host to Commonwealth colleagues in 1977.

The Commonwealth has grown from 36 to 54 member countries in every continent in every region of the world. Our combined population amounts to a staggering 1.6 billion people. Our organisation is more inclusive, more influential, than ever before.

Today's Commonwealth is working hard to safeguard democracy, protect our environment, promote education, jobs and prosperity for all. Its members also work closely together in tackling poverty and disease. This year's summit will be a chance to build on past progress — by forging new partnerships.

Partnership for Prosperity First, a new partnership for prosperity, between public and private sectors. For the first time this year, there will be a Business Forum before the Summit bringing together leaders of industry, commerce and finance to put their views to us on how we can promote growth together. Governments can only do so much. Businessmen have a crucial role to play. The Business Forum will tell Heads of Government exactly what they need. They will make suggestions on how we can increase trade and investment between Commonwealth countries.

And this year, for the first time, Heads will have a specific theme, 'Trade, Investment and Development: the road to Commonwealth Prosperity.' We shall concentrate on practical ways in which Commonwealth countries can work together in a partnership for the prosperity of all our citizens.

OPINION

Reform UN for Real Peace

Dr Abu Obaidul Huque

Since 1945 the United Nations was able to stop some wars and conflicts among nations albeit temporarily and at the same time many activities of the United Nations became controversial, and in many cases the United Nations efforts and activities even suffered miserable failures.

In the recent years the outcome of several much expensive UN summits at Copenhagen, Rio de Janeiro, Cairo and Beijing have disappointed the world people. More unfortunate is that the world people were simply disheartened to observe the miserable failure of the world body in tackling the immorality and inhumanity in Rwanda, Zaire, Somalia, Bosnia, Chechnya, etc. and quite passively watched these perpetrations of cruel events by the modern civilised world. Possibly these are the reasons which have shaken the conscience of some concerned world leaders in favour of reforming and overhauling the United Nations.

Under these circumstances now world people at large must have started realising that the 'secondary level' fatal social problems of the contemporary world viz corruption, AIDS, poverty, human rights violation, environment

mainly in the absence of a moral approach in its programmes, efforts and strategies. At present as people are losing confidence in the UN so they are realising that no efforts and programmes of the UN will be able to achieve the targeted result in yielding real and durable peace, order and justice unless and until they are touched upon by the essence of human and moral values and approaches.

Thus, keeping the above views in mind, a benevolent organisation namely 'Foundation for Moral Development Approach (FMDA)' from Bangladesh sent a proposal to the United Nations, entitled 'A proposal to the United Nations on Moral Development Approach: A New World Order for Peace' suggesting some steps and strategies for universal moral development. Since this moral degradation has become a global problem, the world body must come forward to solve it universally. And hence it is appealed to the United Nations and its member states to consider and implement such global moral development proposal to save the mankind from its dark and uncertain future.

The writer is the founder-president of FMDA, Dhaka.