

## So Much for Combing Operations

The country-wide combing operation by police seems to have worked as a stimulant for criminals! At least, that is what the sharp rise in incidents of rape and murder in the month of April suggests. Only positive impact of the highly-publicised police manoeuvre has been a marginal decline in the number of city-centred murders. However, it will be perhaps a little premature to rule out the operation as ineffective at this stage. True, the initial signs have been anything but auspicious; nevertheless, we would like to believe that there will be reversal in near future.

Police's failure to arrest the alarming rise of crimes over the years has certainly put its credibility on the line. While identified criminals have remained at large, innocent people have been subject to police harassment. Reported deaths in police custody have not helped, either. Besides, disconcerting allegations of extortion, partisan approach while coping with terrorists, unholy nexus between police and people of the underworld, etc., have only eroded public confidence in the law enforcement system. On top of that, if the current drive to rid the society of criminals and terrorists fails to yield any positive result, one cannot be blamed for viewing the whole affair as nothing more than a charade.

Over the years, such augmented police activities have failed to touch the heart of the matter. Seasonal in nature, this kind of operation has been largely restricted to highly-publicised arrests and recovery of arms and ammunition. The arrested and accused are seldom convicted and put away. Besides, drug and arms dealers hardly get nabbed, law-enforcers failing miserably to trace out their network. On the whole, each and every special drive by the police proves to be an exercise in futility. After a lull during these seasonal operations, criminals resume their activities in full swing.

Poor co-ordination has been a major drawback in successive drives to curb crime. Recovery of arms and ammunition should be supplemented by tighter vigil at the borders, making sure weapons are not smuggled through. Police intelligence should be strengthened as well. It is hard to accept that despite an alarming rise of terrorist activities by the outlawed extremist political parties, police cannot trace out the masterminds. Unless things are straightened out on these fronts, the on-going combing operations, and similar ones in future, will prove ineffectual and restoration of police credibility will be a distant reality.

## Unethical

Some government officials and their wives are engaged in side businesses with the 'permission' of the government. The list includes a former secretary also. This piece of startling news was published in a couple of influential Bangla newspapers Thursday. It is reported that during the last eight years between 1991 and 1998, twenty-five government officials of different ranks, including a secretary, were allowed officially to carry on private business or involve themselves with private parties in their businesses which encompass shrimp culture, cottage industry, movie-making, printing, indenting, etc. etc. Besides these officers, a list of whom has been published in newspapers, there could be many more who did not care to seek permission. Many officials of commerce, industry, food, health and other important ministries are alleged to be working as 'commission agents' of various private organisations besides a large section of them also engaged in share market business.

This is a highly unethical trend that has been set apparently through the loopholes of the 1979 government officers services and conduct rules whereby an officer can do business or any other job with prior permission of the government. This rule is not at all conducive to healthy and honest discharge of one's official duties and responsibilities as a full time public servant. Once a permission is obtained one may hold two jobs concurrently at the expense of one's substantive post, so it seems.

We would like to seek clarification on the rule which permits full-time public servants to conduct private business or hold another job. This also throws the officers into obligation to their private employers. It is unthinkable that a government officer, appointed on permanent, full-time basis should have such distractions. Keeping intact the provision of lien to other organisations, the 1979 rule should be updated immediately plugging the loopholes.

## Negligent of Duty

The Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) is in dire straits. The ongoing work stoppage by 125 interns has plunged this health establishment into a crisis situation leading to an increasing number of deaths among patients. It was reported in Thursday's press that a week's death toll stood as high as 64, and at least 500 patients, who couldn't afford private clinics, have been languishing without treatment there. The rigid stance of the young health practitioners — which they'll continue with until their demands are fulfilled — has multiplied the agony of ailing people to a miserable extent throughout Chittagong division. The interns demand one-thousand-taka monthly allowance-hike while government's promise made in October last remains still unrealised.

But, morally speaking, staying away from work and observe the patients die, is nothing short of sinning. More so, when the striking interns are reported to have happily engaged in work at private clinics in Chittagong. This, by all means, is an act of sheer opportunism. *Patient-healing* is one "distinguished profession" in which the practitioners can ill afford to be hypocritical to their noble 'Hypocratic-oath'. But contrary to this uprightness, the hospitals of the country seem to be in the lap of the gods, and making money seems to be the last word with the physicians who are supposed to care for the ailing humanity in these establishments.

Doctors must shun this unethical way of realising demands and find an alternative. Since their "negligence of duty" has become a sore point with this "ailing" nation, they need to remember that the cost of grooming them as "doctors" is borne by the state with poor tax-payers' money.

**P**RESUMABLY, shivers would run down (as it occurred to me) your back as you glance through two newsmen appeared recently in two newspapers. According to the *Dainik Janakantha*, a total of Tk 27 thousand crore have been "pocketed" unscrupulously by the vested interest groups. In economic jargon, the amount is a "dead-weight" loss to the nation. It was a robbery, to say the least, and was possibly extracted illegally from different developmental projects. The other newsmen that I would like to refer to is on the dreadful disclosure that the actual income of a sample of policemen amount to one thousand times more than their stipulated income from salaries. Since, on both the counts, the extra bucks in the bucket came from illegal routes, they are cases of corruption.

Stories about creepy corruption know no bounds. It is growingly becoming a perennial concern in Bangladesh. The two episodes mentioned above go to epitomize the epidemic called corruption. The cancerous corruption, as it is called, is eating into the vitality of the nation with all of its canine ferocity. Corruption occurs throughout the world but the lesser the degree, the better it is for the society. One should, however, remember that "widespread corruption is a symptom of a poorly functioning state and a poorly functioning state can undermine economic growth."

What causes corruption? The incentives for corruption are perhaps influenced by a volley of factors such as: (a) the benefits and costs under the discretionary control of officials; (b)

## Curbing Creepy Corruption

*Corruption is at the core of the gap between demand and supply. It reigns supreme at a point where there is pervasive red-tapism, weak legal structure, lack of proper democratic institutions and, above all, where government interventions in economic transactions remain high.*

the formal laws on corruption, bribery, conflicts of interests; (c) the conditions of civil service employment and the incentive structure within civil service system; (d) the extent of auditing and monitoring within government; (e) the ability of citizens to scrutinize government activities and file complaints; (f) the level of press freedom and the freedom of individuals to form NGOs and (g) the level of active political opposition. Needless to mention here, perhaps, that corruptions are caused and determined by the degree of the severity of factors (a-g) just listed. One should, therefore, search for the solutions in them. But before suggesting solutions to curb corruption let us pick up the most vital factors that seem to be causing creepy corruption in Bangladesh today.

The last three items viz., citizen's ability to scrutinize and file complaints, level of press freedom and level of active political opposition could be bracketed as "democratic governance." A system of democratic governance should reduce the pace at which corruption creeps in. On an empirical context let me place — for the sake of example — two regimes: the regime of H M Ershad and Gen Zia (call it "controlled" democracy) and that of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina (both uncontrolled democratic regimes at least on the basis of elected representativeness). One would not, perhaps, be surprised to see

that the largest slice of that "dead-weight" loss to the tune of Tk 27 thousand crore took place during the time when Bangladesh experienced controlled democracy during those two generals. According to Michael Johnston, an economist working on the causes of corruption, "the most serious cases of corruption are entrenched political and bureaucratic corruption....they create and are sus-

competitive market economy should be less prone to corrupt activities since the scarcity premium on red-tapism is almost close to zero. Once upon a time, licensing systems, foreign exchange controls and non-transparent custom duty rates were harbours of corruption. With deregulation and opening up of the economy, the premium from those regulations tended to wane, if not withered away.

Why police, tax and customs

allegedly, are less accountable to the public. Take the following example. A lady was arrested recently on the plea that she was, allegedly, involved in "anti-state" activities. After few days of interrogations, she was found of no fault of the kind she was arrested for. Were the persons concerned punished for the activity? There are said to be millions of such cases where the police force indulge in these kinds of venture just to extract illegal income. They appear to take advantage of the non-transparent rules and unaccountable performance. The police force, it is said, are in charge of the establishment of the rule of law in the country but they themselves tend to stay above the rule of law.

The extent of auditing and monitoring within the government is another contributory factor to the growth of corruption. The extent of auditing and monitoring depend, among others, on the extent of effectiveness of the Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC). Unfortunately, PSCs failed to find a place under the controlled democratic regimes as I mentioned above but still has to come with teeth even in the prevalence of a truly elected parliament. Any discussion on corruption should, therefore, highlight the importance of PSCs and their roles in combatting the scourge.

The status of the formal laws on corruption, bribery and the credibility of law enforcement



## Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

tained by conditions of weak political competition, slow and uneven economic growth and a weak civil society. In the medium to long term, it is possible to move from a high corruption equilibrium to a low corruption equilibrium by guaranteeing civil liberties and basic economic rights, enhancing economic and political competition and encouraging the growth of a strong civil society.

Civil liberties and basic economic rights and civil societies grow with ease in a democratic governance while economic and political corruption are watered by a restrictive regime that argues for interventions in economic activities. Relatively,

officials are alleged to be the most corrupt people in the society? Why other government officials in ministries or corporations are considered to be engaged in corrupt practices? One of the prime reasons being that these people can cause a discrepancy between demand and supply of the goods or services to be provided to the citizens. The rules of the land vested so much inextricable and in explicit power in them that they could easily extract a "rent" out of the hazy hegemony of "interpretations". So, to clamp down on corruption what is needed is to rewrite the rules and make them more transparent to the clients. The other reason being that these groups of officials

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

### Of Food, Men and Cooking

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

*A few years ago, the food critic of The New York Times compared the top cuisines of the world and came to the conclusion that the Indian cuisine — of the Mughal variety — is the best. This will surprise no one in Bangladesh, because we are part of that culinary excellence. There is no other product in Bangladesh that is a world beater. Yet, we have done very little to export the one product in which we are among the best in the world.*

**H**ISTORICALLY, men have shown far less interest in cooking than in eating. Men have perpetuated the myth that women are natural cooks, and that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Women have always known that to be another manifestation of male chauvinist laziness. After all, most of the top chefs in the world — be that in France or (for instance, the late Fakhruddin Babburi) in Bangladesh — are males.

A generation ago, the household roles were clearly defined: father, the wage earner, and the mother, the home maker. Even if the mother did not actually cook, she supervised the maid servants who did. The fathers was not required to cook; hopefully he bumbled his way across the kitchen to the dining table.

A woman is just as likely to be a bad cook, if the society did not mandate that she spend a substantial part of her time in the kitchen. Women who were homemakers had to put up with unfair questions such as: "do you work?" The fact is that the mother probably worked harder than the father. Because all her hard work were carried out in the privacy of home, and did not result in a pay check, her tools were undervalued. Even with both husband and wife working outside the home these days, the responsibility for dinner still rests solely with the mother.

Nevertheless, because of their inexperience with the heat in the kitchen, when men are forced to cook, horror stories can result. Here are a few. In an attempt to fry an egg, a man poured oil into the pan, turned the stove, cracked an egg and dropped it in the oil. He was shocked not to hear the sizzling sound he expected, instead with a thud, the egg disappeared into the oil. The man was not aware that it takes time for heat to transfer from the flame to the oil! Following a bad recipe, a man cooked some rosogollas. Actually, it was more like "rock gollas." The wife was very supportive. "You have worked really hard," she said. "But we are having children as guests. I don't think we should serve these rosogollas, because they might injure the children!"

For expatriate Bangladeshis in America, Mrs Siddiqua Kabir's cook book is the Bible. Unlike other recipe books, if one follows Mrs Kabir's best seller step by step, it is hard to go wrong. Most of the time.

Once I followed Mrs Kabir's recipe to the letter and proudly served the dish to guests. I received the following dubious compliment: "If you practice a few more times, you will be perfect!" Unsatisfied with the food served at invitations, irate Bangladeshis are known to have presented Mrs Kabir's cookbook to the unsuspecting hosts! Some men have different difficulties with Mrs. Kabir's book: "Her book is for the gourmet cooks. It starts with Rezala and Biriyani; I am still stuck at Bhat and Dali!" Perhaps Mrs. Kabir can write a simplified version for the "stupid males"; or as in the case of the egg fryer, a book for the cooking-retarded males!

Better still, Mrs Kabir could start a newspaper column emulating the popular "Dear Abby" column in America, where

readers spill their guts in French entrees are magnifique! If one wants to get really cheesy, with antipasta, pasta, spaghetti, pizza and egg plant parmesan, Italy is the place to be. Bangladeshis know all about Chinese cooking; although the really "authentic" Chinese food that I tasted in Chinatown London, bears no resemblance to what is served in Bangladesh — most of the "authentic" stuff is boiled, and not that tasty.

Fine food is an integral part of advanced civilisations. Next to breathing, eating is what we do most often. Food is what we entertain guests with. It is worthwhile, therefore, spending plenty of time preparing what we eat. To judge the sophistication of a culture, all one needs to do is take a walk through their meat, fish, poultry and vegetable markets, and sample their food. Good cuisine is synonymous with refined culture.

Presently, the gastronomical world is dominated by only a few nations — America, France, Italy, China and India. The main staple of American diet is meat and potato; with beef steak being the standard bearer. With hamburgers, fried chicken, pizza and French fries, American chains such as McDonald's, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut, dominate the world's fast food market. (In these health conscious days, in an attempt to de-emphasize Fried, Kentucky Fried Chicken call themselves simply "KFC".)

Supported by hors d'oeuvres, pates, sauts, and casseroles,

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Notice that Britain has no food to brag about — unless one wants to call roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, fish and chips or Shepherd's pie delicacies. A German friend once told me that he would rather die than eat the Scottish delicacy, haggis, made out of the heart, liver and lung of sheep or calf, and boiled in the animal's stomach. I remember an upset American, served a thin English steak at a hotel, confront the waiter: "You call this steak?" No wonder, these days culinary Britain has been overrun by restaurants serving foreign fares. Let us be fair to the British. Their confection, the scented tea (Twinings, Earl Grey) and cucumber sandwich are delicious!

The cooking expertise of different nationalities are not lost on comedians. I am reminded of the following joke I heard in England. The answer to the question, "What is the secret of happiness?", is: "To have an

American salary, a British house, a Chinese cook and a Japanese wife." And the secret of misery? "A Chinese salary, a Japanese house, a British cook and an American wife!" When I related this joke to my American male and female colleagues, they burst out into uncontrollable laughter!

A few years ago, the food critic of The New York Times compared the top cuisines of the world and came to the conclusion that the Indian cuisine — of the Mughal variety — is the best. This will surprise no one in Bangladesh, because we are part of that culinary excellence. There is no other product in Bangladesh that is a world beater. Yet, we have done very little to export the one product in which we are among the best in the world.

The reason for the excellence of Indian cuisine is our mastery with spices. Western cooking, with the exception of an occasional garlic or onion, misses out on this. The West looks at the spices as preservatives, made redundant with the advent of refrigerators. Our best chefs use the spices to bring out the best in food — that is why meat, fish and vegetable require different combinations of spices. Regional cooking, on the other hand, tend to overpower all other spices by using too much chili. Because our everyday curry is "hot," we need bland boiled rice to go with it, to

cool us down.

Long before it was scientifically known that a nutritionally balanced diet requires carbohydrates, protein, fresh vegetables and sucrose, advanced civilisations had figured it out empirically. From time immemorial, Bangladeshis have been eating Bhat (carbohydrates), meat/fish/Dal (protein), Bhaji (vegetable) and sweetmeats (sucrose). (Because of our notorious sweet tooth, Westerners find our sweetmeats too sweet!) It amazes me to see the scientifically perfect composition of the main staple of the Middle East since the ancient times, "falafel" — pita bread, fried lentils and salad with a pea sauce. The Mediterranean diet — rich in fish, vegetables and olive oil — is considered the healthiest in the world.

With so many variables, quality control is not easy in cooking. Only American fast food chains attempt it with some success. Cooking is a scientific process, with many irreversible chemical reactions taking place all over. In frying an egg, the protein is denatured irreversibly. The reason the dark flesh beneath the skin of an Ilish fish tastes somewhat different and sweet is because the sugar is caramelized by heat!

The science behind cooking is still very inexact. Those who can best handle the multiple variables of spices, oil/ghee, duration and magnitude of heat applied, turn out to be the top chefs. Everyone has a niche in the wide spectrum of cooking expertise. That is why when we are invited out, the quality of cooked food served varies from household to household. When the experience is agreeable, as soon as the palate makes contact with the food, taste buds explode in excitement, and we exult: "Khalmama/Bhabi, the food is delicious!"

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educated observers who find it very difficult to digest the data and statistics publicised by the regime. The CHT agreement was also signed in a hurry without the consensus of the main opposition party (the preceding regime) and here also the result bugs and viruses continue to plague the agreement. Hurrying is not a sign of wisdom.

Now the docile and frustrated Mayor has come up with the Community Police scheme, without announcing the consensus with the opposition parties. As all of us know, nothing works in this country until the politicians agree in principle to a project or scheme.

## Why a list now?

Sir, I have had written, some time earlier, about the hullabaloo of the Central Command Council (CCC) of the Bangladesh Mukti Joddha Sangsad (BMS) and its initiative to prepare a fresh list of genuine Freedom Fighters (FFs) and the strong demand of a section of the leaders to stop the preparation of the so-called list of genuine FFs.

Now, again, that the row between the BMS and its CCC has again surfaced, I am convinced that free opinion from the public be sought "if there is any necessity of the BMS and this that council at all" when the Kendriya Samanay Parishad (KSP) (not an ordinary citizen like me, but a rival faction of the BMS) declared "there is no need to prepare the list of FFs after 27 years of independence". At last a frank and bold opinion has been expressed. But it's also alarming to note the expression what is necessary is to prepare a list of the killers and collaborators in 1971. Will these be real or made-up one? And who gives authority to whom?

Should we really go witch-hunting and prepare either list after so many by gone years or think constructive for our underdeveloped country and take stock of those who in the name of CCC or FFs misrepresented the cause of FFs and plundered cash and kind and defamed the genuine FFs, some of whom even do not know if they at all exist in the so-called list; and some who exist in the list may not have survived up-to-date.

It is not clear to us as to why PSC imposes to 200 marks in

clamour about the FFs or their CCC or establish innumerable branches of CCC as they (FFs) do not derive much from their enlistment with them? If there is really any welfare in mind we have Mukti Joddha Sangsad (MJS) which I hope will suffice the needs of FFs. And I reiterate in other words the BMS has outlived the necessity and there remains not much purpose of its existence after 27 years of independence.

A F Rahman  
Dhaka.

## Crescent and star

Sir, As usual we have welcomed and celebrated with gaiety and ecstasy, joy and happiness the Pahela Boish