

Mayhem in Aborigine Village

WE find no word strong enough to deprecate the atrocities committed by armed hooligans upon the *Santhals* of village Vimpur at Mohadevpur upazilla under Naogaon district. It is all the more condemnable owing to a manifest lack of action on the part of the police or the local administrative authority to prevent it happening despite their having prior knowledge of a situation developing over a land expropriation bid by some vested quarters. The latter were seeking to evict the aborigines from a land. They had reportedly made their home for the last 15-years, on the pretext that it was a property abandoned by a Hindu landlord, a vested property, so to speak. In their land-grabbing greed the local influentials showed total disregard for the sensibilities of an ethnic minority which deserved to be treated with respect especially when these related to their habitat touching upon their fundamental right to live.

It appears that documents were forged by the terrorist godfathers Sitesh Chandra and former UP Chairman Hatem to fake a claim on the land which has been in continuous possession of the 19 *santhal* families. For the last two years the terror leaders had used hired goondas to raid the aborigine village with casualties inflicted on the tribals. The latter went to the police and even filed cases but to no avail, because the police neither charged the accused nor made any arrests.

But the barbarity that the aborigines were subjected to last Saturday has surpassed previous records: the armed hirelings surrounded the village in broad daylight with their godfathers Sitesh and Hatem ordering the aborigines to huddle under the same roof which they did. Thereupon the house was set ablaze and as Biswanath and Jagannath wobbled out of the inferno they were put to flame and critically injured. Then tribal leader Alfred was caught while fleeing and chopped to death amidst chants of 'victory'. Wounds were inflicted on several men and women. After the police came to know of the mayhem through a tribal errand boy, they reached the spot four and a half hours later, only to see wreckage. Despite the known notoriety of Sitesh and Hatem nothing was done to neutralise them in time.

Ethnic minority has a high place in our Constitution, philosophy and national ethos. What happened at Vimpur is a big shame to our civilised sensibilities. This was in ironic contrast to the Decade of Aborigines we are observing under the UN auspices. We want the atrocious tendency towards minority oppression nipped in the bud.

Dengue Management

SATURDAY'S workshop on 'National Guidelines for Clinical Management of Dengue and Dengue Haemorrhagic Fever in Bangladesh' has not yielded any concrete result. But certainly it has paved the way for it. This is for the first time that heads were put together to formulate a set of guidelines for combating dengue. Foreign and local experts exchanged opinions on the subject with a view to approaching the task on solid foundations; but it seems that the infectious diseases control wing of the health directorate ran out of patience and presented draft guidelines and circulated it, thinking that they have done their job. But 40 local experts, who attended the workshop, felt otherwise, because in their view, the matter needed greater deliberation to arrive at an agreed set of guidelines to fight dengue. We are glad that the experts' view has been accepted and a three-month time-bound plan has been adopted to complete the task at hand. Since dengue has come to stay for quite some time we can take a longer-term view of preparations needed to banish it. But at the same time, the rainy season is yet to be over and we have a short-term perspective to attend to at the earliest.

Given the mixed situation, we are inclined to take the view of Thai expert Dr Siripin who thinks that the World Health Organisation guideline can prove 'effective' in the management of dengue fever. However, he thinks that each country needs to have guidelines of its own, depending upon, we believe, the environment, demography, organisational structure, logistics, community culture of the country concerned. We endorse Siripin's advice that concerted and synchronised efforts by physicians, nurses and relatives of patients hold the key to combating dengue scourge. Alongside, if government and municipal actions are forthcoming, this ban can be kept at bay. If Thailand could reduce the mortality rate from dengue to one per cent from what used to be 40 per cent in 1958 - then we have reasons to feel confident.

A Single Authority for ZIA

STORIES of passenger harassment at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) are nothing new. Organised gangs of rogues and cheats bully and browbeat innocent passengers and fleece them at random in presence of law enforcers and get away with impunity. The ordeals faced by travellers at the major international airport of Bangladesh has become all too known to be recounted. In fact, there exists complete lawlessness at ZIA.

In the face of it all the recent arrest of 21 muggers and thugs from the airport area on Saturday has been praiseworthy and we expect similar actions from the authorities to weed out undesirable elements from the airport premises. The airport has been beset with huge problems, particularly in the area of passenger safety and handling. It is an irony that the place which should be spic and span all the time reflecting the image of the country to the newcomers has become a den of miscreants. It is also interesting to note that there has been no police station at the airport. Hopefully, we will have one very soon.

A multiplicity of agencies work at the ZIA, each functionally independent of the other, with the result that none is accountable to any central authority. In fact there is hardly any coordination among these agencies and all the ills at ZIA may be traced to that factor. We suggest that the government immediately form an airport management authority for coordination and supervision of all the agencies now working at the ZIA. A duly empowered single authority is needed to protect the interest of millions of passengers travelling through ZIA. In the meantime the existing agencies at ZIA should take all measures to flush out the crooks and thugs ruthlessly.

AUGUST 11, 2000 ... a group of young men gunned down SMA Rab, a potential ruling party candidate for the next mayoral elections, at Sonadanga, Khulna. The daylight murder was ascribed to the veteran politician's supposed link with an outlawed organisation.

July 16, 2000 ... unidentified gunmen killed Shamsur Rahman special correspondent of the daily *Janakantha* at his Jail Road office in Jessore. Once involved in left politics, the well-known journalist earned appreciation from the conscious quarters - and, as it turned out, also the wrath of ultra-leftist elements - for a series of reports on the activities of the outlawed political organisations.

March 7, 1999 ... a couple of powerful explosions during a cultural function of the *Udichi Shilpi Goshthi* at the Jessore Town Hall premises left ten people killed and more than 200 injured. Born as the cultural front of the Communist Party of Bangladesh in 1968, the organisation later drifted from the party mooring and has ever since stood for secular ideals and progressive culture with a powerful message for the reactionary forces.

February 16, 1999 ... at a public meeting at Kalidashpur Primary School ground in Daulatpur, some 50 kilometres off the Kushtia town, a group of armed terrorists indiscriminately sprayed bullets on the podium of a public meeting, leaving senior Jatiya

Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) leader Kazi Aref killed. Five others also died on the spot and 20 were injured. The 57-year-old valiant freedom fighter was a member of the reorganisation committee of the JSD that came into being after the merger of two left leaning parties.

August 30, 1998 ... RM Saiful Alam Mukul, editor of the *Daily Runner*, was gunned down in Jessore. It is believed that he was about to run a series of reports on the unholy nexus between notorious criminals and people in local administration.

These are only a few of more than 200 murders that have taken place in the country's south-western region over the last two and a half years.

Motives for the killings have been multifarious - political rivalry, inter- and intra-party feuds, toll collection, ransom seeking, control over market, personal vendetta so on and so forth. And the outlawed political organisations have been implicated in almost every murder or assassination.

Over the years, there has been proliferation of the so-called ultra-leftist groups. One entity underwent multiple fis-

sion and more extremist bodies were born. Most of these groups are now named after their leaders, as in the case of criminal and terrorist groups. Evidently, what set out to be an ideological struggle in the early-1970s to free the common people from the exploitation of the elite has taken a dramatic U-turn to materialistic manoeuvres.

The moneyed and the influential section of the society still are their target, obviously not for any ideological reasons. As in the past, the affluent people are still kidnapped. Sometimes they are allowed to go back home in lieu of ransom. Sometimes their dead bodies are returned. Sometimes they simply disappear.

Last year, a Dhaka-based chartered accountant went to Meherpur for audit of a factory. His host there gave him a precious piece of advice. *Stay indoors after sunset*. The two days and two nights he stayed there, not for a moment he forgot the advice and was relieved when he came back to the capital city safe and sound.

In the countryside, the situation is even worse. Even the close confines of one's home

offer no protection. On March 11, four people of the same family were slaughtered at their own residence in Bagerhat's Sharankhola area. They were aspaled.

News reports say that there are approximately 3,000 armed terrorists in the region. Their armoury features the primitive machete to the sophisticated AK-47 and AK-56 and everything in between - sten gun, sub-machine gun, SLR, nine-shooter and powerful explosives with high-tech detonating devices. No wonder, the law enforcers prefer to keep off the harm's way.

The home ministry's much-vaunted combing operations appear to have worked as a stimulus for the criminals and terrorists. They have grown in strength and courage, and their network has expanded. The killings in recent times do have a discernible message stamped in them. *Don't mess with the outlaws*. The warning, it seems, is meant for all - journalists and political leaders inclusive.

No one dares speak out.

Death is the penalty for the one who dares. Shamsur Rahman and Saiful Alam dared and died. Nor do the outlaws tolerate political nuisance - rule of law, protection for citizens, etc. Police, therefore, are no more than figurative presence. Whatever be the degree of atrocity, no complaints should be filed with the police station - that seems to be the order. Anyway, complaints lodged almost invariably means inviting trouble, because if somehow the terrorists find out the identity of the complainants, which they often do, the retribution

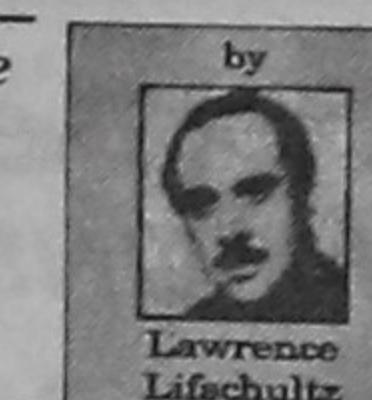
could come in the shape of death, mutilation and cruellest possible means of torture one could ever think of. Allegiance, therefore, is to the outlaws.

What could be the way out? Surely, not the anti-terrorism and anti-crime drives the government has been so persistently preaching and practising. Why? Simply because these haven't borne any change in the overall scenario. True, arrest and recovery of illegal arms and ammunition have had instant impact. For the whole duration, or at least for a significant part, of special operations, crime does appear on the ebb. But as soon as it ends, it's business as usual. Criminals and terrorists resume their evil deeds with renewed vigour. Often, their activities intensify as if to make up for the time lost during the intensified law enforcement activism.

The anti-crime and anti-terrorism drives in the country's south-western region have failed to make any headway in the fight against the outlaws. It has indeed added pomp to the home minister's hackneyed rhetoric. That's about all the utility these operations have so far had. If he harbours any doubt about that in his mind, the brutal murders of Shamsur Rahman and SMA Rab in the interval of less than a month should be enough to dispel it.

A coup d'état took place it was not a problem for the Americans? was a quiet 'nod' given at the appropriate moment? Were Ambassador Boster's instructions ignored? If so, by whom?

The time has come for democratic representatives in Bangladesh to publicly challenge American democracy to be open about its past actions. A mature and sophisticated approach is required that recognises that there are many Americans who would approve and support an open accounting of this painful chapter in US-Bangladesh relations.



The writer is presently working as a Research Associate at the Yale Centre for International and Area Studies, Yale University. He was recently named a Fulbright Scholar for South Asia.

Member of the Provincial Assembly and the Zila Nazim as a Member of the National Assembly. After all there should be some linkage at the grassroots level for the potential elected representatives at that level.

The 105 districts of the country average about 100 Union Councils each with about 25 Union Councils in every Tehsil. There is a total of 7930 Union Councils in Punjab, 1437 in Sindh, 1212 in NWP, 367 in Balochistan, 26 in the Federal Capital and 403 in FATA, a total of 10835, making for 10835 Nazims Union Council and 10835 Naib Nazims Union Council. As many as 21670 councilors will have dual membership of Union Councils and Tehsil Councils. The Nazim and Naib Union Nazims will form the electoral college for the Zillas and Tehsils respectively. At 21 seats per Union Council there will be 22735 Union Council members. Around 15000 Union Council members will be women (at 33% reserved seats).

The District Coordination Officer (DCO) should not have control over all the functionaries at the Zila level. Zila Council members who have been elected by the people should be appointed by the people should be appointed by the Council to head various executive posts. Let the functionaries report to them in their individual capacities, providing the bureaucratic back-up functions as necessary for good governance. Let the District Coordination Officer act as the Advisor to the Nazim and/or his Principal/Cabinet Secretary, ensuring that the rules and regulations are not being violated, especially in budgetary matters pertaining to allocations and expenditures. Power has been given to the people with one hand and taken back through the DCO with the other. This must be rectified before implementation. The local government plan may not be perfect but it is far better to have some form of local governance functioning at the grassroots level than not at all.

The Chief Executive has openly invited suggestions, this is quite a departure from the normal military mind-set that thrives on Tennyson's refrain in his famous poem about the 600 or so who took part in the Charge of the Light Brigade, "though they knew someone had blundered, someone had made a mistake, ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die". Less than 200 made it back. Romantic perhaps, brave certainly and the very model of discipline, but was it pragmatic?

Where Outlaws Make the Law

by Mir Ashfaquzzaman

The anti-crime and anti-terrorism drives in the country's south-western region have failed to make any headway in the fight against the outlaws. It has indeed added pomp to the home minister's hackneyed rhetoric. That's about all the utility these operations have so far had. If he harbours any doubt about that in his mind, the brutal murders of Shamsur Rahman and SMA Rab in the interval of less than a month should be enough to dispel it.

Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) leader Kazi Aref killed. Five others also died on the spot and 20 were injured. The 57-year-old valiant freedom fighter was a member of the reorganisation committee of the JSD that came into being after the merger of two left leaning parties.

August 30, 1998 ... RM Saiful Alam Mukul, editor of the *Daily Runner*, was gunned down in Jessore. It is believed that he was about to run a series of reports on the unholy nexus between notorious criminals and people in local administration.

These are only a few of more than 200 murders that have taken place in the country's south-western region over the last two and a half years.

Motives for the killings have been multifarious - political rivalry, inter- and intra-party feuds, toll collection, ransom seeking, control over market, personal vendetta so on and so forth. And the outlawed political organisations have been implicated in almost every murder or assassination.

Over the years, there has been proliferation of the so-called ultra-leftist groups. One entity underwent multiple fis-

sion and more extremist bodies were born. Most of these groups are now named after their leaders, as in the case of criminal and terrorist groups. Evidently, what set out to be an ideological struggle in the early-1970s to free the common people from the exploitation of the elite has taken a dramatic U-turn to materialistic manoeuvres.

The moneyed and the influential section of the society still are their target, obviously not for any ideological reasons. As in the past, the affluent people are still kidnapped. Sometimes they are allowed to go back home in lieu of ransom. Sometimes their dead bodies are returned. Sometimes they simply disappear.

Last year, a Dhaka-based chartered accountant went to Meherpur for audit of a factory. His host there gave him a precious piece of advice. *Stay indoors after sunset*. The two days and two nights he stayed there, not for a moment he forgot the advice and was relieved when he came back to the capital city safe and sound.

In the countryside, the situation is even worse. Even the close confines of one's home

offer no protection. On March 11, four people of the same family were slaughtered at their own residence in Bagerhat's Sharankhola area. They were aspaled.

News reports say that there are approximately 3,000 armed terrorists in the region. Their armoury features the primitive machete to the sophisticated AK-47 and AK-56 and everything in between - sten gun, sub-machine gun, SLR, nine-shooter and powerful explosives with high-tech detonating devices. No wonder, the law enforcers prefer to keep off the harm's way.

The home ministry's much-vaunted combing operations appear to have worked as a stimulus for the criminals and terrorists. They have grown in strength and courage, and their network has expanded. The killings in recent times do have a discernible message stamped in them. *Don't mess with the outlaws*. The warning, it seems, is meant for all - journalists and political leaders inclusive.

No one dares speak out.

Death is the penalty for the one who dares. Shamsur Rahman and Saiful Alam dared and died. Nor do the outlaws tolerate political nuisance - rule of law, protection for citizens, etc. Police, therefore, are no more than figurative presence. Whatever be the degree of atrocity, no complaints should be filed with the police station - that seems to be the order. Anyway, complaints lodged almost invariably means inviting trouble, because if somehow the terrorists find out the identity of the complainants, which they often do, the retribution

Anatomy of a Coup: A Journey of a Quarter Century

The time has come for democratic representatives in Bangladesh to publicly challenge American democracy to be open about its past actions. A mature and sophisticated approach is required that recognises that there are many Americans who would approve and support an open accounting of this painful chapter in US-Bangladesh relations.

between the State Department and the US intelligence community for decades. Besides the Chilean experience, there have been instances in many countries where clandestine CIA operations have been carried forward, quite independent of the knowledge of ambassadors or reluctant political staffs, who might have qualms or may be unreliable from a security and secrecy point of view. In such instances, the US diplomatic corps serves as a well dressed 'leaf' for covert operations.

In 1979 and 1980 I published a series of articles in the European, American and South Asian press on the intrigue behind the army coup which toppled Sheikh Mujib. I also published a book which examined these questions in some detail. Unfortunately, readers in

Bangladesh were denied access to this material for many years. Indeed, I was banned from the country or more than a decade and my writings were censored from the press. The sordid details surrounding the coup against Mujib were taboo subjects during the military and quasi-military regimes which ruled Bangladesh through the 1970's and 1980's.

A time has come to write a new chapter in the relationship between Bangladesh and the United States. When Bill Clinton visited Dhaka last March, I wrote in *Prothom Alo* that "the real road to a better relationship between the two countries will be best served by clearing up the record of the past." The prime Minister of Bangladesh is uniquely placed to raise this issue. Twenty-five years ago, her mother, her father, and many

members of her family were killed, including her twelve year old brother, Sheikh Hasina and others have a right to know that happened.

Last year in Guatemala, President Clinton publicly apologized for American involvement in the 1953 overthrow of the Arbenz government and the subsequent terror that a series of American-backed military regimes inflicted upon Guatemala's population. It is conservatively estimated that more than 100,000 people lost their lives in the decades of military rule that followed the coup. Perhaps, the moment is not yet ripe for an apology to be offered by the United States to Bangladesh. The time may yet come. But, a definitive accounting is due.

The Solarz Correspondence

is a clear and definitive starting point. It's significance is that the United States government for the first time admitted that there were Embassy meetings in 1974 and 1975 with opponents of Mujib's regime. Hitherto the only mention in the public domain of such meetings came from our confidential Embassy sources. We published their statements. Yet, our sources also claimed quite specifically that these Embassy meetings took place with representatives of Khondaker Mustaque Ahmed.

Is the American government prepared to reveal the nature of these meetings which took place prior to the coup? Who were the participants on the both sides? What were the questions explored? Was a red, an amber, or a green light given? Was an impression communicated that if

per cent of Pakistan's districts are virtually tribal territory, a better way for more effective coordination would have been to have either more Provinces or conversely having Divisional Governments. However the city district government concept gives hope that a restructuring of the Districts will probably take place on the basis of population, especially in Balochistan, Upper Sindh and West Punjab, e.g. Balochistan's six divisions can easily become six districts for a workable district government with homogeneity. The way the present Divisions were (mostly) carved out by bureaucracy is not a sensible proposition for good governance anywhere in Pakistan.

For some excellent features in the plan the military regime deserves kudos, viz among others, (1) run-off elections, (2) voting age reduced to 18 years, (3) the senior-most bureaucrat in the district set-up to be under

the District Nazim, (4) reserved seats for women, minorities, workers and peasants, (5) running mate concept for all major posts i.e. Nazim and Naib Nazim, (6) direct linkage between administration and representation e.g. Naib Union Nazims to represent in the Tehsil Council, Union Nazims at the District (Zila), (7) district police chief under the Zila Nazim, (8) Citizens' community boards and (9) financial autonomy at Zila level, etc. etc