

Stop This Ominous Trend

EVEN the most dispassionate of readers of newspapers will be appalled by the unabated flow of reports on lawlessness that takes a heavy toll of human life and property almost everyday around us. Not a day breaks without the news of loss of lives in the previous 24 hours across the length and breadth of the country. Added to this is the newest kind of vandalism that wrecks property as well as breaks the backbone of the owners of such property, be it a sequel to personal vendetta or a political rivalry.

Our correspondent reported looting of 35 shops at Siddirganj, about 10 kilometres east of Dhaka, the other day and the inaction of the police despite filing of three cases against alleged culprits by the aggrieved party. Not only that, the thana had the temerity to refuse filing of the cases until the complainant had spoken to the Home Minister. Naturally the defendant accused the thana administration of favouring the 'terrorists'.

Monday's papers were replete with news of murders in the metropolis and elsewhere in the country. A Jubo League leader, Sudhir Bhattacharya, was shot dead at Sutrapur and Roushan Ali, owner of a rickshaw garage, was hacked to death at Nandipara under Khilgaon thana. And away in Lakshimpur two people lost their lives as the BNP and AL activists fought a deadly battle at Radhapur bazar. At least 20 persons were injured and fifty household looted by the feuding parties.

These are all but ominous signs for the ruling party and the government. It has been observed that in many cases the ruling party activists themselves created law and order situation and put the administration in utter shame and the party in embarrassment. While the victims of vandalism and terrorism do not get proper police support and protection at their time of distress without the help of the top brasses and influential political leaders or ministers, identified hoodlums and wanted criminals seem to get adequate police escort in their attempt to 'hijack' a bank. What was the police posse doing at the UCBL on Thursday when an alleged murderer and his hired goons were forcibly taking control of the bank? How could the police claim that the accused was absconding when he was talking to the press at a local hotel where he was staying?

The Home Minister and his police owe an explanation to the nation. This ominous trend has to be reversed for the sake of the society.

Departure of a Loyalist

KADER Siddiqui has resigned from the parliament where he was a member as an Awami League nominee. This move was expected. His departure from the party is now a matter of time. It appears that he is waiting to be expelled from the party rather than resign for tactical benefit.

It has been for quite sometime that Siddiqui and the AL chief are at odds. What actually lay at the root of their parting of ways still remains shrouded in mystery. Sheikh Hasina's disdainful remarks about him, though characteristic of her, were suddenly far more venomous than usual. Calling him 'mad' and a 'goat' was unusual even for her standard. Siddiqui, on his part, has done nothing to clarify as to the reasons for his parting of ways with the party of which he has been an ardent supporter. His remarks about the present AL leadership being illegal appears more contrived than real. Question naturally arises as to why he has suddenly awakened to this fact of illegality after so many years, and that also after Sheikh Hasina started to put the squeeze on him. His resignation letter also does not properly explain the reasons for his action except rehashing points that he already made in recent past.

What are the likely impacts on the ruling party of his departure? Sheikh Hasina is likely to tighten her grip on all other possible dissident voices in her party. We are also likely to witness a fresh propaganda offensive against Siddiqui which may include more official harassment against his supporters, which may only make Siddiqui a hero and as such increase his public appeal. AL will make a fatal mistake to underestimate Siddiqui's ability to organise his support base. Whether he will be able to provide any alternative political leadership is something we will have to wait and see. But with him around, and freed from the AL noose, politics will not be the same again.

Chittagong Benighted

DISRUPTION of power supply has become a familiar phenomenon in recent times. While the country's extant generation system has long been running in deficit thereby forcing frequent load-shedding in its major cities and the suburbs, mishaps on the transmission network have been infuriatingly regular.

Fire at the Hathazari sub-station, the heart of electricity supply in Chittagong, came as the latest in an endless sequence of power disaster. Worse still, almost instantaneous tripping of the transmission line resulted in disruption of power supply from the 420 MW Raozan Power Plant and 350 MW Kaptai Hydroelectric Plant to the national grid. Huge areas in the port city and its suburbs plunged into darkness. Also, Chandpur, under water due to a flash flood, and Noakhali were, and still are, without electricity. Alarming, the Power Development Board (PDB) engineers could not, till early hours on Monday, confirm when supply would be fully restored.

There is no denying the fact that the country's power sector is beset with multifarious problems. While issues related to pilferage, illegal connection, bill default, systems loss have been intensely belaboured, maintenance of generation and distribution mechanism has not quite been highlighted although, in recent times, almost all incidences of power failure have had something to do with poor maintenance. Collapse of a tower of 132 KV Ashuganj-Kishoreganj transmission line into the Brahmaputra near Bhairab is not an instance of too distant a past, nor is the snapping of a high-tension 33 KV power line by the crane of a barge or the crumbling down of a power tower in Narayanganj. On each occasion, it was a varying degree of negligence on the maintenance front. This time, too, it was no different. According to reports, attempt at power transmission through a faulty feeder line led to the fire that wrought havoc at the power sub-station.

While urging the power people to immediately restore supply to the affected areas, we would expect them to treat the incident as a reminder to shore up the maintenance front.

TURKEY is painfully waking up from the worst disaster of the century. She is rising from the rubble left by a devastating earthquake, that has flattened a long northern peninsula, the Marmara region, known as heart of industrial Turkey.

It happened at 3.02 a.m. on August 18. The Richter scale from the seismic centre in Colorado, USA, showed 7.8. It was way above what the Richter scale in Turkey was showing, which was in the neighbourhood of 6.8 at the most. The blow has been so massive and devastating that the entire Turkish nation is still reeling under its impact. And the Turkish TV channels have been showing pictures non-stop 24 hours of dazed victims, flattened houses, billowing smoke and the rubble strewn over a very large area. Search operation is still continuing and the death toll rapidly rising. It has now exceeded 18,000 and the number of wounded more than 40,000. Fatalities are apprehended to rise to at least 45,000.

It all began with a violent shake and huge buildings swayed like toys. Survivors quickly took refuge in nearby gardens, lawns, streets, cars, away from the buildings. Cars were brought out from the garages and were driven aimlessly through the streets causing traffic jam. The seaside

was filled with people in no time. Terrified residents spent successive nights outside in hastily erected makeshift tents as aftershocks continued to shake the region for days after the quake struck.

For days they tried to contact their loved ones by telephone, but in vain. Even cellular phones would not function. Electricity was out, so was water. There was fear etched on their faces as they, tens of thousands, waited for news of their family and friends trapped under the rubble.

It wasn't until the morning after the quake that its mind-boggling magnitude began to emerge. It tore through a large swathe of territory running from the extreme west of Turkey which lies in Europe and was felt as far east as the capital, Ankara. The Marmara region where the quake was centred is the most densely populated area of Turkey, home to around one-third of the country's estimated 65 million people.

The earthquake roughly covered 120 kilometres of the major national highway known as the E5. This is the main artery linking Turkey with West Europe. As you drive

along this route you will see Turkey's most advanced industrial plants. Many major international firms, including Japan's Toyota, and Korea's Hyundai have factories here. There are also huge pharmaceutical, and telecommunications enterprises. In Bursa, the first Ottoman capital, which was



The Horizon This Week

Arshad-uz Zaman

later succeeded by Istanbul, there are giant textile firms which export to the US and Europe.

The epicentre of the earthquake is the town of Izmit, which is exactly 100 kilometres north-east of Istanbul. Turkey's largest naval base at Goleuk on the Sea of Marmara was also severely hit by the tremor which transformed it into a mass grave for hundreds of officers and soldiers stationed there.

TV pictures showing row af-

ter row of crumpled buildings and rotting corpses bring out the grim reality of its impact. Rescue workers have kept up their search for survivors more than a week after the quake, and the odd miracle has occurred with women and babies pulled out alive from underneath the debris over 100 hours

after the quake struck. Thousands of unrecovered bodies are still rotting under the debris, their overpowering stench heavily felt in the air.

The rescue effort has been hampered by the collapse of vital bridges, poor weather conditions, and a major fire which erupted at Turkey's largest petroleum refinery in Izmit, threatening to engulf entire towns within its vicinity in flames. Lack of coordination between government agencies involved in the relief effort has

been a problem too as well as the insufficient number of rescue equipment such as backhoes, bulldozers and cranes. In the early days following the quake, thousands of people used their bare hands to sift through the rubble for signs of their loved ones.

The Turkish authorities have moved quickly to face the situation. President Suleyman Demirel was seen walking through the ruins of devastated town, seeking to comfort survivors. 'The state will heal the wounds of this disaster,' he pledged repeatedly. Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit has also toured the struck areas numerous times, vowing to rebuild homes for the tens of thousands left homeless by the earthquake.

Yet such is the scale of the disaster that the Turkish state alone is in no position to provide full relief on its own. The spirited Turkish people have demonstrated once again just how enterprising they can be by organising relief efforts at their own initiative. The public response to the disaster has been overwhelming with literally tens of thousands of Turks rushing to the aid of their fellow citizens. They carried

medicine, food, clothing and other urgently needed supplies to the disaster areas, well before the authorities got there. They drove their own trucks and cars to the sites, and most helped in search and rescue operations as well.

International aid has been flowing in as well, prompted in part by heart rending footage of the struck areas broadcast for days on CNN as its top news story. President Clinton appeared on CNN shortly after the quake and expressed his deep sorrow over the natural disaster suffered by America's long-time friend and ally, Turkey. The US has sent three hospital ships, and rescue teams and is at the forefront of international relief efforts. Israel and even Turkey's traditional foe, Greece, have pitched in with rescue teams and aid supplies.

Economic losses stemming from the quake could run into tens of billions of dollars, according to financial analysts, although the US government has come up with a more conservative estimate, putting total losses at between four and eight billion dollars.

In any case, it is evident that it will take Turkey a long time to fully recover from this massive blow, both in emotional and economic terms. As one survivor put it, 'It was like 100 atomic bombs crashing over our heads.'

Rehabilitation Should Precede Eviction

by A R Shamsul Islam

Slum-dwellers must have the reason and right to demand from the government that kind of human treatment as enshrined in the UN charter on Human Rights, Constitution of Bangladesh, Universal Socio-Econo-Cultural Rights Agreement endorsed by Bangladesh.

mental assistance and financial help.

None of the above two contentions of the government can be weighed as totally correct. First, terrorism is a product of many factors like black money; rise of godfathers; corruption in police; administration; political leaders' rearing of hoodlums; drug addiction etc. It epitomises near complete erosion in social and political values. Simply beating down the resorts of operational forces cannot do much of the abolition of terrorism. For argument's sake let us suppose that the government has reached out to the operational terrorists by destroying their hide-outs in the slums.

But how could it touch the godfathers of terrorism who live above-board in posh areas like Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara etc? Sooner or later it was declared with much fanfare that the government had prepared a list of the godfathers (numbering about 100) of the metropolis and they would be brought to book. The matter ended then and there as usual. Second, the evicted squatters cannot be sent back to their villages by convincing them of a likely earning they will be able to acquire. They are supported by the government. Slum-dwellers constitute flood and river erosion victims, landless labourers, divorced women, widows etc. Before it of any means they flocked to the metropolis in the quest of a livelihood. They have somehow got something of it. The government action tore it apart. Cannot they identify the government as one that instead

of providing means to the downtrodden indulges in destroying what little they have cobbled up on their own over years of tears and blood? Who does not know that means of livelihood in rural areas are far from being plentiful?

The present stand of the government on slums issue stands out as a melancholy contrast to what it did when the Bhasantek slums were being razed by the State Minister. Also, Uddin Ahmed, the PM stopped government operation forthwith, moved to the site and declared no slum-dweller would be evicted without alternative arrangement for rehabilitation being made.

Noticeably, the government took action, nay jumped into action, when a cop was killed by terrorists in Gopibag and undisciplined commotions broke out among the police. Is it due to an urgent need to pacify the police force or an urge to exploit this opportunity to fulfil a pent-up desire of the government?

It is not exactly known how many slums, big and small, are there in the city? Has the government counted them out? Almost the entire two sides of the rail track zigzagging across the capital are littered with shanties. Human Rights Organisation claim the number of the slum-dwellers of the metropolis to be around 25 lac. A substantial portion of the population of the capital indeed. Slums from TT Para near Kamalapur rail station to Khilgaon-Malibag rail gate were done away with. Kawranbazar

and Tejgaon railline-fringing shanties met with the similar fate. But slums of Mohammodpur, Lalbag, Kamrangir Char, Mirpur were not touched. It is alleged that ruling party MPs Mogbul Hossain, Al-Haj Selim and Kamal Majumdar protected them as dwellers there proved to be at their command and control.

As a matter of fact, slum demolition should have been preceded by a thorough rehabilitation schedule being exhaustively studied and deftly finalised. This is a gigantic task demanding years of efforts and investments. Since the time of the PM's first declaration of commitment to rehabilitation before eviction about three years have elapsed, but nothing tangible from the government side is heard to have been done in this regard. Only Taka five crore by PM is sanctioned and a 13-member high powered rehabilitation committee formed. This is like a drop in the ocean. Of course government rhetorics have poured down as usual. But the realities that the evicted slum-dwellers are made to face are far crueler.

Equally unfortunate is that the NGOs, who are learnt to have procured crores of takas from donor agencies abroad in the name of development of the slums, are practically of no help to the evicted victims save inciting them against government action. Such behaviour of the NGOs is alleged by many as a trick to suck out more aids from abroad in the same name of rehabilitation of the slum-dwellers.

To the Editor...

Thanks to the press

Sir, Cancellation of Rajuk's recent flawed and partisan allotment in the city's posh areas by Prime Minister, in a press conference immediately after her return from London, upholds the victory of the press, as some newspapers, though a few, truly became vocal against this depraved allotment.

As a result people in all walks of life had come to know this heinous allotment and voiced their condemnation and surprise against such nepotism. We compliment PM for her immediate, bold and decisive move ignoring the corrupt and sycophant members of her government who were involved in such coterie interest and hope that she will be free from facing such further embarrassing situation.

We congratulate the deserving newspapers for their professional and ethical stand where some remained reticent on this issue for their mean interest. If newspapers would remain vocal against such unethical issues, nobody can deprive people from their rights.

Mr. Wahed Alam,
Paikpur, Mirpur, Dhaka

Service delivery quality control

Sir, What Dr Andaleeb (Penn. U) says in his commentary on the Quality Challenge (DS Aug 3) is correct. The local practitioners in the local medical service sector, both public and private, are not aware of these basic professional guidelines, and the professional knowledge and experience is not generally sub-standard. What is problematic is the creation and maintenance of good service practices in underdeveloped countries, because the average standard of the whole team has to be above the acceptance level for competition, as the patients expect the next level of efficient service; otherwise opt to go elsewhere. It is more than the gap between the demand and supply curve. The mushrooming of the private clinic does not necessarily mean a competitive improvement of the quality of service. This gap is also due to the culture of the local environment, as practiced and accepted,

especially officially. If the regulatory agencies are lax, the service providers can get away with a lot of shady deals. The recent national budget failed to enforce any levy on medical services, as the medical experts earn a lot in dual settings.

We have yet to cultivate formality in public service. Subsequently QC will automatically follow. This formality comes from professional discipline, the last of which we witnessed during the British days, and a little bit before independence. Now the nation is full of free loaders and today the culture of short-cuts (for quick bucks) is prevailing in the country. Although a passing phase, it passes slowly.

Therefore the professional advice assumes lower political and administrative priorities, for topical exigencies of the dubious kind (examine the PSCs in the energy and power sectors, the unprofessional the DSE in the human losses in the electricity sector, the purchase of defence equipment, etc). The state of affairs was hinted by the President of Bangladesh in a recent official address to the civic society.

The undiscovered goal is to make way while the sun shines. All these malaises and distortions in our changing society is

the aftermath of the revolution of 1971, because the dust has not yet settled, thanks to the continuing political confrontations, where national consensus is as elusive as experiencing nirvana.

Atif Zabr
Dhaka

No 'tube light' for street lighting

Sir, DS has done a public service by exposing the racket as to why city streets go without lights (Staff Report, Aug 21). Fluorescent tube lights are not suitable in a developing society where the service staff or the personnel involved cannot resist the temptation of making a few bucks through corrupt practices in almost every stage of a project: capital, operation and management, and maintenance.

The maintenance budget is under severe strain due to pilferage and premature demand for spares. Therefore the inventory control has to be very tight (purchase storing, inspection, issue, and destruction of used components) and supported by inspection and monitoring sections. When even the latter two sections are corrupt, the human system loss becomes very high, and the maintenance budget starts bleeding, as is the case

mon sight in any undertaking, electrical or otherwise.

The starting or switching circuits of these tube lights are not trouble free, whether at home or at homes, and maintenance becomes a problem with the non-technical owners, coupled with erratic power supplies (start-offs, breakages, and fluctuations). The tubes are not cheap items with about 4000 hours of average life. The ballasts have to be of high quality, with PF correction (the latter is usually ignored locally). Lately local electronic starting unit (without choke and starter) have been marketed, but its evaluation report is not available, and it is over-priced compared to tiny components used. Mass production may be examined for feasibility, as the cost will come down considerably (it works under wide voltage fluctuation).

Street lights must be reliable and trouble-free, rugged in operation under severe environmental conditions, require less maintenance, and should allow quick repair. Therefore expert groups have to review the whole situation and revise and update the specifications of street lights for use in Bangladesh.

Abul M Ahmad
Dhaka

Construct an underground pass

Sir, Dhaka-Narayanganj bus route passes through Folders Street, Wari which is always overcrowded and traffic jammed with innumerable motor vehicles and rickshaws. Hundreds of children are required to attend their schools located in Wari and Hatkhola areas crossing the hazardous and insecure Folder Street with high risk of accident endangering their lives and wasting their valuable time and energy.

Many a time we have requested the DCC for the construction of an underground pass/road crossing here but of no avail.

We would once again request the DCC to construct an underground pass/road crossing at Sher-e-Bangla School point on Folder Street, Wari, for the safety and security of the school children and to cope with the ever increasing dangerous driving of vehicles on the street.

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OPINION

Transshipment and Politics

Abul Mohsin

The ruling party calls it 'transshipment', the BNP says it is nothing but 'transit/corridor', should we say what non-sense! Even before anything of the sort took the shape of an agreement the opposition parties led by BNP foisted a 30-hour hartal on the hapless people. What will it do when there is actually an agreement to that effect?

Without ascertaining its economic aspect, it is foolhardy to denounce the proposal on the imaginary ground that it would compromise with our sovereignty. Sovereignty is not such a flimsy thing that it would end with the passage of 50 or 100 trucks a day through Bangladesh territory. Had it been so, the Bangladesh should have opposed the proposed network of Asian Highway through its territory which would be useless if we do not allow others' vehicles to use the Highway.

Former BNP Finance Minister says Bangladesh should look for regional trade agreement rather than bilateral one. Well, it all depends on what is beneficial to us in the near future. If other countries of the SAARC area agree to it, then certainly a regional trade and transit pact can come into being. But obviously the present state of Indo-Pak relationship is such that it would be years before friendly relationship is restored between the two countries. It may be pointed out here that some time ago Pakistan entered into a regional block of its own with the central Asian countries without involving any SAARC countries including Bangladesh. So why should we waste our opportunities for no benefit to us?

In the papers people constantly complain about our adverse balance of payment with India. But the question is, most of the imports from that country are done by the private sector people and why are they doing it? Certainly because it is to their advantage to do so! Bangladesh cannot achieve parity in export and import trade with India because we do not produce goods in such large quantities which have great demand in India. If we had done so, then there would have been at least some sufficiency of such goods to India if officially they were reluctant to buy those.

India's technological base is much better than ours and their

vast market enables them to have economies of scale for production of various goods which make their products cheaper for our importers. No compulsion works here. However, goods of much better quality are also available to our importers but at a much bigger price and our purchasers do not always go for them. Hence, we find these goods in our markets. Not that they are doing favours to the Indian producers. Market economy has its own logic which is bereft of sentimentalism and gratitude! However, as the consumers become more sophisticated they will look for quality products even at a higher price and if the Indians cannot upgrade their goods accordingly they will simply lose the Bangladesh market. But this is another matter.

To revert to the original issue of transshipment, we should objectively examine the pros and cons of the matter. Our political leaders have no right to mislead the people by raising unfounded alarms. If the transshipment takes place during the day-time (which should be possible considering the distance) then the people would see for themselves whether troops or armaments are being transshipped. After all, troops cannot be crammed into a container nor can weapons be sent by trucks without armed escorts. India can transport both arms and soldiers to its north-eastern provinces through the existing road/railway link which runs by the northern side of Bangladesh. Now it is seeing a shorter route through Bangladesh.

If it is found that Bangladesh will not gain much economically by allowing transshipment of Indian goods then the government should drop the idea. But the facts must be made known to the people clearly. The Awami League government will be well-advised not to pursue an issue which is likely to prove to be its political harakiri, unless they can prove otherwise. In the meantime, the opposition parties also owe it to the people not to mislead them by insisting on saying that the ruling party wants to give transit/corridor to India while in fact, the government is only talking about transshipment. Needless to say that there is substantial difference between transit and transshipment.