

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali
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Short of Police Reform Nothing will Help

PUBLIC confidence in the enforcement of law having touched a new low after some dastardly murders in the city, the metropolitan police commissioner has announced a new combative plan. Unfortunately it bears the same trade mark of ad hocism as before. Basically he ought to know his limitations as a mere cog in the machine that needs to be set right in the first place. That is an issue to which we come later in course of this editorialisation to round it off. For the present though, let's evaluate the merit of what he has said because it comes from a man on the job who is weather-beaten, too.

The police commissioner has made two announcements apparently designed to enhance the sense of security among the public: first he has asked his officers to arrest 15 professional killers who remain at large, to play havoc with law and order, 'at any cost', if necessary, by shooting them at sight to overpower them so that they can be taken into custody. His second recommendation is for a special police corps styled as Murder and Dacoity Prevention Squad whose job it would be to step up surveillance on criminal elements and stop them on their tracks before they pounced on anyone. In other words, what we are looking to is the prospect of another crackdown against criminals knowing full well that despite a much-hyped preceding series of raids and combing operations we are back again with the murders calling for a fresh raid. How long do we hop from one raid to the other? Basically, a crackdown is a desperate action that must either succeed or embolden criminals slipping through the fingers.

While appreciating the police commissioner's pro-active approach, we cannot miss the underlying seasonality about it to somehow quell public commotion over a paralytic sense of insecurity.

We have always seen the home ministry or for that matter the police rising to the pitch of the occasion with some fancied ideas about dog squads, special squads, TV screen monitoring networks beside road intersections and the like. This air of sophistication is put up without getting the normal functioning of the police right. It is good augury though, that the DMP's monthly stock-taking conference occasioned a healthy self-look and some corrective decisions were taken accordingly. First of all, officers-in-charge need to be invariably present and functioning at the police stations at the early hours between 8 am and 10 am when they usually play truant. Secondly, no aggrieved person should be turned away from thanas without his or her complaint having been recorded with the police. No bribery should be brooked there. And crucially, a corrective step is called for in the area of warrants of arrests which await execution. The number of arrest orders issued being fewer than the actual number of criminals roaming around it is imperative that the police waste no time in executing the warrants of arrest.

As for the 15 professional killers against whom the police commissioner prescribes arrest 'at any cost', — even by shooting — it is worthwhile to mention that most of them had been arrested at some point in the past and then released to be able to resume their terrorist activities. How were they released? The answer is: either by political patronage, or because the police sent them to the court in a way that could not prevent grant of bail.

On balance, our suggestion is that so long as a police reform is not carried out it is only quackery that we will practise in an attempt to cure a chronic ailment. It is as part of that reform process that political use of the police will have to be banned and the society called upon as well to invest in modernising the police force from its present rag-tag conditions topped off by an acute state of demoralisation.

Friday Mailbox

Good gesture, indeed

Sir, The invitation extended by the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to the Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia for consultation regarding the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner is indeed, a very good gesture and should be reciprocated by the opposition.

The vindictive politics must be abandoned both by the government and the opposition for the greater interest of the nation and for unhindered democratic process which was many a time distracted due to the destructive attitude of the politicians.

The neighbouring country India in spite of lot of drawbacks have institutionalised Parliamentary Democracy and at the same time entrenched it in its soil after acclimatisation to the Indian socioeconomic system.

Our nation after great sacrifices established democracy in the country and restored the vandalised electoral system, which was practically destroyed during the rule of the military regime.

Now the only expectation of the masses both from the government and the opposition, is a sane and pragmatic approach to every national problem.

Hope the coordinated efforts of the government and the opposition will usher in an era of peace and stability in the country.

Al-Haj S. M. Khalid Chowdhury
Dhaka

"Conscience- a Heavenly Trait"

Sir, The Daily Star in its issue of April 5, 2000, published a thought provoking article in the Focus page "Conscience- a Heavenly Trait" by Mr. Muslehuddin Ahmad. In the write-up, the author dealt with several issues arising out of the speech delivered by our Honourable Chief Justice Latifur Rahman in Austria.

In this article the author has raised another issue of vital importance that relates to the massive unfair means adopted by our SSC and HSC examinees. While we fully endorse Mr. Ahmad's observation, "even some parents, teachers, local leaders are directly involved" in copying spree in exams, we do not subscribe to his prescription for remedy, "...individual schools and colleges should be given the responsibility to take the exams and award certificates."

Purportedly, this conclusion was arrived at to put to an end to the horrific extent of copying in exams assuming that the concerned institution will act responsibly in conducting exams and awarding certificates. Mr Ahmad goes on to argue "if so many universities including private universities are allowed to award degrees, then why not the schools?" The logic is tenable as has been proved in other societies. Such freedom will be given to some of our well-established and well-managed schools and colleges but their number is minuscule. But for rest of the country the proposition is untenable. Candidates desirous of seating for SSC and HSC exams as per rule must pass pre-test and final test held in the institution they are studying as regular students. These tests are administered to ascertain if candidates have attained acceptable standard of knowledge and skill in the subjects they are required to take final exams. Through this process unprepared candidates are eliminated from among the aspiring candidates. But it appears that this process of elimination is not followed in most of the institutions. Had it not been so, candidates, in large numbers, would not have gone for unfair means to pass exams.

There are other questions that need serious attention. As a matter of fact such concerns

VLADIMIR Vladimirovich Putin was sworn in and assumed the office of the Presidency of the Russian Federation on 7 May in the fading glory of the resplendent throne room of the Kremlin Palace built by the Romanovs of the Czarist Russia. The rise to power of Putin, the super spy-master of the KGB and almost a non-entity in the political arena of the Russian Republic till last year, was meteoric and took many by surprise. The peaceful transition at the highest office of state through an apparently democratic election caused the Russian people to have a sigh of relief.

Putin, a protégé and successor to the first President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, was discovered by the latter following a series of futile attempts with several aspirants tried on the post of Prime Minister. Putin's victory in the Presidential election held in last March was overwhelming and became commendable, specially against candidatures of mature politicians and formidable foes like the Communist Party chief Gennady Zyuganov and flamboyant ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. May be the Russian people tired of inter-party and intra-party feuds of old and die-hard politicians wished to settle for an untried new entrant to politics as their leader.

The Presidential election in the Russian Federation was marked with some characteristic phenomena that exercised a decisive influence on the outcome of the election. The nouveau rich and the industrial-cum-business tycoons constituting an omnipotent oligarchy represented an overpowering section of the society. At the world forum of business community held in Davos, Switzerland, before the 1995 election of Yeltsin's second term as President, the Russian oligarchy took the decision in favour of a victory for Yeltsin. They dodged Communist Zyuganov, who would not serve their interests, and also the nationalist leader Zhirinovskiy as being unpredictable. The oligarchs, as expected, got their pound of flesh in the bargain and were allowed to buy huge quantity of shares in state enterprises at nominal price and amassed immense wealth in their already bulging

coffer after Yeltsin denationalized these enterprises in his second term of office. Despite having been propped up by rich protectors, the boisterous but sick Yeltsin, whose personal habits being not without reproach, often clashed with the powerful Duma, the Lower House of the Russian Parliament. But, thanks to his lucky star, he escaped unhurt on each occasion, though narrowly. However, this time he realised the desirability of leaving the reins of statecraft before the expiry of his term and resigned at the end of last year. In the pro-

cess, he obtained from a grateful Putin immunity from prosecution for corruption which charge could have been brought later against him and his family for such wrong-doings during his regime. As a sequel and

in order to demonstrate his urge to fight corruption, the Acting President immediately removed Yeltsin's daughter from her controversial Ministerial job. An important factor that contributed substantially to



Vladimir Putin receives a bunch of flowers from his predecessor Boris Yeltsin during their meeting in Boris Yeltsin's residence outside of Moscow, 27 March Putin was elected as President on 26 March 2000.

— AFP photo

Vladimir Putin: In Quest of Democracy in a Land of Autocracy

He has to very carefully steer the nation through an arduous path so as not to cause excessive annoyance to the oligarch king-makers inside the country and to conform to the rules of the games of international donors and financial agencies.

The new President has, therefore, to tread on the thin edge of a razor, while his formidable foes wait impatiently on the wings.

Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

Putin's victory in the Presidential election was his iron-fisted action towards suppressing the rebellion in Chechnya. This boosted the sagging morale of the Russian people, who had been utterly depressed and adversely affected economically due to gross mismanagement of the economy and rampant corruption perpetrated in all spheres of the society from the very emergence of Russia as a Federation. This resulted in a significant backlash from the Communists attempting to stage a comeback with the support of the overwhelming poor population, especially in rural areas and among pensioners and fixed income earners. Putin, highly knowledgeable and skilful, though relatively inexperienced, added an important feather to his cap through a moderately successful Chechnya operation and, by augmenting his popularity, won the election and saved the nation from receding into its totalitarian past. The Chechnya factor was important not only from the point of view of raising the morale of the Russian people, but also to maintain the territorial integrity of the Republic. Some Muslim ambassadors were invited to visit several Muslim states and autonomous regions in the Soviet Union during his assignment in Moscow over a decade ago. During our visit my colleagues and I discerned a perceptible emotion among those people and their eagerness to express solidarity with the Islamic community. This makes one wonder, perhaps the troubles of the Russian Federation from its constituent Muslim dominated regions spreading all over the country may not have been over yet.

Putin's priorities in the conduct of statecraft and leading his nation in the coming years

have been widely discussed and profusely written about in the international media. To sum it up briefly, the major tasks of the incumbent President lies in promoting economic well-being for his people and in restoring their confidence and dignity so as to bring back and attain, as far as possible, the past glory of the now defunct Soviet Union, a superpower. This is no mean task and will pose a grave challenge to Vladimir Putin.

Vladimirovich, as the Russians address him in a familiar tone. Earlier, Mikhail Gorbachev's experiments in introducing his own method of reforms failed miserably and cost him not only his state power but dealt a fatal blow to the very root of the communist system in the citadel and very birth-place of Communism. It was not his political reforms or Glasnost in which he achieved a measurable success in no time, but his total failure to make any headway towards realisation of his economic goals of restructuring or Perestroika of a vast society, that led to his downfall and to the abolition of the existing system.

Besides success in Chechnya as a confidence building measure, Putin sought to serve the same purpose by way of reminding the Russians of their past glory in the great victory over the Nazi Germany that brought about a decisive end to the Second World War. The elaborate and ceremonious parade held in the Red Square on 9 May only served the people to recall one of their glorious achievements in the past in order to help bolster their confidence and pride.

To undertake economic reforms and restructuring for the purpose of achieving growth, increasing production and attaining real full employment, no doubt, poses a more formidable task. In order to achieve a reasonable measure of success, he has to very carefully steer the nation through an arduous path so as not to cause excessive annoyance to the oligarch king-makers inside the country and to conform to the rules of the games of international donors and financial agencies. The new President has, therefore, to tread on the thin edge of a razor, while his formidable foes wait impatiently on the wings.

Let Us Congratulate Our Good Samaritan

He must have gone back and forth many times in his mind before he took that decision while instincts raged in his heart between good and evil. Ultimately, the good prevailed over evil and he was able to do the right thing.



Crosstalk
Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

lular phone he had found on the sidewalk. This 24-year-old struggler, who makes his living as a fruit vendor in Karwan Bazar, desperately conducted his search until he found the rightful owner of that cellular phone. Where do we place in the scheme of life dominated by impulses to snatch from others, this extraordinary example of giving something back to its owner by an ordinary man?

The newspaper, which reported this story on its page 11, did not print any photograph of this Good Samaritan. So, we would not know him next time any of us is in Karwan Bazar and want to congratulate him on his honesty, or buy something from his fruit-stand as a token of our appreciation. It is understood that virtue does not make celebrities because good men are like flat coke — sweet and cool but without fizz. The reason why criminals and their victims appear on the front page of newspapers is that grisly acts of crime work on the forbidden instincts of readers in the same way drugs work on the nerves of an addict. Dostoyevsky explains in *Brothers Karamazov* that evil happens not just because of a few criminals but because of a moral climate in which all people participate by harbouring evil wishes.

But how did this common man perform that uncommon

act despite so much evil wishes being harboured around him? Could that be an outcome of his hormonal pressure or genetic composition? Was it coded inside his homunculus or embedded in his amniotic depth? What moral courage must have prompted this erstwhile garment worker of poor health to hold back his temptation while more fortunate able-bodied men succumbed to its force?

Could it be that this metaphysically valiant man, in fact, is a metaphysical coward? Did he return that cellular phone in the fear of divine reprisal? Was he afraid that the owner of the phone was eventually going to find out and punish him? In a famous commentary, Tolstoy argued that there was no single motive but rather a series of "tiny, tiny alterations" of mood and mental habits. Now would our Good Samaritan, who returned a phone, have faltered in his conviction were he to repay bank loans?

Let us say he did it out of

Samaritan so much for the act he has accomplished as for the thought for which he had arrived at that act. Perhaps knowing that would be the foremost discovery of man unraveling the complex stratum in the inner sanctum of his own mystery.

In all likelihood, our Good Samaritan did his work out of religious sensitivity. Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* reasons that belief in good and evil is itself sheer prejudice, a mere relic of religion. But he wants to kill a pawnbroker just because she is an oppressor of the weak. In his quandary, he tries to discover his real motive for his crime but never arrives at a single answer.

That perplexity may be true for us as a society, which fails to comprehend its own horror. When it is no longer safe to walk with a friend, park your car on the street, go out for a walk, tell someone not to pester your sister, and ask for help from the police, the ecology of evil is complete. But what is the real motive for this preponderant evil?

The question puts us face to face with our Good Samaritan. Why does someone even bother to determine the ownership of a lost object in a country where a killer can fetch his victim from the house and shoot him in the

broad daylight, go back to fetch victim's other brother and kill him too? How can we hold such a minuscule act of virtue against this mammoth attack of vice in the calculus of our conscience?

Raskolnikov tried to do that by justifying murder in his theory, which divides the world into extraordinary people, such as Solon, Caesar, and Napoleon, and ordinary people, who simply serve to propagate the species. That seems like utilitarianism from the power angle. If virtue ought to be based on utility, then power is virtue because it is useful. What about our fruit vending Good Samaritan? What utility can be derived from his conduct? Let us face the truth that he did not do anything great and that his honesty could have been a clumsy wedge between cowardice and righteousness.

We still need to congratulate him on his honesty, because it is not the fact but the thought that counts more. He must have gone back and forth many times in his mind before he took that decision while instincts raged in his heart between good and evil. Ultimately, the good prevailed over evil and he was able to do the right thing. But while we celebrate this victory of virtue, we also need to calibrate the whole process. Can we do endoscopy of the Good Samaritan's soul, CAT Scan his faculties or culture his blood? We ought to replicate the process of virtue and grow more Good Samaritans. Who knows, we might need one to find a lost friend or relative and even to save our own lives!

Mother's Day

Creating a New Trend

by Ekram Kabir and Navine Murshid

The notion of a Mother's Day is not that we are trivialising our mothers or the bond we share with them. It is a reminder of what our mothers mean to us. And it is an occasion when mothers get undivided attention.

'MOTHER'S Day' is hardly a celebration in this part of the world. Yet, there are many among us who would probably want to take this opportunity to show their love, respect and devotion for their mothers.

Mothers are unquestionably the best givers. The world, since the earliest form of life, has seen the popularity of many social jargons. But the position of mothers has remained unchanged.

A mother doesn't have to be the woman who gives birth. There are many women who are a mother to someone even though they didn't give birth to them. Also, there are women who have never given birth to a child, yet they mother other children or even their pets. 'Women are mothers' is an established truth, and no one needs a teacher to know it.

The custom of honouring mothers began thousands of years ago. We still, like the people of ancient eras, weave wonderful stories and relate to those goddesses and queens. Some historians claim that the precursor to the Mother's Day observance was the ancient spring festival dedicated to mother goddesses. In the ancient Greek Empire, the spring

festival honoured Rhea, wife of Cronus and mother of the gods and goddesses. In Rome, the most significant Mother's Day — like festival was dedicated to the worship of Cybele — another mother goddess. The Hindus around the world celebrate a ten-day festival to honour *Ma Durga* — the Divine Mother who redeems all evils. And the best example of motherhood has been the mother of Jesus Christ — the Virgin Mary.

However, in modern times, America initiated Mother's Day observance. Anna Jarvis is considered the real founder of Mother's Day in America. The civil war had ended when Anna was only one year old. There was still much hatred among families in West Virginia. Anna heard her mother say many

times that she hoped 'some time, somewhere, someone will found a Mother's Day.' She was convinced that if the family honoured their mother on a special day, the fighting and hatred would end. And thus began the quest for a Mother's Day.

Presently, from the largest countries to the smallest, people almost everywhere celebrate the day. The days and ways may be different, yet the idea is the same — "to honour mothers in some special ways."

Why this doesn't happen in Bangladesh is anybody's guess. Some argue that love and respect comes straight from the heart. There is no need for a day to pay tribute to mothers. Each and every day provides many such opportunities to whereby

one can express love. There is no need to say 'I love you' to show that you love someone. In fact, the words itself may lose its meaning after a while. The words never measure up to love the mother harbours, the love the children express through their actions, through their arguments, through their cries.

On the other hand, why keep ourselves away from dedicating a day to mothers when the whole world is celebrating it in their own ways? Those who live far from where their mothers live can visit her, or give her a call, e-mail her, saying "Thank you for being my mother."

Thankfully in our country, where family bonds are still valued, most of our mothers live with us. Then again, very seldom, we express our love for

our mothers. We take them for granted and we think that they know we love them. That is true. But mothers do want to feel special once in a while. A day in tribute would make them feel special, important. This is reason enough to celebrate Mother's Day.

What would then be the ingredients of the day? Taking care of one's mother to shower her with special attention; doing at least something that will make her happy and proud to have such lovely children.

In our daily activities we often forget how much exactly our mothers mean to us. We forget that it is she who shaped us into what we are today; it is her inspiration, her scolding, her love that is the most important part of our growing. Yet, when we mention our father's name in our curriculum vitae, we conveniently forget to mention our mother's name.

The notion of a Mother's Day is not that we are trivialising our mothers or the bond we share with them. It is a reminder of what our mothers mean to us. And it is an occasion when mothers get undivided attention. A time to let them know that we do not take them for granted.