

Eloquent Statistics

THE crackdown on criminals has been a numbers game. Since January this year statistics have been reeled off about the numbers of criminals arrested and caches of arms and ammunition recovered. In places, terrorists with dreadful records were hauled up. The police hunt against political terrorism by clandestine groups working behind extremist ideological signboards resulted in the surrender of some cadres along with their weapons. The raids having started with a focus on this brand of terrorists in the south-western part of Bangladesh, these could hardly create an impact on the much wider crime situation of the country.

This is borne out by the fact that from January to May of the current year the total number of crimes committed in the country stood at 50,242 compared with 44,928 during the corresponding period of last year. Under all heads of crime except that of child repression there has been a heightened incidence of offences across the board. Against 'Murder', 'Women Repression', 'Rape and Attack on Police' columns the upward trend is clearly alarming: In the first five months of the current year 266 more murders, 688 more women repression offences, 290 more rapes and 66 more assaults on policemen occurred over the levels recorded for the same period last year.

Speaking of Dhaka city, the number of criminal cases in January-May marked a sharp increase by 1,166 over 7,235 in the corresponding period last year. Incidence of crime in Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna Metropolises has also shown a rising trend.

To strike at the roots of terrorism we have to break the arms and drugs trafficking rings. The ease with which the apprehended criminals are getting bail and hitting the circulation trail back again is making a mockery of the anti-terrorism drive. So long as the rate of conviction remains negligible all the talk about deterrent punishment is bound to be ridiculous. When the dusts settle over a case, one or the other political patron of the hardened criminals extend the oxygen of support to the latter and the curtain gets dropped over a once hyped 'dealing with an iron hand'. A report in a prominent Bangla daily has it that a hardened criminal or two might be absorbed in the Ansar cadre. To reform a serious offender of law is an enabling idea, but to recruit him as something of a lawman one has to be wary of 'old habits dying hard.'

Seasonal Insanity

EXCAVATION of roads for 'development' work of such utility service providers as the T&T, WASA, DESA, Titas Gas has become a regular feature of life in the capital city. Strangely, these organisations, for reasons best known to them, always wait for the monsoon to come to undertake maintenance and extension activities. What follows is of woeful consequences for city-dwellers — hours after hours of traffic congestion. In the old part of the city with a maze-like road network, the situation more often than not takes untenable proportions. Even the Dhaka City Corporation plays a devil's role by not properly repairing the roads damaged by excavations. Every year it is the same tale retold. However, this year, the worrying bit of difference is that the residents of old Dhaka have decided that they have had enough. In fact, they have served the DCC an ultimatum, saying that if it fails to repair the roads by July 31, they will stage demonstration, hunger strike and other forms of agitation in front of its office. One can only wish that the situation would not turn into a serious law and order breakdown.

This 'seasonal insanity' has often been ascribed to poor co-ordination among the service providers. However, the DCC side of the story, published in a leading Bangla news daily, has added a completely new dimension to the problem. It seems that there is little synchronisation in the disbursement of funds from the donors with the time-table of the service providers to simultaneously carry out repair and maintenance works. Often the money comes late for the organisations to coordinate their programmes.

In developed countries, they have ducts along the roads especially designed to accommodate such works. However, in our country, it may not be readily possible because many roads are not wide enough. Still we should consider the option. But, basically, funds must be available at the proper time to start and finish the work during drier months. With some efficiency at our end and donor cooperation, we should be able to sort out the disbursement problems. Besides, there should be a distinct division of responsibilities so that the utility organisations cannot get away with passing the buck.

End of the Tunnel

THE people of Indonesia can now see light at the end of the tunnel they have been through for the last 44 years.

The recently concluded free and almost fair elections, participated by multiple parties and observed by independent monitoring groups from all over the world, have paved the way for installing a democratically-elected government since the days of the country's founding President Sukarno. The results declared after delays due to 'wrangling within the election commission and the complex election procedures' represent no mean achievement for the election commission in a spread-out archipelago. The Democratic Party of Struggle, led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, got 33.74 per cent of the vote in the June 7 ballot. The ruling Golkar Party is placed second with 22.44 per cent of votes, something of an achievement considering the public outcry against former President Suharto and his regime which brought them down.

Happy signs could also be found as Golkar Party chairman Akbar Tanjung conceded defeat on Friday and congratulated Megawati's Party.

Now starts the complex process for the election to the office of the president. The incumbent President Habibie hopes to get the support of smaller parties in his bid for the presidency while Megawati is thought to be the actual front-runner with the help of National Awakening Party and the National Mandate Party. But we are concerned at the attitude of the clerics who are trying to make a gender discrimination against Megawati and also finding fault with her for having 'fielded too many non-Muslim candidates in the recent election'. We hope good sense will prevail on them and the election to the presidency will take place without any hassle. We congratulate Megawati on her success in the first round of elections.

Will Peacemaking Elude Barak?

It may be argued that Barak's cabinet decisions reflect a determination to make important decisions alone. If that is the case, he will find the job of peacemaking probably even more difficult. But it is also a job that's worth doing, and one that Barak, to his credit, seems determined to undertake.

Violation of international law. Beyond that, they are a needless provocation to the Palestinians and, as such, make it more difficult to reach a peace agreement with them.

Barak's willingness to withdraw from occupied territory and to suspend new settlement building are concessions, but they are not giveaways and they certainly do not make Israel more vulnerable.

On the contrary, they have energized the process of building a lasting peace for everyone in the region. It is no coincidence that Palestinian acts of violence have become rare in recent days.

Hamas, the extremist Palestinian organisation has been generally contained. Syria, one of Israel's most intractable adversaries, also responded to Barak's election with upbeat statements about the possibility of peace.

The Middle East is a difficult place to tame, even by the smartest and best-intentioned people. The conflict there involves history, religion, culture, money and power politics. Peace is fiendishly difficult, which is one of the reasons the conflict has lasted so long. But now, for the first time in too long, there is reason to be optimistic.

Barak also promised that his government would not undertake any new settlements in the Arab land it still occupies, and he even suggested that the status of some existing settlements would be reviewed.

Such settlements — some of them are actually cities — are a

mistake.

By far the most important thing about the new government of Israel is that, unlike its predecessor, it is genuinely (not merely rhetorically) committed to the search for peace with the Palestinians and other Arabs. The only major questions that remain are whether the new cabinet is ideally suited to achieve this objective and whether it was chosen in a fair way.

He has put together a coalition government consisting of seven parties and controlling 75 of the 120 parliamentary

tone that was to last for four long, lean and unproductive years.

Now, the question is, can Barak deliver on his promises? Although there is little doubt that he wants peace with his neighbours, serious doubts surround the cabinet he has selected.

He has put together a coalition government consisting of seven parties and controlling 75 of the 120 parliamentary

peace.

For instance, the parties representing the religious groups and Russian immigrants want Jewish settlements in the West Bank expanded; whereas the dovish parties in the coalition want a peace process that could lead to a Palestinian state as long as it guarantees Israel's security.

Though Barak may have broadened his coalition by including so many parties, in the process he has weakened the ministries. With such a hodge-podge of political parties, he may find that not everything will go his way. Much will depend on his leadership abilities.

His new foreign minister, the quirky and unpredictable David Levy, has served in that job twice before without making much of a mark, and there is little reason to believe he will make one now, when the times require courage and imagination.

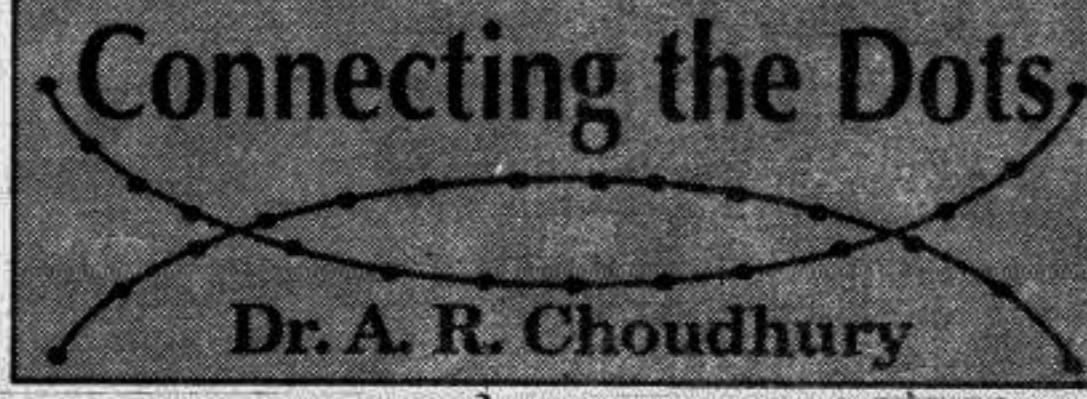
The new justice minister, Yossi Beilin, has no previous experience in Arab-Israeli affairs. The new cabinet is also noteworthy for what it does not contain. Arabs make up about twenty per cent of Israel's population and voted overwhelmingly for Barak in the May election.

tion. But not a single Arab was included in the cabinet. Only one woman was selected. In a country of some six million people, it is hard to imagine that there was not even one Arab or more than one woman qualified for a position of leadership. Are these omissions the result of racism and sexism in Israel?

It may be argued that Barak's cabinet decisions reflect a determination to make important decisions alone. If that is the case, he will find the job of peacemaking probably even more difficult. But it is also a job that's worth doing, and one that Barak, to his credit, seems determined to undertake.

Now that the coalition is in place, Barak has to move fast on peace before the orthodox Jewish parties regroup. He should revoke contracts signed by the Netanyahu government to expand settlements on Palestinian land and scrap lavish financial incentives given to settlers on the West Bank. In addition to continuing to implement the Wye River agreements by carrying out phased handover of 13 per cent of land to the Palestinians, he should also begin serious peace talks with Syria, leading to Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon and return of the Golan Heights to Syria.

Barak holds most of the cards now and has everything going for him. He only needs to seize the opportunity.



Connecting the Dots

Dr. A. R. Choudhury

Barak, in his inaugural speech, declared that pursuing a 'true, lasting peace' is his most important goal. He moved quickly to arrange meetings with foreign leaders, including Yasser Arafat.

That initiative contrasts with the arrogance of his predecessor, Benjamin Netanyahu, who waited for more than two years before meeting with Arafat. Netanyahu's deliberate snub of Arafat set a snarling

seats. The coalition is a complex constellation where the Labour Party and its left-wing allies are joined by three religious parties, and groups representing Russian immigrants and defectors from the right-wing Likud Party.

With such a diverse government of seven parties, it would be a major feat if Barak can marry all the diverse interests of his coalition in an effort to forge internal and external

Whether the Udyan is Saved, or the Conference Centre Built

NAM has Outlived its Utility

by A M M Shahabuddin

Has not NAM become a 'misnomer', an 'anachronism' in itself in today's post-cold war world? So it's no use trying to whip up a dead horse. Better give it a decent burial, if possible, at a well-attended high-profile grand summit somewhere in the world.

member countries are expected to attend the summit. It would, therefore, be a big occasion for the government to project Bangladesh in the 'home ground,' with full exposition of all its aspects, whatever may be the overall outcome of the summit.

But the rising cries against the 'deforestation' of the Osmany Udyan by felling thousands of trees (government claims only a few hundred), has created a 'road block' for the government to go ahead with the project. It is really a hard task for the government to change horse in mid-stream when the formal foundation-laying ceremony has been held by a foreign dignitary. Only time will show what decision the government takes to overcome this dilemma.

However, the subject matter of this article is not this controversy over Udyan vs. Conference Centre. Rather it will be a sort of 'clinical post mortem' on NAM relating which the current controversy has built up. And most tragically, for which the 'bell' has already started tolling'.

Great Honour for Bangladesh

Indeed, Bangladesh has been greatly honoured by getting the rare opportunity to host the next NAM Summit in September 2001. And Bangladesh government, in cooperation with China, is preparing to put up a grand show at the proposed ICC at the Osmany Udyan. Some 5000 guests from over 109

flected a very harsh reality. But it seems to have fallen on deaf ears, or lifeless rocks, as there has been no tangible change in NAM since then. Perhaps the member countries will wash off their hands after giving NAM a decent burial after they themselves are convinced that the organisation had already outlived its utility. Perhaps, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister had foreseen it long ago, when, addressing the same Cairo Summit, he said that NAM had already lost its 'clout' and asked whether it was being 'mummified'. The organisation seems to have already been turned into an 'empty content' as apprehended by President Hosni Mubarak.

The Sun Sets for Good!

NAM undoubtedly saw its golden days when it made its glorious and historic debut in international affairs in 1961, with four charismatic world personalities, namely, Pandit Nehru of India, Dr Soekarno of Indonesia, President Nasser of Egypt and Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, as its guiding force. It was born with the solemn purpose of serving as a bulwark, a barrier, between then prevailing two-rival power-blocs, one headed by Washington and the other by its arch rival Moscow, when the 'cold war' concern in the post-War world was riding high. NAM then played successfully the role of a decisive 'third power', shepherding the neutral countries under its flag. At that, its voice was heard and respected both within and without the UN. But it gradually lost

its position and prestige with the exit, one by one, of its four founding fathers. NAM, however, received its greatest shock with the demise of the powerful Soviet Union, ending in its disintegration and the drowning of the Warsaw Pact that used to be a real fit-for-tat to West's NATO in those days. And in the subsequent deluge, NAM lost its clout totally, leaving behind a cipher with its sun setting, perhaps for good!

A Peeping Tom?

During its long journey from the early 60s down to the end of the 90s, the organisation betrayed the cause for which it came into existence. It had a big role to play both on political and economic issues, affecting its member countries. It hopelessly proved its ineffectiveness and impotence. You needn't go too far to seek examples of cases where its presence and intervention was most needed. NAM was totally missing from the scene when war was going on between two of its members — Iran and Iraq — for a decade and when the other two of its members — India and Pakistan — are still at loggerheads after fighting three wars. It was nowhere to be found when the Gulf war assumed a devastating proportion, besides a host of other cases, such as, Bosnia, Middle East, Ethiopia, Somalia, Vietnam, Cambodia, the latest episode being Kosovo. Where was NAM? But it religiously follows its periodic ritual performances, including the Summits. But have they ever

called a special or an emergency meeting to brace a critical situation, arising in any part of the globe? No. It was either a silent spectator, or a peeping Tom, looking through the key-hole to see what was happening there or just sitting on the fence, with its lost image.

G-15 Group: Gone with the Wind?

Apart from the political issues, one of the purposes of NAM was to look after the economic interests of its member countries. But here also it miserably failed because of lack of a consistent, bold and forward-looking policy. In such a vital field, it preferred to play a subservient role. To overcome such unpardonable lethargy on the part of NAM, the former Indian Prime Minister late Rajiv Gandhi came up with a proposal at NAM's Belgrade Conference in 1989, to establish a 'Group of Fifteen' (G-15) to serve as an 'antidote' to the Group of Seven (G-7) of the industrially advanced countries, to safeguard the economic interests of the developing countries. But unfortunately, the initiative met a premature death like that of its promoter Rajiv Gandhi.

That is why a prominent Calcutta English daily lamented some time back: "Having fainted this anaemic child (G-15), India should at least arrange for its decent burial." Perhaps, it had already been done quite nicely, though unsung and unremembered.

Attractive Options

Now the members of NAM, who are mostly developing and least developed countries (LDCs) belonging to Asia, Africa and Latin America, are gradually getting disillusioned with this once much-vaunted organisation for its utter failure to deliver the goods they expected from it. So they are going for new options to join more profitable regional organisations like ASEAN, APEC, NAPTA and SAFTA. Even SAARC, which was established on the initiative of Bangladesh, seems to be getting rusty wheels with creaking noise which reminds us that it also needs proper 'oiling' to keep it going for the purpose for which it was set up.

So the most vital question that haunts everybody's mind is: Has not NAM become a 'misnomer', an 'anachronism' in itself in today's post-cold war world? So it's no use trying to whip up a dead horse. Better give it a decent burial, if possible, at a well-attended high-profile grand summit somewhere in the world. As they say, "an empty sack can never stand upright." So what is the use of carrying it on your back all the way?

Tall Piece: This is a popular joke about one Sardarji who migrated from Lahore to Amritsar after the partition of India in 1947. Sardarji put up a 'Lord' sign on his front door, prefixing 'Lord' to his name. His neighbours were naturally surprised to find a 'lord' living in their neighbourhood. So one day, one of his neighbours asked Sardarji when he was conferred this 'Lordship.' Promptly he replied, when I migrated to India from Pakistan. But how? He said, "I was a landlord in Pakistan, but when I came here, I left the 'land' there and you see the landless 'lord' standing before you." Get the message? What NAM had left behind and what we see of it now!

The have-nots cannot rule

Sir, It is a truism that, generally speaking, the have-nots cannot rule, anywhere, at any time, regardless of society, time and place. This incompetency is due mainly to two factors: inability to resist temptation; and the tendency to misuse power. The former is said to be half the religion; and the latter a crime against human rights (to use a modern term).

For a have-not it is extremely difficult to act in a neutral and impartial manner, as he does not have the inner space for broad-mindedness.

This quality matures after cultivating many qualities of the head and the heart for many years during one's lifetime.

There are two weaknesses which need to be focused: Subjective temptations; and furtive acts of nepotism. A single high official can cause a lot of damage before it is detected. When powerful groups of have-nots operate in many sectors, it is a national disaster, because then there are no deterrent forces at play. Perhaps that is one of the basic goals of democracy.

Two small examples from the news of the day will suffice. One sacked Deputy Secretary to GoB has been reinstated in his post after 16 years, with full monetary compensation, following a high court judgement. The second example is the alleged questionable allotment of plots of land for residential purpose in Dhaka city by RAJUK to persons, high and low, connected to the political regime.

Thousands of similar examples of corruption and nepotism could be cited relating to our society since after independence. The social scientists can point out how to change the mores of a society, including the abysmal standard of moral character. If the regime itself becomes a part of the ugly game, then how to bring about a cure?

has been started again from the last week of the month of November of the year '98 and which will be completed during the duration of the project by June, 1999.

We fail to understand the wisdom of and justification in the publication of the advertisement on July 2, 1999 when the duration of preparing, collection and preservation of ID cards has already ended last month i.e., June, 1999.

We would like to know from the Election Commission as to when the voters including the undersigned whose photographs have already been taken would be receiving the necessary Identity Cards?

O. H. Kabir
6, Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka-1203

Sir, We draw the attention of our Prime Minister.

1. If we cut down so many trees, then the oxygen in the atmosphere will come down, the carbon-dioxide will increase and earth will become a greenhouse planet like Venus. All the ice will melt from the Himalayas and other mountains. Then there will be a big possibility of massive floods. Many people will die and other animals will also become extinct. The earth will then turn out to be a planet with no life.

2. First of all, in our city we don't have as many trees as we need, then if the government starts to cut down more, we won't be able to survive. As you can see, our city is very polluted. We can't even breathe properly when we walk through the streets. The roads are always jammed and we can't reach anywhere in time.