

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 adhucism 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 inspite of lot of drawbacks have institutionalised Parliamentary Democracy and at the same time entrenched it in its soil after acclimatisation to the Indian socio-economic system.

Our nation after great sacrifices established democracy in the country and restored the vanquished 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. Muslehdin 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 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 may 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

have already been voiced in a number of forums in the past. Since the problem has not been resolved, further discussion on the subject is in order. Do trained teachers and instructors adequately staff these institutions? Do schools and colleges in most parts of the country hold classes regularly? Are class tests held at regular intervals? Before such questions are raised, one needs to know if the institutions are reasonably in working condition as far as their funding, adequate classrooms, laboratory, play ground, teaching aids and equipment, furniture and well staffed library facilities are concerned. From time to time, what appears in our national dailies in matters of these questions the situation in our schools and colleges are far from our image of the minimum requirement of an effective operational institution.

Under such conditions serious aspirants for getting school and college education are more than the availability of minimally prepared institutions that can satisfy the growing educational needs and demands. Apart from this, there are thousands of candidates who do not go to school but want school certificates at all costs. With this given situation of huge unmet need for education and passing certificates, an environment of corruption creeps in to the school administration for providing all unacceptable candidates to procure the admit card in order to be able to get into the exam hall along with legitimate students with adequate facilities for copying. With this background where is the scope of providing a free hand to our schools and colleges in conducting their own exams and awarding certificates?

Syed Walidul Haq
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Corruption in the name of plant quarantine

Sir, In line with other international airports a unit of plant quarantines has been functioning at the arrival hall of Zia International Airport. However, most of the passengers are not aware of their existence, purpose and power. They have a small counter by the side of custom counters, but without any placard or signboard for easy identification unlike other airports of the world. The staffs on duty have similar uniform to those of Customs Inspectors again unlike other airports. And the Ministry of Agriculture did not even bother to display the rules and regulations including the modus operandi. Though the very purpose of this unit is to check import of diseased plants in the country, what they do is in reality is only known to the victims.

During the rush hour the uniformed staffs look for their prey, sing out innocent and illiterate passengers, escort them to their counter, and terrify them stating consequences of carrying consumable fruits and extort foreign currency from them. The passengers are made to feel guilty and utterly helpless, as they find no one to turn to for help. At times, just to extort foreign currency, taking the advantage of their uniform these staffs even resort to other excuses when the passenger is found to possess no edible fruits or such. For a long time, this has been occurring under the nose of the Authorities inside the restricted area. And only a victim knows how it hurts him after arrival at the port of entry of his own country and being harassed by such corrupted staffs.

This is indeed a corruption and malpractice which needs to be weeded out immediately.

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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.

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.

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 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 my 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.

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