

Law and Order is the Priority

Mohammad Nasim, who was given the Home Affairs portfolio on Thursday last, harbours few illusions about the task he has undertaken. While speaking to journalists at his office in the Telecommunications Ministry on Sunday, Nasim echoed the sentiments of most people in this country, when he identified 'terrorism' as his top priority. He also said that keeping the political situation peaceful would be another of his major tasks. The two together would be handful for any minister, particularly given the precarious state of law and order in the country, and allegations of the use of the police to oppress opposition parties. However, Nasim does appear aware that acts of terrorism are not isolated events, and they flourish only in a lawless environment. Once the rule of law is allowed to lapse and policing becomes a partisan affair, then the incentive for terrorism and all other criminal acts increases. Currently, the general impression is that administration of law and order is highly distorted, with corruption and political interference affecting both the morale and efficiency of the police.

Nasim needs to be aware that, along with political terrorism, the general law and order environment also raises much cause for concern. For the public at large, security of lives and property in their everyday existence is probably more important. Robbery, muggings, random acts of violence, extortion etc., are more important simply because they occur too close to home, affecting the public's peace of mind and general sense of well-being more directly. Here again, when the law is applied selectively or not at all, then criminal activities flourish.

The question before Nasim is not whether he can 'root out' terrorism or not, but whether he can demonstrate application of the law strictly and indiscriminately. The home minister, if he is serious about what he has said in his first public utterances since taking office, first needs to rise above partisan interests. He cannot expect the police to maintain law and order with any degree of efficiency unless they are freed from political interference. Political stability also requires a stable law and order environment which leaves little or no room for opposition grievances. It is now upto the new home minister to prove that he is equal to the task.

Lack of Quorum

If the opposition boycotts Jatiya Sangsad or walks out of its sitting on a given day, technically it may not affect the transaction of parliament's business but this certainly tells upon the quality of JS proceedings. On top of such a negative impact on parliamentary activity, of which we have had a plentiful share since the half-way point of the previous parliament to well into the current one, we now face the predicament of frequent lack of quorum in the House. The MPs' lack of punctuality in attending JS sittings delays the commencement of the business of the House as their impatience to stay on makes the Speaker call it a day before time. In other words, 'the effective time of the parliament' devoted to the day's orders of business is lessened that much more. If the parliament secretariat people have to frequently set the alarm bell ringing like some SOS calls for the truant members to return to their seats and fill the quorum there is but one conclusion to draw: those parliament members are making a mockery of the trust and confidence the electorate as a whole and their constituencies individually had reposed in them by voting them into parliament. If the MPs themselves trivialise the JS like this how are the people expected to hold the institution in esteem?

For all one knows, parliament sessions are spaced out suitably for the convenience of MPs to attend all the sittings undistracted by other preoccupations. Furthermore, the day's agenda are set by prior consultation at the business advisory committee level with notices duly served by way of intimation of what is to be expected on a given day. So, there is no question of any delayed start of the sitting or the quorum going by default in that kind of a work-a-day setting.

The lack of interest in parliament's work touches on a sensitive moral chord, too. By a very crude but essential yardstick, the lapse is an instance of pecuniary dishonesty because the MPs are paid for their attendance and that from the public exchequer. Accountability should have been a guaranteed feature of their conduct as highly placed public representatives.

Good Augury for Afghanistan

We are delighted at the prospect of a positive turn of events in the war-torn Afghanistan after long twenty years of armed conflict that has all but ruined the country. The landlocked rocky stretch of a country, between Iran and Pakistan, Afghanistan has seen only war since 1978 when the Soviet protege Tariquee ousted Daud from state power through a military coup. Daud himself had captured power by overthrowing King Zahir Shah in 1973. The people of Afghanistan turned against Tariquee in 1979 and the country virtually went into a civil war. The Soviet Union which occupied Afghanistan in 1979 in a failed bid to rule the country through brute force was driven away finally in 1989. Unfortunately, the war did not end there, rather it continued without respite killing and crippling thousands of Afghans and ruining the economy beyond redemption.

The Afghans have been in a pitiable plight under the tutelage of the Taleban who are known for their harsh religious edicts. Efforts were made in the past to persuade the warring parties to talk peace, see peace but in vain. It now, however, seems that the ice has started melting and the Taleban and the Northern Alliance have agreed to bury their hatchet in UN-brokered talks held in Ashgabat, capital of the Central Asian republic of Turkmenistan, ironically a former Soviet territory. The parties have agreed to power-sharing arrangements, exchange of prisoners and joint efforts to end years of bloody conflict. Both sides have agreed to form a 'shared executive, a shared legislature and a shared judiciary,' according to press reports. We welcome this change of heart by the warring factions in their quest for peace and wish them all success in their gigantic effort to reconstruct their devastated country.

As promised last time, today I am dealing with the way, I think, SME development may be facilitated in Bangladesh. SME development depends on the availability of supply side services and facilities such as information, finances, skills, and technology on the one hand and knowledge about and the development of the existing and potential markets (domestic and foreign demand) for the products on the other. It should be noted that these are the core elements; but there may also be other services or facilities needed by a specific industry or geographical area or enterprise.

In order to discuss the issues in some depth it is necessary to cover the various aspects in two instalments. I would therefore cover some aspects today and the rest next time. But I wish to emphasize that all the important services and facilities need to be accessed by the entrepreneurs in a package, to be utilised as required. For example, a particular entrepreneur who is starting out may need all the services, while an existing entrepreneur may need some of them (e.g. credit for working capital, in-service training of management personnel, information on emerging markets, etc.). Each should be able to access the services required. Again, the services needed by an entrepreneur are provided by different agencies, public and private; but information about where to go for what is not readily available, particularly for small entrepreneurs from outside Dhaka and, perhaps, other cities; nor may there be readily available information about who does what best, given that there are more than one source for particular services.

Hence, it is important that there exists an institution, preferably in the private sector, which collects, processes and disseminates information regarding where to turn to within the country for different services, including an assessment of who does what best. It will also identify gaps in terms of non-availability of certain

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services or of inadequacy of the available services (in terms of quality, level, and quantity) and encourage the existing and potential service providers to fill those gaps. For medium enterprises it is the implementation of relevant policies and access to finances that are the more critical issues. Today I deal with access to credit, the human factor, and technology; other issues will be taken up next time.

Access to Credit

The SME sectors are starved of both term and working capital loans. The two development financing institutions (DFIs), Bangladesh Shilpa Bank (BSB) and Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS) have not been active for years in extending loans. The commercial banks also do not provide term loans. In the past, many of the entrepreneurs who succeeded in securing term loans from BSB or BSRS could not arrange loans for working capital from commercial banks or other sources, finding themselves in serious problems. But there were others who in fact were not interested in setting up or running businesses/industries; their intention was to secure loans somehow from BSB, BSRS or a bank and use the moneys for other purposes.

It is extremely important for the SME sectors to make progress that there are effective institutions providing term loans (i.e. DFIs) as widely as possible. At the same time, it is crucial that the proposals are appraised objectively, critically and transparently. The experience and social standing of the individuals applying for loans should also be taken into account. Also, it is necessary to ensure that the applicants have access to working capital so that they can in fact run their businesses/industries without hassle on this account.

On the other hand, loans

must be repaid. Those who cannot pay due to unavoidable reasons may be facilitated and enabled to pay through rescheduling/waiver of interests, as appropriate. But those who are wilful defaulters must be dealt with firmly in accordance with the provisions of the contract.

The story generated by a Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)/Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP) study conducted in 1998 is an extremely discouraging one regarding access to credit by small enterprises. Most of the enterprises in the sample of 47 enterprises were either inherited or set up by the entrepreneurs using their own resources (savings, sale of assets and property, gifts from

properly trained, skilled and experienced people are needed in adequate numbers. Therefore, as in any other modern sector, in the case of SMEs particular attention needs to be given to the human factor, its current status and future development. The broad social setting in this country is such that only about half the adult population (15+ years) is literate, and a significant proportion of them can write their names only or their reading and writing abilities are of rudimentary levels and of little or no practical use. Insofar as skill training is concerned, the people at large receive no training at all. The people in general learn what they do in their economic pursuits (agriculture, off-farm ac-

ground of higher secondary to graduation and above.

Another study covering enterprises with 5 to 20 workers (including both family and hired workers) found that the educational background of about 90 per cent of the entrepreneurs is primary or above, of 58 per cent secondary or above, of about 39 per cent higher secondary or above, and of 29 per cent graduation or above. But, in both the samples, the entrepreneurs generally lacked formal skill or management training when they started their enterprises, although most of the entrepreneurs included in the 1998 study and about half the entrepreneurs included in 1992 study had some informal, on-the-job experience/training in the same line of business through their previous employment.

One major problem faced by SMEs relates to the availability of skilled managers and workers, in terms of both numbers and adequacy of training and experience. As a result, production and distribution costs tend to be high. In the public sector, such agencies as the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries (BSCIC) through its Training Institute for Small and Cottage Industries, Bangladesh Institute of Management (BIM), the Department of Youth, and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs provide managerial and skill training.

In the case of the Department and the Ministry, self-employment is the main focus; and, hence, the level of training tend to be geared to that end and not to the needs and requirements of the SMEs. The training activities of the BSCIC and the BIM, geared to SMEs, account for only a minuscule part of the needs.

Certain NGOs, Trusts and private agencies also provide training in certain skills;

trainees include both self-employed and wage employment seekers. But, these training activities are not particularly geared to the needs of the existing and potential SMEs; there are often of rather low levels and of indifferent quality. It is important that there is an organisation that is mandated and equipped to ascertain the skill requirements of industries/businesses on a continuous basis and encourages existing training institutes to provide the kinds and levels of training needed in sufficient numbers. New training institutions may also be encouraged to be set up in the private sector geared to meeting the properly assessed felt needs for trained hands.

Technology

In this age of phenomenal technological advancement with the information technology leading the wave of globalisation putting competition at the forefront of economic management nationally and globally, there is no escaping from the urgent need to seek technological modernisation. Although, there is awareness about that in Bangladesh, not much progress has been made not only physically but also in terms of strategic planning for supporting and facilitating the process.

In order to be able to compete successfully, the SME sectors cannot but to go for modern/advanced/upgraded technologies, as appropriate. The current situation, particularly regarding small enterprises, is characterised, by and large, by more or less traditional technologies and methods of production. About 80 per cent of the sample entrepreneurs of the earlier referred to SDC/BUP study have said that they were not satisfied with the existing technologies and methods of production used in their enterprises. Many of them had in fact carried out cost estimates of planned upgrading. But mainly due to failure to access necessary finances, they could not actually undertake the upgrading.

the all-time list," replete with spectacular psychedelic effects. It was the era's quintessential 'head' movie.

Astronaut Neil Armstrong was once asked: "How does it feel to travel in space?" "As in '2001: A Space Odyssey,'" replied the first man to walk on the moon. The special effects of this movie is so real that thirty years after it was made, people like the writer who watch the movie at home are still awed. Once again, Kubrick puts famous music to work. In "2001: 'The Blue Danube Waltz'" accompanied a space-docking sequence in absolute harmony.

Film makers like Kubrick are standouts because of their versatility. Perhaps no one is more versatile than Briton David Lean. His "A Bridge over the River Kwai," (1957) about the revolt of British prisoners of war in a Japanese camp in the jungles of Burma (Myanmar), is simply the best war movie ever made (number 13 on all-time list). Sir Alec Guinness's role as defiant and proud Colonel Nicholson is unforgettable.

In Lean's 1962 film, "Lawrence of Arabia," (number 5 on all-time best list) that introduced Peter O'Toole (in the title role) and (Egyptian Christian) Omar Sharif to the world, the scene changed to the desert. The visual effect in this desert cat is so stunning that it inspired Steven Spielberg to choose movie-making as a career. The scene changed to Russia and snow in Lean's next classic that featured Omar Sharif in the role of "Dr. Zhivago" (1965, number 39 on all-time best list). That remains one of the best movies about the Russian Revolution. Lean capped off his brilliant career by coming to India and creating another masterpiece, E M Forster's "A Passage to India" (1984).

Perhaps the most controversial of all Kubrick movies was the 1971 flick, "A Clockwork Orange" (1971, 46 on the all-time list," an oblique reference to nurses practicing injections on an orange before prickling humans. The movie has been universally acclaimed as a masterpiece, at the same time condemned as violence-inciting and rape-stylizing. (It had to be withdrawn from English movie theaters after copy cat effect.)

Malcolm McDowell's portrayal of a British punk, terrorizing women, was so authentically British that for a long time I thought that Kubrick was British. He is New Yorker, it was nauseating to watch the unrepentant cad go about wrecking carnal havoc to a distorted version of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and exclaim: "Das ist gut, Ludwig!"

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Key is Services and Facilities in Package

Spotlight on SMEs

Lest We Forget ...

by Qazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad

parents and relatives, non-institutional loans). Only 6 per cent of the enterprises were able to raise parts of their initial capital requirements from institutional loans. Many others expended considerable effort and time in trying to secure loans from banks, but did not succeed. They wasted their time, energy and also considerable amounts of money in the process. Insofar as working capital is concerned, generally the entrepreneurs themselves raised that too. The story is similar regarding expansion capital. Only 30 per cent of the enterprises were able to raise part of the expansion capital, usually a small part.

The Human Factor

Business and industrial growth depends crucially on skilful management, production and distribution, for which

activities, etc.) by doing or as handed down from one generation to the next within the family framework. Indeed, one of the basic constraints faced by Bangladesh is the low level of development of its human capability.

First consider entrepreneurship. Those who will set up SMEs are generally unlikely to come from among the people at large, who are by and large illiterate and poor. The potential SME entrepreneurs are generally people who have some business experience and an educational background as are the existing SME entrepreneurs. The 1998 SDC/BUP study of 47 small enterprises (employing 5 to 50 persons) from different parts of the country covering 19 industrial categories has found that most of the entrepreneurs have an educational back-

LETTER FROM AMERICA

Women on the March

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

To counter the "male chauvinist pig" (MCP) propaganda that would have women play only certain male-prescribed roles, women have created their own species-specific rebel, "female chauvinist sow" (FCS)! Women's new consciousness has a more militant (and male) connotation: "femaleist."

100 meters sprint! Because of their endurance, it is commonly agreed that in races much longer than the marathon (26.1 miles), women would beat men. The first theory under challenge is that of the male hunter. The theory stipulates that since the days of the caveman, men went out hunting, spear in hand, while women remained in the cave and lactated. As a species, women survived by trading protection and "meat, for sex," according to this theory. New research carried out by women seem to indicate that the hunts were communal; in which men, women and children participated. The whole community would drive the animal into a communal net. Then the male hunter would indulge in mayhem. This theory makes a lot of sense. With all due respect to my male predecessor, it hard to imagine him outrunning a deer! Evidence of such a net, 25,000 year old, has been found in the Czech Republic. Research also showed that 70% of calories the cave persons metabolized came not from meat, but from plant food, collected by who else, but "power surges."

Not all research findings are complimentary to women. It is clear that as soldiers, they too have blood on their hands! The old wisdom that only men are promiscuous has been disproved. New theory: females may have a natural tendency to play the field." And it is not only men who fall for pretty young things. Recently, in America, a 37-year-old Caucasian school teacher, Mary LeTourneau, has had two babies with her 13-year-old Hispanic boyfriend! Contrary to male conviction that women would instantly marry a "wheelchair-

bound millionaire," women are just as reckless in choosing partners!

TIME ponders the main question: "So how different are we really?" The revisionist evolutionary story tells us that both sexes share the legacy of our hunting, gathering, fighting, roaming ancestors. In addition, both sexes are confronted daily with the same kind of hard choices: Do the fun thing or do what your tribe considers moral one? Go for security or adventure, sex or handshake? And both sexes appear to have the same internal equipment for making these choices, equipment that we know as conscience or free will. But from a female point of view, the whole business of difference is getting a little old: Different from whom? And how did he get to be the standard for the human race?"

Of course there are differences between men and women. And thank God for "Viva la Difference!" Women's sexuality is slow and deep; men's sexuality is fast and furious - and superficial. None of the differences are meant to be limiting. Both species would agree on one point; that the female species is prettier!

Women do not need to be patronized. They are more than capable of holding their own in any sphere of life. Historically, it has been seen that women who excel at the helm of a nation are not those who are

anointed leaders, but who come up through the ranks. Margaret Thatcher and Golda Meir come to mind. They paid their dues and had stints as ministers of various portfolios before landing the big one. Mrs Indira Gandhi was battle hardened as a Minister before she took on the big one, that of Prime Minister; hence her success. Of the many reason for the lack of success of our two ladies, or Benazir Bhutto for that matter, is that they did not have to prove their mettle in any kind of competition.

So what are men afraid of? In certain reptiles, the female species does not need the male to reproduce. Perhaps men are afraid that some day they too may become superfluous. That is why they do not want to let go of the women. They like women to be attached to them even in nomenclature: as in, woMAN, feEMALE.

Kubrick's three top films were so vastly different. (He also directed other blockbusters such as, "Spartacus" (1960), "Lolita" (1962), and "The

Shining" (1980). In the scathingly anti-war "Dr. Strangelove" (1964), (listed as number 39 among the best 100 movies of the twentieth century, last year), he portrayed the military as "a collection of incompetent, Jingolistic yahoos itching for a chance to unleash nuclear devastation. Mr Kubrick's sarcasm and ironic humour flared memorably in "Dr. Strangelove" in the juxtaposition of Vera Lynn singing "We'll Meet Again" against images of nuclear catastrophe."

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To the Editor...

Women's rights trampled on globally

Sir, Hillary Clinton should hang her head in shame and not make statements of the kind reported in the DS of 6 March 1999 on Page 5. While she has done nothing to enhance the status of women in America, on the contrary she has degraded their position by endorsing the traditional-patriarchal standards of men's behaviour, by accepting her husband's unfaithfulness and sexual exploitation of not only Monica Lewinsky but other women too. He covered up the affair with lies and she blatantly supported him on public television, never once showing any sorrow or remorse for the misuse of another woman!

I am shocked at Mrs Clinton's audacity at daring to point out the inequalities of women, citing the example of Afghanistan which is currently in turmoil and should not be held up as example, while there could be so many countries in stable conditions that could be discussed. The stupidity of her statement that "They (Afghanistan) have shunned western