

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali
Dhaka, Friday, January 14, 2000

Crime: The Insidious Destroyer

OUR political leaders have acquired a passion for keeping their antennae high on the diatribe of each other and very low indeed on the field-situation and public disenchantment with it.

What is even worse is that they are hell-bent upon turning their negative words into deeds by letting off roars of all kinds: "marathon hartals as never before" versus "resistance come what may."

With such compulsive obsessions getting the better of their best judgement they remain absolutely blind-folded to the stark reality that something menacing is happening beyond their immediate world.

In their volume, tentacular spread and pernicious effect crimes have outstripped all previous records. So much so that the processes of democracy, administration, economy, development, education, service-delivery are gravely threatened by their ever increasing incidence and morbidity.

In our context, political criminality and social criminality have become indistinguishable from each other. And, as if to make the situation much worse for us, they are reinforcing each other in a way so very typical of us.

Why do we think we are teetering at the edge of survival? The reason why we feel so is because crime is an insidious destroyer. It denudes from within and burrows a whole system into a state of atrophy.

So, let's say this to our politicians as full-throatedly as we are capable of: For God's sake, do not look at crime as a partisan issue but treat it as a political and social question touching on the very survivability of the system our Constitution stands for.

Bangladesh Politics in the Y2K Generation

by M. Rashiduzzaman

Will there be a new breed of politicians in the Y2K generation? Imagination can get foot loose but let us not expect a completely different kind of politicians in the near future.

WHEN Sheikh Hasina was visiting Washington, D.C. soon after she had become the Prime Minister in 1996, a young lady of Bangladeshi descent, I am told, asked her a pertinent question at a public meeting: "Do you know that if you live by the sword, you also die by the sword?"

The human inventiveness in politics, in practice and imagination, is limited - during the last 2000 plus years, people have loved only a few forms of government while physics, and chemistry, electronics and communication technologies have made astronomical advances.

In the last (virtual) three decades of the last millennium, Bangladesh has in turn tested governance by one (single charismatic leader), a few (martial law government), and many (parliamentary government) - we have been shifting political gears as nervously as the excited but inexperienced automobile driver.

turned into civilian regimes, one of which was vociferously rejected in 1991 for an about turn to the Westminster form of government. That's an epigrammatic but not an unfair summation of Bangladesh politics - may I add that the Y2K generation will surely carry the baggage of the past.

The impasse between the opposition and the ruling party is not likely to break - one side is not ready to yield to the other. In fact, the BNP-led alliance has greeted the new millennium with more strikes, and the governing party is planning to go ahead with the local elections in the teeth of the opposition resistance.

Let us not ignore that Bangladesh politics is passing through a fed up phase; and let us not forget that most Bangladeshis want to get out of the perceived paralysis of the law enforcement agencies. Both of those proclivities are the results from what they experience in recent years.

hardly inspire many beyond the ardent partisans. Sadly, that split could continue as before unless we stop using history as a single cookie-cutter mould to divide the civil society into "us" against "them".

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such forces will open new frontiers to the old religious and ethnic conflicts. To accommodate such pressure, the larger parties and the national leaders need a change of heart, flexibility and accommodation.

Modern politics is largely a reactive phenomenon - what happens in New Delhi will affect Bangladesh politics, no matter which party will be in power in Dhaka.

led the public on an anti-Indian bearing. Dhaka is unable to match New Delhi militarily but the unravelling Hindu nationalism will make India a strident political issue, not just in the hands of the BNP and the Jamaat Bangladesh will not be a doctrinaire Islamic state, but the Muslim identity of Bangladesh will become a strong political force.

Will there be a new breed of politicians in the Y2K generation? Imagination can get foot loose but let us not expect a completely different kind of politicians in the near future.

The quintessential lawyer-politicians will yield the remaining of their ground to the new business groups, and such activists who can organize hartals or who can counter them. The influence of the moneyed class in Bangladesh politics, irrespective of the denominations, is palpable, and the Y2K politicians will even be more sautéed in money.

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Why Not Privatise the Government?

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

What is a government expected to do anyway? It is supposed to maintain law and order, create jobs, ensure justice, conduct foreign policy, raise taxes, undertake public works and control monetary and fiscal policies.

THE idea may sound a little weird and wonky, but it is going to be tried. When the wind of free-market liberalism is catching up with everything, why leave out the most pivotal business of human society: its governance?

Why not magnify that possibility to national level and think of corporations running the government someday? Let us not have illusions that the private sector will be more efficient than the public sector.

Edmund Burke said, "Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants". And it is in the confluence of wisdom and wants that governments have been erected from time to time.

General managers will be in charge of several divisions reporting to a managing director who will report to the board of directors through a chairman. The managing director will do the functions of the Prime Minister and the chairman will do the functions of the President.

In modern nations market forces are gradually encroaching upon the power of government. In the eighties under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, discourses were undertaken whether to minimise government interference on the market.

Leninist prediction for communism was that the state, as a centralised embodiment of coercive power over society would "with away". In recent times we have seen how the governments of several European countries combined their sovereign interests to introduce a single currency.

What is a government expected to do anyway? It is supposed to maintain law and order, create jobs, ensure justice, conduct foreign policy, raise taxes, undertake public works and control monetary and fiscal policies.

contrary to some of the elected members who adorn our parliament.

John Adams, 2nd President of the USA and father of John Quincy Adams, wrote in 1776, "The happiness of society will be the end of government". It is obvious that the happiness of modern society is rooted in the government based on economic populism.

Either a plutocracy or dictatorship of the corporate will best empathise with that definition of happiness because its own objectives will be in line with those of its subjects.

saying on its head, a money-driven society should be ruled by a money-driven government so that everyone will be engaged in maximisation of production and profit.

And look at the sunny side of this novel idea. It will bring an end to political cant, jousting and jealousy. There will be no dogmatic or ideological conflict, political killing, demonstration, strike, campaign violence, dynastic arrogance, caretaker government, extortion, endemic corruption, second elections, cadre-building, opportunism, chicanery, and self-seeking pretensions.

American writer Henry David Thoreau wrote that although he accepted the motto "That government is best which governs least", he actually believed "That government is best which governs not at all".

The author is a banker

Friday Mailbox

Access to the university campus

Sir, We all know that the Dhaka University is not only one of the best educational institutions of our country but also a historical place. Including the Shahid Minar and Aparjeyo Bangla, many other recent sculptures are located here.

I suggest a few steps which the university authorities may consider: 1) Use of alcohol or any kind of drugs in campus should be banned.

2) Except for the national programmes and programmes by the organisations that are related with the university, no other celebrations, programmes and processions should be allowed on the campus.

3) No one should be allowed to get into the TSC compound, Arts Faculty, Karzon Hall, Mokkaram, IER and Charukala buildings on holidays, and also after 5:00 p.m. on working days without showing proper reason.

4) Except for occasions like Bijay Dibash or Ekushe February, no other programmes will continue there after 8:30 p.m.

5) In every such occasion-day, the university authority should seek additional help of the police.

6) Rickshaws and private cars should stay out of the area on working days.

7) The university authority should not allow illegal shops, hawkers and beggars in the university area.

Omar Sharif Turza Monowara Sikdar Apartments Dhaka 1209.

I am shocked Sir, The picture of Dhaka University in the DS of 2.1.2000, including all other newspapers, depicting as if a bunch of hyenas attacking a helpless prey has shocked me. I feel ashamed of being a student of this institution.

To the leaders Sir, I would like to ask some questions to the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia.

Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.

opposition bench. Where is the shadow government?

2) "BNP neither believes in secularism nor in fundamentalism", was said by you in 1991. Now you want to go to power with the help of the fundamentalists. It may be mentioned that they do not support women leadership.

3) On one hand, you will offer dialogue with the leader of the opposition and on the other hand, you use objectionable words against her. In this circumstances, how can you expect them to accept your offer?

4) Before the election, you said that you would scrap SPA and give autonomy to radio TV, if your party went to power. But you did not scrap the SPA. And also, there's no autonomy for radio and TV. Why?

Iqbal Ahmed Dhaka

A deadly culture in the offing

Sir, "Jubo League leader shot dead" was a story in the DS (Jan 4, 2000). This killing of the youth was reported as "a sequel of rivalry with the Ward Commissioner". To the local insider, however, the murder was the sequel of a land-grabbing episode.

Corruption at all levels; bank loan defaulters; uniformed or non-uniformed toll collectors; Chakuri chai kaj chaina officialdom; side walk usurpers like vendors, work-shops, used car sellers; non payment and under payment of utility bills by way of bribery or influence or by being members of the public offices including the parliament are the order of the day.

Do we see any sign of these disorders being eliminated in the foreseeable future?

Syed Wallullah Dhaka

OPINION

Dhaka is said to be a city of pollution - a popular traffic jam and what not. But soon after the Eid i.e. for two to three days it just gave a different look. It was almost deserted. Motorised vehicles were too few. Rickshaws had their hey days but their number also appeared to have waned.

The City of Dhaka after Eid

Abu Imran

enforcing agencies e.g. the police, turned up much later, when it was not known what made the police stay away from the place of disturbance and then turn up much later to the advantage of none.

Environment and traffic jam wise Dhaka was better but not law and order wise. Just on Eid day two groups of people traded with lethal weapons and mercilessly injured one another in Agargaon area.

Even the individuals were not spared. A senior officer, Joint Secretary to the Govt, was brutally murdered by the muggers on 11.1.2000 on the university campus around 6-30 a.m. while he was coming from the railway station by a rickshaw. It was done in the broad day light. And there too police had failed miserably to give protection that too to a high official.

It is unfortunate that before people could appreciate the quietness and pollution free atmosphere of Dhaka city, in came the horrible news of violence and murder. It is further

unfortunate that this happened just after the end of the month-long fasting designed to help people attain piety, learn to respect the rights of others and let peace prevail in the society and the world. But regrettably, no sooner had the month-long fasting been over, than in came the usual phenomena of crime, violence and other evils. But it was expected that following the month-long fasting there would be some improvement. And there was genuine reasons too. A leading vernacular daily informed that during the last holy month of Ramzan, the law and order situation was more or less stable. This was a good piece of news. But alas! it was falsified. This was because people by and large ignore the true spirit and essence of the teachings of Ramzan. Fasting does not mean only staying away from food, drink, even legal sex etc. Its aim is to purify people from sins. Yet sinners are back on the streets of Dhaka. One wonders how much habitable the city will be with them, when law enforcers are incapable or indifferent?