

Attack on Daily Dinkal

WE most vehemently condemn what happened at the Dinkal office the other day. It is pure vandalism by the police which, we are forced to conclude, took place under direct or indirect instigation of the ruling party. What the newspaper did comes under the purview of the role of the press. We know it is a party mouthpiece and as such could be given to exaggeration and distortion especially if something goes against the ruling party. While we do not condone such journalism, yet it is expected of an opposition mouthpiece and is tolerated the world over, as long as it remains within some tolerable limits. Obviously Shamim Osman, the ruling party MP from Narayanganj, felt that the Dinkal had crossed that limit and thus he went to court and lodged three defamation cases. On the basis of Osman's complaint a magistrate in Narayanganj issued warrant against the editor, publisher and the reporter concerned of the paper. Though the measures were totally unjustified still, up to this stage, they were within the purview of the law, however anti-free press they may be.

While in the Dinkal office police and some plainclothes men, openly carrying fire arms, vandalised its premises overturning furniture, computers and generally dislodging the office. The identity of the latter group remains a mystery as the police claims they were members of the Detective Branch (DB) which the DB denies. So who are they, and how come they openly carry arms and move along with the police? We demand that an official explanation be given as to the identity of these men.

Why was this done? Obviously to send the message that the person concerned had the law enforcing agencies at his command and that whosoever would dare to cross this ruling party MP's path would face similar harassment. What is truly regrettable is that police is being used for such purposes further reinforcing the impression that police can no longer be depended to aid people who are in the opposition.

We raise two issues here. Police cannot vandalise the premises of a newspaper while arresting journalists, including an editor and publisher. Second, this is an attack on the press and is intended to intimidate us. Lodging defamation cases was the appropriate step within the law of the land. But vandalising the Dinkal premises was pure and simple hooliganism. And since it was done against a newspaper this must be construed as an attack on the freedom of the press and protested as such. We once again condemn this incident and urge other newspapers, journalists, civil society and the public in general to protest against this incident.

Not the Right Move

DOCK workers of Chittagong port went on a 24-hour strike from 8 a.m. on Thursday. They were protesting the plan for construction of a container terminal by an American private company on the Karnaphuli estuary. The strike call was given by 22 trade unions of the Port and Dock Workers Federation.

The importance of Chittagong port for the import and export trade of the country cannot be overemphasised. Disruption in the normal activities of this vital installation is always treated as suicidal. The workers have been agitating for quite some time now against private initiative for construction of a terminal to primarily handle containers in the port. They are doing so with the blessings of Mayor Mohiudddin of Chittagong, a ruling party stalwart. Neither the shipping minister nor the government has taken any concrete steps to dissuade the agitating workers from the confrontational course, nor have they been told of any alternative arrangement for construction of the terminal. It is intriguing to see the government totally surrender before the whims of the agitating workers and the party stalwarts.

Chittagong port cannot remain oblivious of the importance of a well-equipped modern container terminal to handle future cargo ships. Its failure to do so will push it backwards in the eye of international shippers. So, the crying need of the hour is a new terminal for handling containers. There may be difference of opinion about the location of the terminal but there cannot be any two opinion about the necessity of one. Since this is a huge project involving an enormous expenditure in foreign exchange, it may not be possible for the government alone to go ahead with the plan. And since the country is inviting foreign direct investment it will be worthwhile to negotiate best possible deals for the construction of terminals. Chaos at the port in any form or manner is against the interest of the country.

Cable Chaos

CABLE television operators in certain parts of the country have suspended at least ten satellite channels protesting increase of fees by Nationwide Communications Ltd. The tussle has created an irritation among a huge telecast-loving audience who mostly depend on these channels for news, views and leisure. Since the inauguration of these channels, these operators — numbering 2000 throughout the country — have been offering service to the viewers entirely on their own terms. Starting from fees to number of channels, all has been regulated by the cable operators, majority of whom operate in Dhaka and Chittagong.

It has had a good socio-economic impact from the operators' point of view, because after this business gained momentum, a large section of our unemployed youth found a mode of income generation. But these ventures have been performing without any pre-determined policies. Therefore, the trade has succumbed to a number of anomalies. The lack of regulatory controls has meant that most cable operators do not operate under any mandatory licences, the government doesn't receive revenue from them. Moreover, these tele-traders charge the customers Taka 200 to 300, compared to monthly expenses of only Taka 60 to 70 per customer. This is obviously a pressure on the viewers. In each area, a cartel has developed to enjoy monopoly. There must be competition among them to provide the best service in terms of viewing quality and price. Often they are over-subscribed — far beyond their load handling capacity.

Things have to improve and be streamlined, not only because it upsets the equanimity, but also gives a bleak picture as far as our system of information inflow is concerned. We want a set of rules for the cable operators.

WHILE the U. S. Secretary of State, Madeline Albright eloquently speaks of 'human rights violation and containment of weapons of mass destruction', her country alone supplies 44 per cent of the total global weapons. It also manufactures and stores the maximum quantity of these weapons. It is most ironic that the leaders of the free world who have taken the vow to defend 'human rights and global security' have been supplying most of the weapons to the dictatorial regimes that violate human rights, create insecurity and help killing of innocent civilians. In the arms trade, the U. S. is followed by the United Kingdom and France and their share of the world's weapons export is 17 per cent and 14 per cent respectively (US Congressional Research Service, 1997). Great Britain, another defender of human rights, is a great supplier of weapons to abusers of human rights and repressive governments. Recent television pictures from Indonesia show that the British-supplied tanks and armored vehicles are being used to suppress pro-democracy demonstrations. While the stories of killings, killers and victims are reported widely and repeatedly, the names of the suppliers of killer-weapons are never reported in the news media. Isn't it time to report these as well? Wouldn't the names of the perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and the like and the suppliers of their weapons provide a better picture to the civil society?

Informed sources report that the machetes and guns used in the Tutsi-Hutu genocide or in the recent tourists' killings in Africa were mostly supplied by United Kingdom and France. The arms exports of other countries namely, the European countries (except UK & France), Russia, China and 'Rest of the World' comprises 9 per cent, 7 per cent, 3 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council namely the U.S., UK, Russia, France and China, that have authorized themselves to have the

guardianship to maintain global peace and security, have in fact, exported 85 per cent of the global weapons. These weapons either promoted instability, inflicted conflicts, perpetrated genocide, war and destruction, or empowered dictators, terrorists, rulers, war lords, abusers as well the legitimate governments and individuals to uphold their freedom and rights of mankind.

How Much World Spends on Guns and How Big a Billion?

The world spends \$790 billion every year on military weapons and each day, \$2.2 billion. This figure does not include black market trading. How big a billion? If you were to count by one number every second, without stopping, it would take 11.57 days to reach one million and 32 years to reach one billion.

The former President of Costa Rica, a Noble Laureate for Peace, Dr. Oscar Arias estimated that if only 5 per cent of the world's defence spending is channelled into anti-poverty programmes over the next decade, each citizen of this planet will have an income above the poverty line and the whole world could have basic social services. UNICEF estimates that spending just \$7 billion a year (less than 1 per cent of defence spending) in the next decade could educate every child on this planet Earth. At present, 1.2 billions lack access to safe water, 800 millions suffer from chronic hunger, and poverty related illness kills 35,000 children every day.

What are the 'Weapons of Mass Destruction'?

When you listen to the speeches of President Bill Clinton or Prime Minister Tony Blair and other Western leaders and follow the media, you

might tend to believe that Saddam Hussein of Iraq is the only producer of 'weapons of mass destruction'. What are they? They include bombers, missiles, nuclear missile carrying submarines, nuclear bombs and warheads, chemical and biological warheads. When an UN-SCOM inspector was asked why could they not finish their job in eight years? He replied, 'since major suppliers of Iraq's weapons were the Western countries and Russia, we are basically tallying invoices of Iraq that they received from the West during its wars and some of Iraq's documents are missing and some do not match', and therefore, the mission was taking time. It provides a signal to those countries that are buying weapons from the West that if a conflict arises, they would look for your stock and therefore, if you spend it, better keep a record of it. In fact, if the sale of weapons have been transparent, much of this massive stockpile and destruction of human life could have been avoided. Secret trading helps powerful nations to supply arms, illegally against unfriendly nations or to nations of strategic importance.

The 'Conventional weapons' include combat aircraft, armoured vehicles, heavy artillery, submarines, surface warships, missiles, bullets, high explosives, bombs, rockets, mines, depth charges, grenades, bazookas, rocket launchers, mortars, machine guns, rifles, small arms, hand guns, tanks and others. And small arms and light weapons are those which can be used and carried by one or two people. Example range from guns—revolvers, pistols, carbines, assault rifles, and light machine guns—to grenade launchers, mortars, mobile anti-tank guns, rocket launchers and shoulder-fired anti-aircraft

missile launchers. These weapons cause maximum deaths and injuries in today's civil conflicts, claiming thousands of lives each year. Approximately 90 per cent of casualties stem from small arms.

Killer Weapons: Where Do They Come from?

It is very sad that an irresponsible global arms race mostly from rich to poor nations is headed by the most powerful nation on the earth, the United States of America. The U.S. exported 44 per cent of the total and the five permanent members of Security Council exported 85 per cent of the global arms. Mostly industrialized countries manufacture arms and they account for 93 per cent of all weapons export—72 per cent to 80 per cent of arms sale go to developing countries and almost half went to those countries that were not democracies (US Arms Control & Disarmament Commission, 1995). These are exported through a variety of means including smuggling. Light arms are attractive to smugglers as they are cheap and easy to conceal and transport. There are so much stockpiles of arms in the world that wars can go on for decades, says Sam Cummings, an infamous arms dealer.

Who are the Major Contractors of US Weapons Supply?

The ten largest suppliers and contractors of the U.S. defence in 1996 were Lockheed Martin, McDonald Douglas, General Motors, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, United Technologies, Boeing, Litton Industries, and General Electric. They produce and sell it because of 'filthy profit' and more so, in the absence of transparency, profit is sky-high. In President Reagan's Iran-Contra Cover-up Hear-

ings' it was disclosed that a 'simple lock and key' was purchased at \$700 a piece. Once there was a move in the U. S. college campuses that multinational corporations (MNCs) must stop investing in South Africa to create pressure to end apartheid and students boycotted Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola and many other items in protest. Smith College is a prestigious Ivy League College with tons of inevitable funds. When First Lady Nancy Reagan was visiting the campus, she had to dump her Pepsi-Cola to show support against apartheid and all attending guests did the same. Due to public pressure, many MNCs including Pepsi-Cola stopped investing in South Africa and that softened the White minority government to preserve apartheid. If people across the globe stop cooperating with the manufacturers of weapons, there would be a day when these killer weapons would vanish from the face of the earth. Politicians and leaders will not initiate cutting of arms race or imposing penalty on the suppliers and manufacturers of killer-weapons unless people are serious about the issue and take a stand to have a peaceful and sustainable world without wars and conflicts in the coming millennium.

Who Get Killed in Arms Race?

The EarthAction, a global network for the environment, peace and social justice comprising 1,500 citizens groups in 144 countries, discloses that there are 28 wars raging across the globe today and 90 per cent of their casualties are innocent civilians. Over 25 million people, more than the entire population of the GCC countries comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have been killed in conflicts since the World War II.

Instead of pursuing real disarmament, and banning weapons that kill human beings our governments spent a total of \$797 billion only in 1996. News media is apt to report news especially if any Western person is killed in a developing country but none provide any news on the manufacturers of the killer-weapons nor they add that each day 1,317 people are being killed due to supply of weapons. If the news media would inform the public the names of the manufacturers, and the supplier country, then a record could be kept that might be useful to convince the leadership to stop production of killer weapons, or a 'class-action' suit can be filed for compensation against the manufacturer or the country-government. Jailing a dissident is a violation of human rights and it is bad but supplying weapons to kill a dissident is much worse.

Recently, a cancer patient in the US has been awarded nearly a million dollars as compensation from a cigarette manufacturer and the major cigarette manufacturers of the U.S. have agreed to pay more than \$360 billion as compensation for manufacturing cigarettes. A Georgia jury fined the General Motors \$105 million for manufacturing a defective van that exploded in Atlanta and killed its driver because of a faulty gas tank. The McDonald was fined \$3m for spilling 'hot coffee' on a customer. A Boston pub was fined one million dollars for its negligence for 'not asking' if the customer took more than two glasses of drink' as he died in a car accident due to alcohol. In Boston, a 24-hour convenience store was fined for selling cigarettes to a lady below 27 years of age. If pub owner could be fined for serving more than two drinks, the store owner for selling cigarettes, the car manufacturer for death of a passenger, and the cigarette manufacturers for producing cigarettes, then why not the manufacturers of killer weapons be fined heavily across the globe?

The author, a Professor of Economics and Management in USA, is currently working in Saudi Arabia.

OPINION

Public Safety Act: Provocation or Relief

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

IT was a strange coincidence that two bomb blasts in BNP's central office in Dhaka and their regional office in Chittagong took place when the new Public Security Act got through the Jatiya Sangsad and was awaiting President's formal concurrence. In Dhaka one of the alleged perpetrators of the crime succumbed to the injuries he sustained, while the Chittagong blast left a number of 'artisans' critically injured. The wounded ones in Chittagong were earlier reported to have been in hospital there for medical care under police custody. Mortal remains of the Dhaka casualty, till last reported, had been lying in the cold storage in the hospital, ostensibly awaiting handing over to his nearest ones. But none claimed the dead body till February, 2000.

Meantime, there had been conflicting news about the identity of the dead young man. Police tracked down his address at Hazaribagh but local residents didn't corroborate that anyone nicknamed 'Faidya' ever lived in that area. The second possible address police were informed of was Nayatola. There too the residents at the address disowned. So, the mystery about the actual identity of the man remained unresolved although some people around Fulbaria had claimed to have identified the person by the name Farhad Babu perverts to 'Faidya Babu'. His antecedents also presented him as a BNP cadre. The number of persons so far hauled up included, among others, the caretaker and the office peon of BNP central office at Naya Paltan. Both of them have already given confessional statements to the magistrate testifying that the office room of the BNP labour front on the 3rd floor of the building was being used as a bomb-manufacturing workshop for long and also on the night of the blast under discussion.

The BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan described the ripping of their office by bomb blast a machina-

tion of the ruling party. The confessional statement of BNP employees had been enough to ridicule Bhuiyan's observations, circumstantial evidences would also dismiss it. For a couple of days the BNP office was under police custody for obvious reasons but finally made over to them.

Embarrassment to BNP leadership apart, a most pertinent question must arise in any sensible mind. That is to say, with whom should the ultimate responsibility vest? There are ample precedences available which show that the head of the organisation cannot avoid the imputation because he or she, by virtue of being the chief executive must shoulder vicarious

over the past several days. The presidential concurrence continued to be delayed till the end of the 15-day mandatory period. The bill was eventually assented to after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met President Shahabuddin at the Bangabhaban. It was made known that the President had expressed his reservations on some of the clauses particularly on one debarring bail during the period when a convicted person's appeal to High Court would remain under consideration. At the request of the Head of the State, Sheikh Hasina committed herself to do away with this provision and amend a few others by way of an Ordinance to be signed by the Presi-

people at large.

The bone of contention against the new law has been that it would be used as a tool for political victimisation by the ruling party. The government on the other hand has been forcefully rejecting such malintention on its part. But such statement could not as yet dispel the fears of the opposition. And although eight specific criminal acts have been retained in the purview of the law, there is no elaboration if the acts of terrorism, bomb blasting, burning of public vehicles in the course of political movements in the streets would be excluded. Consequently police intervention in such cases of rowdism by militant political activists, more precisely,

one-point movement, achieve their goal and then go on scrapping in their own way.

But things do not appear to have been so easy. At least in any normal encounter it would remain a distant possibility. In this context Begum Zia's own statement a few weeks ago may be recalled. She was reported to have said that it would not be easy to topple the Awami League government. She hinted at some other means to get rid of Sheikh Hasina. Even though not elucidated what this 'other means' could be? Could it be a serious law and order situation forcing Hasina to give in? We are already having enough evidences of such offensive prior to or during hartal. And the na-

bomb blasting, setting on fire vehicles in the streets. They wouldn't also like to see their civil liberty jeopardized by a handful of goons. They want peace. But the government alone cannot ensure peace. The political opponents have also got to make their contribution. They can start the process by stopping the provocative picketing in the streets during hartal and if this is adhered to, the ruling party would also be advised to abandon their 'peace march' at the same time. Let there be no force, no compulsion. Let the people decide what to do when hartal is called. Sounds indeed utopian? Yes, it does and in our present state of political stagnancy such an imaginary scenario is the only lee way to some relief in our mind.

The prospect of a settlement between the position and the opposition is not at sight. Top-most four leaders of the alliance held a public meeting at Paltan on 13th February, 2000 sitting on the same rostrum. The stinging words of castigation apart, Ershad's deliberation, among others, would have received particular attention of his listeners. He said that he was no longer hankering for power as he had enough of it. He joined hands with BNP and others 'only to save the country' from 'Awami misrule'. His intonation behaved an 'oracle' from the misty pulpit in the void and bore a semblance to his 'pious entreaties' with the Mussalins in different mosques on Fridays for their 'Doa' or blessing. But unfortunately, it's hypocrisy and he continued to remain spectacularly synonymous till his last day. The present stance could be of that ignominious sort to disillusion Begum Zia and to win her sympathies, the numerous criminal cases against him, now subjudice, could be a pointer. He appears to have been very very shaky these days and unless there is a change in the power centre his fate may be sealed once for all.

The ordinary citizens' would like to be reassured that there wouldn't be any instance of the so-called 'political victimisation'. Nor would they relish the opposition political parties have resort to such a stale rhetoric when there would be genuine case involving their hirelings... They wouldn't also like to see their civil liberty jeopardized by a handful of goons. They want peace. But the government alone cannot ensure peace.

responsibilities. He or she is ordinarily accountable for his/her word or action. And in the same breath he/she has to assume full responsibility for the word or action of the subordinate(s) in the organisation when such word or action is said or done in the premises of and in direct relation to that organisation. In the present case the BNP chairperson being the chief and also being the legal tenant or occupant for doing her organisational business is supposed to assume responsibility of the incident in her office.

Leader of the Opposition is weighed in the light of her political formidability not by her social legitimacy or standing.

The big row over the new Public Safety Act and the concurrent entreaties with the President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed to refrain from giving his assent to the bill for formal enactment had engaged the curious attention of the public

himself. And she kept her promise as fast as was possible, within 24 hours precisely. The expressed reaction to such revision within the opposition leadership didn't appear that significant as could be reasonably expected. But the silent impact it created among the thugs for whom the new law had been enacted, was reported to have been of some relief for obvious reasons. The most stringent part of the provisions in the new law was thus abandoned ostensibly to show respect to Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed personally and to bow down to the ends of justice.

In spite of all that happened over the matter, BNP Chairperson continued to contend that by assenting to the bill Justice Shahabuddin had lost his neutral position. He had been debasing chapter to the history of Bangladesh. She also described the Presidential action as the failure of the incumbent to keep up the expectation of the

hirelings, could be easily described by the concerned political party or parties as 'political victimisation'. How would the government meet such situations would remain tricky a point to ponder upon.

The four-party alliance has been asking the government to relinquish power at once and to make it over to a neutral caretaker government enabling it stage a new general election. This is their one-point demand. And when the alliance asks the Awami League government to abrogate the new Public Safety Act concurrently, we have contradictory stance because they are on a one-point movement and if they succeed to oust the government there could not be any point to ask for scrapping the new law in the same breath. More so when they have peremptorily announced that when in power, they would instantly consign the law into the waste paper basket. So wisdom has it that they gear-up their

ture of the inevitable fracas on the street would invariably fall within the ambit of the new law and the persons hauled up in such incidences would be tried by the Special Tribunal set by the government. So, there would be scope for the opposition to give government's intervention the self same hue of 'political victimisation' even without legitimacy. Their activists in the streets are, in their usual words, incapable of resorting to any illegal activities. It is the 'Awami League's cadres' who, in collusion with police do all the mischiefs and shift the brunt on them!

From the ordinary citizens' point of view they would like to be reassured that there wouldn't be any instance of the so-called 'political victimisation'. Nor would they relish the opposition political parties have resort to such a stale rhetoric when there would be genuine case involving their hirelings in incidences of terrorism.

To the Editor...

Who fixes bus fares?

Sir, Uttara commuters, at times, avail buses - local as well as those ply between Dhaka and its northern districts (Gazipur, Tangail, Jamalpur etc). During this bus journey, one commonly comes across heated altercations between passengers and conductors. Mostly about fare related and the promised seat (sometimes even BRTC-City Service, Premier, Nirapad etc) load.

Standing passengers for next halt, at other's discomfort) related matters. The passenger's protests are often genuine.

Maxi-service (Duranta, Rider etc) charges higher fare for the seating service, but its fares are often arbitrary too. For example, as per the fare chart (issued by respective operating company), the fare of Airport to Shabagh (up to MCA) is Tk 12, and the fare of Airport to Mo-

hakhali is Tk 6. But, they insist to pay - Tk 8 as fare from Mo-hakhali to Shabagh (up to MCA). Again, their minimum fare for any small distances (in between board halts) is Tk 5, i.e.

if anyone boards at Biswa Road and stops

at Staff Road then he has to pay Tk 5. Recently, when BRTC City Service (Seating service) started their non-AC seating service, then soon the other buses/mini buses enhanced their fare by renaming 'seating', 'door-lock', 'non-stop' and the like services. Whereas, cleanliness, condition of some of these buses is questionable and their seats are far from the required standard, yet the fare kept as high as others are. Although, they load standing passengers with that fare, yet there is none (from the government or the owners' association) to check this extortion. Would any

body in the administration be able to say why a ticket is not there, against fare paid, as voucher that is required for many reasons?

It may be recalled, in 80's when first mini-bus service was introduced, with higher fares, there was a promise to provide well-furnished mini-buses with fixed comfortable seats and having no standing passengers. It continued, as pledged, for a year or so. But later, these mini buses were reconstructed with cramped seats and even seats on the engine cowling. Even then, the owners were not satisfied, as time passed, they started loading standing passengers in between seats, on foot boards, in bumper and on roof top as well happily charging the same high fare. Would any one in administration kindly tell us, why fare of such miserable minibus ride is more than a bus fare? Are there any

law-enforcers on patrol duty to check these unauthorised acts?

In recently introduced maxi and seating services' enhanced fare charts, it is observed that the respective operating companies (Duranta etc) have issued those. Whereas, I believe the rate of fare of public transport (bus etc) is to be fixed by corresponding government agencies and authenticated and issued by a competent authority from which redress and corrective measures are expected. It appears from the fare-chart's authority that others are exercising government's function borne by taxpayers' money.

On bus matters, during our Eid festivals, there is yet another plague of fare hike and high-handedness of transport operators and workers. At these times, innocent passengers become prey of those people mercilessly. It seems the concerned ministry has nothing to do for

such irregular way of fare hike and other extortion.

A R Choudhury
Uttara, Dhaka

Digital dilemma

Sir, A few months back, the Tk 5 switched certain telephone exchanges from analogue to digital. Numbers starting with 88, 86, 83 etc have all been changed.

However, even if anyone dial the correct number, he/she would keep getting a recorded message that the number he/she has dialled have been changed. This is quite annoying and wastes valuable time, especially when one needs to make a call on hurry. Moreover, sometimes one would begin to hear the engage tone even when the complete number hasn't been dialled.

Would the authorities con-

cerned please look into the matter?

Rina Raihan
Banani, Dhaka

"Waiting for change"

Sir, The thought-provoking letter of Mr. Abdul M Ahmad published in the DS of February 27, reminds me of the lessons of history on human progress and civilisation. As long as the vicious cycle exists in our life and living, one has to wait for changes. But such changes should be the results of selfless service, sacrifice and vision in leadership.

"The changing panorama of ages" rests upon moral values and faith in everything that is good. However, this change towards depends much on our political leaders.

Abul Ashraf Noor
Uttara, Dhaka