

From Paris with a Mixed Bag

THE messages from the Development Forum meeting in Paris read loud and clear. Setting aside the subtleties of interpretation we can say that the bare bone of facts is what needs to be focused on especially because of the highly probing inter-face that took place this time around.

Bangladesh put her requirement at 2.04 billion US dollar, towards which "the World Bank alone committed one billion dollar according to Finance Minister Kibria. As for the total requirement this was termed as 'realistic' with assurance given to 'continue the flow of development assistance as usual.' In this rather nebulous vein, Kibria adds, "the donors even assured more aid than our requirement provided we increase the rate of utilisation."

It is good governance all around that can impact positively on implementation of development projects as well on the reform programmes.

By sharing our development partners' concerns about 18 priority areas, including deteriorating law and order, role of the police, chaos in the financial sector and addressing their head-on, the government will not only help itself but also serve the cause of development in a robust manner.

Campus Violated Again

DHAKA University has once again hogged the headlines for the wrong reason. This time around a student paid the price for raising his voice against acts of terrorism. His inclination towards righteousness led to bloody consequences. He was stabbed, once in his room at the Surya Sen Hall and then when he was being taken to the hospital, and is now fighting for his life at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Terrorism on the campus has become emblematic of the country's oldest and most prestigious educational institution over the years. While there has been an endless sequence of violent violation of student rights, authorities have proved ineffectual, if not indifferent. Probe committees and their reports have failed to bring about any change.

Remove the Barriers Now

IF one wishes to describe the inefficiencies of the Dhaka City Corporation one may continue well into the next millennium without boring one's listeners or readers. Volumes have been written about the mismanagement, inefficiency and callousness with which the DCC goes about its daily chores of keeping the city clean and habitable but the photograph and the report published on the front page of this newspaper yesterday depicted sorry plight of one particular spot at the busy Elephant Road - Hatirpool intersection.

This paper wrote about it a few years back with the result that the slaughter-house was temporarily shut down. But the problems have now taken enormous proportions and require bolder and faster steps by the DCC to clean up the mess around Hatirpool area. It will not be a difficult job if the people concerned are serious and the inspector does not show up at noon or the cops on foot-patrol do not charge their illegal fee.

If the Wishes were Horses!

Is it possible to root out crimes while breeding crimes through other means? It is not the matter of just wishing away an evil. On the other hand it is a matter that calls for a total commitment, a moral commitment and an extraordinary effort involving overwhelming risks.

double standards of law and its application and the resultant discrimination. They tended also to question myriad dichotomies in the political conduct of the leaders, the government's failure in dispensing justice and its inability to redress genuine grievances of the people. And as a result there is an ever-growing defiance of the authority.

In spite of the lofty wishes, noble exhortations and ostensibly serious efforts little is achieved. As the time passed the crimes assumed much more ugly shape and violence a frightful diabolical form. Murder, rape, terrorism and extortion are today the way of life. The graft is the culture of the society and mendacity the norm of the politics. The path of the least resistance is what the coward intelligentsia wants to tread.

Today, as before, it will require an extraordinary effort to curb the crimes and violence. Some basic questions including why, after all, crimes have so pervasively spread in our society will have to be addressed in earnest. One has to go to the roots of the problem, as well as its moral dimension. It is, of course, always an insider's privilege to be in the full knowledge of the intricacies of the problem. But how can one overlook some of the funda-

mentals so blatantly ignored in the maintenance of our law and order? First is the credential of the leaders and the officials entrusted with the task. The leader, whichever political party he may be from cannot face a criminal if his own hand is stained with blood. The superior officials whose records are fraught with an enormous sleaze cannot expect his subordinates to be above the board. Neither the criminals hiding in the ranks of the political parties nor the officials thriving on crimes are in anyway equal to the task. Because both lack moral authority required for it. Any drive against crimes would

do why not this can be done? If so and so got it why not I also can get it? These are the kind of questions frequently faced by the law enforcing agencies and their political masters. And inevitably more exceptions are done.

Perhaps the most important issues to be addressed in this connection are all those factors which are directly or indirectly responsible for breeding crimes. What are those factors? The divergent views are likely to come from the people of different background, but the most widely identified factors are poverty, unemployment, moral degradation, the influence of

certainly did not come as some one's genuine desire to award the corrupt dictator an exemplary punishment. Even earlier, both after the political changes of 1975 and 1982 military takeover, the corruption of the politicians did not stand in the way of their rehabilitation with the new regimes. A former minister of Ershad regime who was convicted of corruption in absentia could return home with impunity after his jaunts abroad under mysterious arrangements. Others evaded prosecution just by switching over to and taking shelter under the umbrella of ruling party. It gave an impression that corruptions, however serious they were could always be condoned with the right type of connection and manipulation. It not only corrupted our high ups, either in politics or bureaucracy, to have the best of both the worlds but also develop a graft culture that dominate the society till date.

The same culture, with impunity, filters down to each layer of our society enveloping all branches of our administration and horizontally spreads to engulf the secretariat, government departments, the police, the customs, the taxation offices. The PDB, the Pourashava, the WASA, T&T, the gas office, the HBC and, of late, even the education institutions. The premises of each one of them are infested with the agents who would lead one up to the concerned desk. Not only the helpless people are held at ransom by the hydra-headed monster of corruption the government also has been, as a result, failing to assert its authority.

It is a vicious circle. In the name of the services the sanctimonious officials of the gov-

ernment and staff of the myriad other departments and autonomous bodies waylay the innocent members of the public who are inevitably trapped in their dragnet to be fleeced of their last penny. The defiant and nonconformists will be worn out to a point where they will find no other alternative but to give in. Everywhere - whether it is in PDB, Pourashava or nationalised banks - the services are generously offered but at some extra price. The railwaymen, the national airline officials or T&T staff are eager to offer services tagged with their police charges. We grease the policeman's hand, keep our fingers crossed before a tiny clerk of a revenue office and worry over the size of his demand or make a shady deal with telephone or electricity linesman just to get our dues.

But how does one afford this additional cost unless his income, whatever may be its source, is proportionately increased? If he is employed somewhere the problem is taken care of; because he also then sells his services at certain price. Both way it is a zero sum game. Problems however arise if the man is not on the payroll of an employer. In fact the most other people fall in this category where one has to make good his losses through myriad other means. Precisely these means are mugging, hike, extortion and so on - the excellent enterprises without investments! That's what sets in motion a vicious circle of crimes which draw in everyone in its whirlpool.

Is it possible to root out crimes while breeding crimes through other means? It is not the matter of just wishing away an evil. On the other hand it is a matter that calls for a total commitment, a moral commitment and an extraordinary effort involving overwhelming risks.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

presuppose drive against these elements in our society. When the authority is bereft of a moral content in it, it is bound to bounce back. The syndrome of it is already all too familiar in the public taking law in their own hand, the mob dispensing summary justice to the suspected offender and a blanket flouting of the government order. At the core of the problem of the country's crime situation is the absence of that moral authority.

But for the declining law and order situation no less responsible is the compromise made in the matter of rules and principles. It is so frequently done in our society as a matter of political expediency that it has already set dangerous precedence with regard to the maintenance of law and order. If that could be

satellite TV network and corruption. Among them none has more sweeping impact on crime than corruption which in itself breeds all other crimes. Today's known crimes like murder, terrorism, dacoity, hijacking and extortion are all byproducts of corruption which has some link or other with all prevailing crimes of the society.

We want to curb crimes but have done precious little to curb corruption. What a hypocrisy! The long arm of law could seldom reach the corruption in high places in our country. It is an irony that none of Ershad regime and succeeding BNP government could be taken to task in spite of so much of outcry against corruption of many stalwarts of those regimes. Ershad's prosecution had been more of political vengeance and

Spectre of Instability Haunts India

Lack of command by a single party or group is breeding instability with possibility of snap polls in near future looming large. Instability often weakens democratic institutions. It is expected that Indian politicians will spare no efforts to strengthen the edifice of democracy.

INDIA, the largest democracy of the world, has been plagued by instability of governance for years now. The governments are proving short-lived, sparking off prospects of midterm elections too early and too frequently. Until Sunday noon - more than a week after the fall of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government - political parties, vying to form an alternative government, were still grappling to muster requisite support in Lok Sabha. There are two options: a minority government led by the Congress, the second largest party in the lower house of parliament, with support from other parties which helped topple the Vajpayee administration; or a government by the "third front" with Congress support. Although there is no formal entity of the "third front" on the Indian political map, the term is generally used to refer to parties which maintain distance from two major parties BJP and the Congress but are otherwise closer to the latter since they are avowedly secular.

Immediately after the Vajpayee government had lost the motion of confidence, four options surfaced as far as formation of an alternative government is concerned: first, the Congress forming a government with "third front" support since it considerably lacks requisite

majority in Lok Sabha, second, the "third front", which does not have too many seats, coming up with a new government since the Congress may not be able to garner the support of all the non-Congress secular parties, third, the BJP-led coalition once again coming back to the ruling stage in the event both two options fails; and last, midterm elections.

Now, chance of the BJP-led coalition, which remains at the helm as the caretaker administration, has virtually disappeared, although for three or four days after its fall such a possibility had been considered as a viable option. Defence minister George Fernandes and the BJP general secretary Venkatesh Naidu went to the extent of saying that the coalition was coming back to power since neither the Congress nor the non-Congress "third front" were able to submit to the president a list of 272 members that would enable them the right to govern despite the fact that these parties together successfully voted to force the coalition out of power. President K. R. Narayanan and constitutional experts appear to be of the view that the government, that has

just been forced to quit power even though by one vote, should not be called back to form a new government at this stage without giving enough scope and time to others. As such, the BJP and its allies are no longer demanding that they be again called to form government and they are now preparing for midterm polls. It is because they lost the confidence motion

The Congress has run into troubled water since not all the non-Congress secular parties endorse their bid for an alternative government. Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party with 20 members is certainly opposed to the idea of a Congress-led government, and two small parties, the RSP and the Forward Bloc in the ruling left front in the West Bengal

front" to which they belong with outside support from the Congress. But Congress is not favourably disposed to this proposal since it had supported such "third front" government twice in the past - led by H. D. Deve Gowda and then by I. K. Gujral.

On the other hand, Jayaram Jayalalitha, leader of the AIADMK whose withdrawal of support led to the fall of the Vajpayee government, is also opposed to the idea of a Congress government. Jayalalitha, who with only 18 members in the house has emerged a key power-broker in the political scene, favours West Bengal Chief Minister and veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu as the best choice under the circumstances. She says she is not unwilling to support a Congress government but a "third front" administration with Basu as the prime minister of the country is preferred. Jayalalitha says so evidently because in such a government parties like hers are likely to share power. Basu's chances of becoming the prime minister came once before after the fall of the Deve Gowda government but his CPM party opposed the

idea. He had called the decision of his party in this regard a "historic mistake" but this time the CPM may approve if the situation arises. With his impeccable clean record coupled with vast experience of administration in West Bengal, Basu would be a welcome choice for many. However, it remains to be seen if the Congress accepts the idea because in such an event it will once again support a government without sharing power which most of its lawmakers do not like. Both options - either the Congress or the "third front" forming government appear viable as none of them want snap polls at this stage. Fears of snap polls may drive them to be satisfied with a government which will be secular but may not be of their own choice.

This situation notwithstanding, the country still may have to go for fresh polls if the politicians of the Congress and the "third front" fail to rise to the occasion. Problems within the non-Congress secular forces are also creating a major hurdle in unanimity. Lack of command by a single party or group is breeding instability with possibility of snap polls in near future looming large. Instability often weakens democratic institutions. It is expected that Indian politicians will spare no efforts to strengthen the edifice of democracy.



MATTERS AROUND US

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury

By 270-269 votes in a situation that does not put the opponents under the floodlight of stability either. In a condition like this of precarious majority, it is possible that contending sides can always win over few members through lures and other means. Now BJP and its allies have reconciled with the fact that the nation is likely to have a government by their opponents or go for fresh polls. They are favouring the second option.

with six members, are also in opposition. The Congress needs support of all the opposition parties in its quest and a single vote here is crucial. Obviously, reservations by these parties made its attempt an impossible task and left its leader Sonia Gandhi, who was expected to be the new prime minister, in despair. Efforts were on to win support of these three parties in the prospect looked bleak. These parties want a government formed by the "third

Pakistan's "Gold Coast"

Unless we take bold steps to open up Pakistan's coast for economic exploitation in a planned manner, we will be strangled by the over-population as well as slow down of job creation. The PM was once reputed to be a man of vision, let him support Raja Nadir Pervaiz with all the means at his disposal to make the vast ocean front into Pakistan's "Gold Coast".

IF any other country in the world had the type of coast that Pakistan has, long stretches of virgin beaches with vast empty spaces of hinterland, it would have been commercially exploited to the limit by now. But Pakistani planners being what they are, more akin to a mule with blinders, their focus has been more or less along the Indus Valley, with only lip-service attention to other areas. Whereas in the early days of the country it made sense for a country with one seaport serving a population of 130 million (not counting the hundreds of millions in countries beyond) it is imperative to have alternatives. Furthermore domestic population congestion and economic factors because of the emerging markets of Central Asia require that a new sea-lane dimension along a different axis be added for expansion or otherwise all facilities and opportunities are likely to be clogged and choked up.

If we take a bird's eye view of Pakistan's coast from Karachi westwards, we have in succession at least three possible ports capable of processing ocean-going vessels with minimum effort. Very rightly the Pakistan Navy is already building up Ormara as a major naval base to shift emphasis away from the single bottleneck at

Karachi. While retaining Ormara for purely military use, what is required now is a sustained effort at both Pasni and Gwadar, with focus on the latter for carving out Pakistan's economic destiny in the 21st century.

Once oil was discovered in quantity in the Gulf, it was only a matter of time before some major commercial centres with port facilities came up, both inside and outside the Gulf. At that time Pakistan lost a golden opportunity for visionary planning. As it is, Pakistani skilled and unskilled labour gave their blood and sweat to build up, along with a host of other Middle-Eastern cities, the two non-oil centres of Dubai and Bahrain in the Gulf with Dubai as the prime free port in the Gulf. Because of inter-State problems, Iraq with Iran and Kuwait, the Gulf states with Saudi Arabia with Iran, etc, the Gulf can become a closed lake because of a very low flashpoint at the very hint of trouble, the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf War taking place in the last two decades. As such, while in peacetime the ports are

commercially very viable, in times of stress they become very vulnerable. Also, if Central Asia is to be commercially served, except for the Iranian ones, most of the ports are on the wrong side of the Gulf. For three major reasons, therefore, a port on the Pakistani coast on the Asian mainland in the vicinity of both the Gulf States and Iran becomes a viable

having naturally sheltered port conditions on two sides. The Belgian Government had extended both a grant and aid that resulted in a fairly useful Fish Harbour constructed to international standards in the last 80s and early 90s.

If Gwadar had been developed as a major port at about the same time as Dubai, Dubai would never have had the commercial success it presently enjoys. Gwadar has many natural advantages that the Gulf lacks. For trade and commerce, Gwadar is a natural access port to Asia. It requires a road laterally to connect to the Iranian port of Chahbahar and thus the Iranian road network. It requires a road connection upto the RCD highway to give it access to not only whole of Central Asia but also South Western

China, particularly Sinkiang Province. Because of the Karakoram Highway, it would be more economically feasible for China to have land access to Kashgar etc through Gwadar. Similarly Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan can best be served from Gwadar. Obviously, Gwadar presently has major hurdles to overcome, among them electricity and potable water. Partly this can be immediately supplied by having a barge-mounted power-cum-desalination plant, partly by having a major utility power base planned, with potable water being piped from not more than 18-20 kms away from a vast river cache formation. The Navy has already got a well-established base of sorts for many years, the Pakistan Coast Guards have a battalion. To give adequate sense of protection, the Pakistan Army could have a composite Brigade Group in a permanent location at Gwadar. As much as America's west was opened up by the US Seventh Cavalry establishing forts in succession, the Pakistan Armed Forces can play a very salutary role by itself. Every one knows how defence towns naturally become the hub of ancillary commercial activity.

It is believed that the Ministry of Communications has been working on a comprehensive plan to establish a two-lane coastal road. It has prepared a detailed study of each portion of the road from Lyari (West Karachi) upto Gwadar and beyond. The only objection one has is why should we not be bold in our planning and opt for a four-lane (or even a six-lane) coastal highway from day one? In fact let's go better than that, why not establish a Pakistan Coastal Authority which will be charged with viz (1) developing the coastal highway in collaboration with the National Highway Authority and (2) the commercial development of the three seaports of Ormara, Pasni

and Gwadar with major emphasis on Gwadar? In the present Federal Minister of Communications we have a very dynamic and upright person, Raja Nadir Pervaiz is no ordinary human being, he is one of Pakistan's genuine heroes and has worked his way up in politics the hard way. This straightforward former soldier is known to be a man with drive and initiative, the PM has entrusted the right man for the right job. One feels that since the PM himself is a builder by instinct, he will realise the economic potential of sound communications, he should put the utmost priority in developing the prime piece of real estate that stretches for 500 to 600 kms of virgin territory along the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. He should get out of the bureaucratic straitjacket that is strangling his initiative and vision, the two qualities that went towards re-energizing a dormant PML. One can only visualize the great cities that can come up along the highways as mini-ports serving the commerce and industry as well as tourism. There can be vast stretches of inland fish and shrimp farms, coconut and date cultivations, even fruit under controlled conditions, etc. Visionary planning coupled with effective implementation is required, the number of jobs that will be created for the next 30-40 years will be staggering. Pakistan will become the hub of economic activity.

We have reached a virtual state of stagnation in commerce and industry, the result is we now have surplus electricity. We can stop lip-service rhetoric till kingdom come, at best our economic planners are hoping for miracles. Unless we take bold steps to open up Pakistan's coast for economic exploitation in a planned manner, we will be strangled by the over-population as well as slow down of job creation. The PM was once reputed to be a man of vision, let him support Raja Nadir Pervaiz with all the means at his disposal to make the vast ocean front into Pakistan's "Gold Coast". Pakistan's economic destiny lies along this seashore, do we have the vision and the courage to meet up with this challenge?

To the Editor

Don't undermine the women

Sir, I would like to thank you for publishing articles on domestic workers. We need to change our attitude towards the working and toiling class of our society, just like the society needs to weed out the hidden discriminations and feudal ignorance, disrespectful disposition towards women.

In the article "Life and Living of Domestic Workers" the author Sharif Atiqur Rahman articulates, "Today we celebrate women's day, children's day etc. These days are celebrated to give importance and to create awareness about these vulnerable groups of people. Why not

there should be a "Domestic Workers' Day"? Is it only me or is there really something not-so-right about this statement? His aim is noble, to make people aware of the plight of a section of our society. But why did he have to use women as an example. Is it because like so many other men in our country who still utter the meymeyanush and meye chehe, he feels women are on the worst form of life on this planet. Or maybe he just didn't take time to understand how absurd and offending his comparison was. First womanhood is not a profession, and then secondly why didn't he compare the proposed day to Labour Day. That would be in the same category.

I almost never wrote this letter. I thought maybe he didn't mean to disrespect. The sarcasm didn't escape me by any means. But then I realized that's another form of disrespect not understanding how your words can offend half the population of you family, country and the world. That's a too unkind of a person. We just cannot let this to happen again and again. Women's Day is a day when we emphasize the need to help our women, however in that same day we celebrate what we have achieved, how far we have come, and we realize how hard our foremothers had to work.

We would march forward and simply we don't have much time to correct the ignorant male chauvinists but take a hint, we'll not accept it anymore. We are not flattered nowadays by your insults and leasies, in case you haven't noticed things have changed.

And it's time our male arrogance disappeared and our language towards women at least straightened out. We are crying for human rights, we are concerned for civil rights, but have we looked inside our houses where the most awesome form of violation of human rights is taking place? We proclaim ourselves as a civilized nation. Let us accordingly.

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