

Jail Killing Day

WE have had many tragedies in our young country's life. But the tragedy connected with the killing of our four leaders - Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Mansur Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman - inside the jail on the 3rd November 25 years ago surely stands out among the saddest. These four national leaders were gunned down inside the jail when they were supposed to be in official custody and as such protected by the State. The purpose was clear, to eliminate all those who led us in our Liberation War and reverse as much of the gains of our independence as possible. Let us recall the unfolding of this event a quarter century ago. After the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu and most members of his family these four leaders were arrested and put into prison as Khandakar Mostaque formed a so-called government with the backing of a few army officers who were responsible for this dastardly act. For four months these leaders were kept in prison and put under severe mental torture and physical pressure to make them somehow acquiesce in the new political realities and to be a part of the new political set up. Their steadfast loyalty to Bangabandhu and supreme commitment to the welfare of our people made them reject all the overtures of the killers' regime, which ultimately sealed their fate. Thus after the short-lived coup led by Khaled Mosharraf on the 3rd of November and when the killers of Bangabandhu realised that power was about to slip out of their hands, they killed these four leaders who were in their custody.

We pay tribute to these four national leaders who had dedicated their lives for the prosperity of the people of this land and this cause. We especially recall the contribution of these leaders during our Liberation War. Syed Nazrul Islam was the Acting President of our wartime government and Tajuddin Ahmed was its Prime Minister. As the leading personalities of the provisional government these two leaders made enormous contribution in ensuring our victory. We especially recall the role played by Tajuddin whose outstanding leadership during that period helped to make our struggle for independence so much more effective.

We fully endorse the present government's efforts to try the killers of these four leaders whose crimes must not be allowed to go without appropriate punishment. We must express our dissatisfaction with the efforts so far made to perpetuate their memories in the public mind. Special efforts should be made to bring out commemorative publications detailing their contribution for the welfare of our people.

Days of BTTB Monopoly Nearly Over

ENTRY of the private operators in the country's telecommunications sector has been inevitably delayed by bureaucratic bottlenecks. Monopoly of the state-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) had to go someday, sooner or later. Fortunately, it would go sooner than later. After a curiously prolonged procedural manoeuvring, the ministry of post and telecommunications will finally sign a deal with WorldTel for installation and maintenance of 300,000 new land-based telephone connections next week. The process could have been easily expedited especially when the government itself had floated a tender two years back for the deal and accepted in principle the WorldTel bid. Moreover, a memorandum of understanding was also signed during US President Bill Clinton's visit early this year. Nonetheless, we are glad that the deal has been worked out to the finest details and hope that the internationally reputed company would come across the least impediment once it begins the installation work.

Basic telephony would indeed become an easier proposition after WorldTel completes installation of its network and exchange in three years' time. Already, the company has committed not to keep applicants in wait for long. Connection within a day or two upon submission of the demand note sounds like fairytale for a country where, according to a World Bank survey, waiting period could be as preposterously long as 13 years. While the arrangement promises effective and efficient services for the subscribers, it will also ensure steady flow of revenue to the government coffers. Initially, the company will have to pay ten million US dollars to begin operations. Later, the government will get two and a half per cent on licence and connection fees. Besides, the BTTB will get 60 per cent on nationwide and international calls.

WorldTel operations would definitely breathe in efficiency in the country's telecom sector. More importantly, it would instigate competition for the BTTB. With an alternative available, the subscribers would call the shots, something during decades of BTTB monopoly they have not been able to exercise.

Goons at Cross-river Points

TOLL collection at the ferry ghats has taken a turn for the worse. Rogues extort money from the incoming and outgoing transport operators, especially lorry and coach drivers who more often than not succumb to the former's threatening gesticulations. Truck drivers are usually the target but sometimes passengers may be prevented from boarding coaches if the conductor or the driver had refused to pay toll or haggled over it. All this has extremely adverse repercussions on the mobility of passengers and the movement of goods across the country. Not only does it create a law and order situation, it goes to disrupt the demand-and-supply dynamics with extremely damaging results in the shape of high commodity prices in the retail markets. The axe finally falls on the consumers as their cost of living goes well beyond their affordability range.

We have often found that these hoodlums act in cohort with local law enforcement personnel. It is said that the money is split between both parties with the cops turning a blind eye to the extortionist activities.

Some time ago, under the direct initiative of the Home Minister incidence of extortion at the cross-river points was reasonably contained. But the grip appears to have loosened out; for, according to newspaper reports, extortionists are back again with a renewed vigour. We urge the home ministry to take note of it and re-establish law and order at the ghats.

THE situation remains tense and fluid in the occupied Arab territories where clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinians have become an every day affair since the visit of Ariel Sharon to Jerusalem on 28 September. The hostile situation apparently dashed even a simmering hope for any solution of the Middle East problem in the near future.

It may be worth mentioning that Ariel Sharon who is the leader of Israel's right wing Likud party, had to resign as Defence Minister after the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres of Palestinian civilians in Lebanon by Israel's ally Phalangist militia. The massacre was perpetrated to stop Yasser Arafat from making Unilateral Declaration of Independence. It was again Sharon, a hardliner, who did not welcome peace agreement Israel signed with Palestinian Liberation Organisation in May, 1993, known as Oslo peace agreement. Sharon described the agreement as national suicide and identified Arafat as a war criminal.

As a result of violence and counter violence the present tense situation in the West Bank and Gaza will not bring any good either to Israel or to PLO. To shatter the hope for peace and establishment of an independent State for Palestinians Israel appears to have sponsored provocation for violence in the West Bank and Gaza. This violence has now turned into intifada and for all practical purpose the whole situation has gone out of the hands of Yasser Arafat. This being the situation Yasser Arafat had no option, but to declare at the summit of the Arab League in Cairo on 21 October: "Our people of the holy intifada have made a pledge to every Arab, Muslim and Christian in the World that they will continue their struggle with all legitimate means until we achieve victory."

This Summit was preceded by hurriedly called Summit between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, brokered by American President Bill Clinton, to end the violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It is often very difficult to understand the policy of the United States of America with regard to peace process in the Middle East. The United States continues to extend support and assistance to the state of Israel in spite of the fact of ruthless and indiscriminate act of Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and Gaza strip against the Palestinians. She also refrains from sharing views of the majority members of the Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly on the resolutions adopted against Israel.

In a resolution on 21 October the General Assembly of the United Nations condemned the excesses of Israeli soldiers against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and Gaza strip, but a spokesman from the White House said that this resolution would undermine the peace process in the Middle East. This implied that the foreign policy of America is favourably disposed towards Israel.

This being the situation with regard to US policy towards Middle East no peace progress could be achieved in the region, if the initiative comes from the United States. As expected, her policy would certainly favour Israel. On the other hand, Yasser Arafat is between the horns of dilemma because hardliners in his own group and Hamas did not subscribe to the policy pursued by him as he already compromised the position with Israel at every so-called peace initiative. Hamas,

the militant Islamic group, holds the view that there is no solution for the Palestine question except through Jihad (holy war).

In Israel, the Likud-Labour coalition led by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir decided in mid 80's to hold elections in the occupied territories for transitional self-rule to be followed by negotiations on the final status. Premier Shamir's concept of self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza ultimately gave hope for an independent state for the Palestinians, in the Oslo peace agreement. Palestinians maintain that the State they demand will facilitate acceptance of Israel by the Arab Countries. However, two Arab States, Egypt and Jordan in fact entered into peace agreements with Israel. And it took a long time to persuade Israel to accept the proposal of an independent and sovereign State for Palestinians.

It may be recalled that the Camp David accord which Egypt signed with Israel enhanced the military strength of Israel over the Arab countries. According to this accord, Egypt regained her lost territories, but militarily she neutralized her position against Israel. Similarly 1990 war against Iraq led by the United States of America crippled whatever military strength acquired by Iraq over the years following war with Iran. Iraq was seen by the United States as a threat to the existence of Israel. The war was not for the sake of love for the small Arab state of Kuwait. This war also facilitated the American troops to be stationed in the region to oversee the military development which might

ME Peace Process in Cauldron

Conciliation Not Confrontation is the Way Out

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

Fairplay demands that justice should be done to the people of Palestine, who have suffered enormously under Israeli brutality. What is going on now is tantamount to gross violation of human rights in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israeli politicians and the army generals are equally responsible for perpetrating a sort of genocide in the occupied territories against Palestinians.

turn out to be a threat to Israel. Moreover continued sanction on the export of oil by Iraq and UNSCOM's visit to Iraq to locate deadly weapons and missiles for the purpose of destruction crippled the economy of Iraq and its military strength and as a result also ensured security of Israel.

At the last Arab League summit held on 21 October in Cairo Egypt played very moderate role in condemning the acts of Israel. As a result, Israel welcomed the resolution by saying that 'wisdom prevailed' in the Arab League summit. Israel also praised Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt. One interesting point to note was that of forceful assertion by the participating Arab countries including Saudi Arabia for strong condemnation of Israeli action but that fell well short of Palestinian expectations. This has amply been reflected in the denunciation of the resolution by the people across the Middle East, saying the leaders failed to take action to punish Israel for excessive use of force against the Palestinians.

Arab countries, in fact, are not united. During the cold war they were divided into two groups, pro-US and pro-USSR. With the demise of the latter and the cold war it was expected that these countries would be united. But the war by the United States against Iraq to liberate the state of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation again split them. Apart from this, none of the Arab regimes is democratic. More or less all the Arab countries have experienced coups, assassinations or uprisings. These countries, therefore, remain vulnerable.

It is really painful to note that so many peace initiatives were undertaken by both PLO and Israel at the instance of US, but to no avail. Ehud Barak, the incumbent Prime Minister of Israel, who won the elections in May, 1999 on a peace platform, is under obligation to implement the provisions of Oslo peace agreement. This accord was signed for a peaceful settlement of the Palestinian problems in the occupied territories on the basis of 'land for peace' in accordance with the UN resolutions. In the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) when coalition government was formed with Labour Party of Yitzhak Rabin Israelis voted overwhelmingly for compromise solution of the existing problem between them and Palestinians and gave a green signal for meeting with PLO officials. Following the resolution Yitzhak Rabin initiated peace process and signed Oslo agreement, but subsequent governments of Netanyahu and Ehud Barak did not honour the agreement. So what is the use of negotiations and conducting dialogue with Israel?

Let us look back at the initiative taken by the European Union, which needs to be revived for the interest of Palestinians. In June 1980, the European Council adopted a declaration, which is known as Venice Declaration. It envisaged that the peace process should be conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. For this, which PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat advocated in the recent past, the Arab League and the OIC should jointly pilot a conference of international nature to resolve the thorny

problem once for all - for the sake of Palestinians, Arabs and the Israelis too. Oil is an important weapon in the Middle East. Therefore, it is high time for the oil producing Arab countries, in particular and other Muslim countries, in general to manipulate oil supplies to the West to exert pressure on the oil hungry western nations to persuade Israel to evacuate from the occupied territories. Oil can play a very effective role in this respect. Oil embargo imposed on Iraq is a glaring example in this context. Arab countries and rich Muslim countries should mobilize their resources for the cause of Palestinians as has been announced by Saudi Arab at the Arab League summit in Cairo.

Fairplay demands that justice should be done to the people of Palestine, who have suffered enormously under Israeli brutality. What is going on now is tantamount to gross violation of human rights in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israeli politicians and the army generals are equally responsible for perpetrating a sort of genocide in the occupied territories against Palestinians. They should be put on the dock. There should be demilitarized zone along the Palestinian self-rule enclaves, which should be manned by UN multinational forces to oversee the developments. Pressure should be exerted by the international community, particularly Arab countries to probe the reasons for violence in the occupied Arab territories although this proposal of Yasser Arafat was turned down by Israel at Cairo summit. In fact, time is practically running out of hand of Israel to reach an understanding with PLO, which is likely to fade away with the departure of Yasser Arafat. Security of Israel can be assured only through cooperation and understanding with Palestinians not through confrontation.

OPINION

Law and Order: Police Reform should be Given Priority

Md Khairul Islam

Of all the ills one that pricks us most is the deteriorating law and order in our country. There is no apparent dearth of laws, it is the order that is in short supply. First the traffic signal lights tell the sorry state of order. When the red traffic light is lit it is mandatory for the traffic to stop. But if you have learned the lessons of disorder, it is perhaps not only unwise to wait for the green light but you will invite the ridicule of others restless behind. However harmless it may look, the breaking of this traffic law with impunity has a far greater impact on public life than anyone of them may comprehend.

These are simply symptoms of a greater problem that needs to be urgently addressed. Execution of laws in this country is definitely one of the biggest problems. The quality or state of law enforcers themselves is ringing alarm bells. But quality does not come without a price. We need a pragmatic and improved approach to counter this problem. There is so much energy and discipline locked up

in our cantonments and bases. On occasions our military serves overseas to keep world peace but what is happening at their own backyard needs more attention. We need discipline here at home and we need it now. Desperate situation calls for desperate and new measures. However controversial it may appear the level of the police force in this country needs to be revamped and brought in par with that of the armed forces at least in matters of discipline. Our biggest enemy is not from outside but rather from within. The real efficiency test for the military is during a war time. On the other hand, it is a war everyday for the police force - a battle that is being lost on and off the streets and shows no hope of light at the end of the tunnel. Why not for a change leave aside our personal interests and do what is right and good for the common citizens and the country?

A drastic approach to improve the police force - not a facelift, not a cosmetic repair but a fundamental and struc-

tural change - is necessary to restore confidence and trust among people. We do not have to follow or copy anybody's model but make a unique one that fits our needs. We want to see the police department to be the most efficient and a model for others. First step should be to bring the salary and benefits level up so that they can lead an honest life without taking the road of corruption. This department should be given such ranks and prestige as may attract the best and the brightest of our youths. Why not modernize its equipment and improve the skills of the personnel to the world standard? But at the same time this department should be transparent, accountable and people-friendly. Considering the present dishonest state of the society, honesty will not come easy or automatically. Strong and efficient police internal department with check and balance departmental force should be created. Military like strict laws should be applied towards dishonest police per-

sonnel. Provisions should be made for defense personnel to serve this department. They will do a better job there than being, say, in the financial institutions. Let's cure the cause and not the symptom of corruption.

Police personnel have to work for and with the people and be their friends in need. They will have also to share the difficult job of educating the public of their rights provided under the constitution. Yes, teach people to obey laws and become good citizens. At the same time our judiciary system needs to make changes so that the laws work for all the people and not for a few interest groups. Laws should be made so that no one can be above and beyond it. A people-friendly and efficient court system should be created. Free and volunteer lawyers should be made available by the state to poor people who cannot afford one. Basic rights of people under the constitution have been promised but to this day we are far from fulfilling it.

When the government and its machinery begins to work for the people and not for itself only then we hope to sail in the right direction. Government officials and politicians forget that they are there to serve the people and not to be their masters - a trend that they have inherited from the British. Generally a member of the parliament is elected not on the basis as to what he or she can do for the constituents but solely because of party affiliation and its agenda. We have to change this and expect more from the very members to improve our failing system.

Today when our lives are at risk it is a costly luxury not to determine our priorities. At any cost we have to change the trend, and time is running out fast. We can live with less but cannot without dignity of self and safety of life and property. If we can restore law and order, business will prosper and foreign investments will pour in. Therefore, this extra expense in building a new policing system

will be adjudged as one of the best investments that the country shall have made.

Bribery and corruption serves only a section of people at the cost of all others. Apparently serving common people is less rewarding. But nothing will be achieved overnight, we have to start and put the engine in the right direction. If we don't do it nobody is going to do it for us. It is ironic that Bangladeshis when living abroad are very law abiding and extremely hard working. That is because in those countries there are systems in place that work. Today here exists a vast moral vacuum. Corruption seems to be the way to go by and it is getting more acceptance in our society! When there is a moral crisis and no hope in sight we have to force morals and ethics by execution of proper laws that will work. We have to demand more from ourselves first and then from the government.

The writer works as chief engineer in the United States marine/navy ship.

To the Editor ...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Ever increasing price list

Sir, We fail to understand as to why the price of oil, electricity, gas and water are so exorbitant in our country?

Regarding the price of oil, it is true that we need to meet our demand by importing oil from distant Middle East countries spending crores of Taka. But still the price should be within the reach of the general people.

However, we do not import electricity rather produce it in our country. Then why after an interval of 3-6 months, PDB, DESA increase the price of electricity?

Ours is a land of rivers and we have plenty of water resources. Then why WASA constantly increase the rate of water charges?

Unlike oil we have discovered many gas fields in the country. It is said that Bangladesh is floating on gas but why the rate of tariff on gas is being

raised every now and then?

Would the authorities concerned kindly look into the relevant matters and explain to us the reasons of anomalies, topsy-turvy and discrepancies with regard to prices of the above imported and domestic products?

A Citizen Wari, Dhaka

Utilising NMT

Sir, I am a doctorate student of Utsunomiya University, Japan. As I have been doing research on urban transportation planning emphasising on non-motorised transport (walking, cycling, rickshaw, etc) and mass transit, I have come to know of various transportation strategies that are practised in different countries such as Japan, Europe, USA, and also in few Asian countries. Nowadays, developed countries are facing a number of problems like envi-

ronmental, financial and social due to excessive usage of motorised private transport. These countries have already realised the drawbacks of excessive use of automobile. As a result, they are now discouraging the usage of automobile and encouraging the usage of non-motorised transport (NMT). Instead of banning NMT on roads, they are providing facilities, such as exclusive lane for cycling and footpath for walking. In Portland, USA, there are roads where automobiles are banned. Only buses and NMT are allowed on these roads. Recently, Portland has obtained best transport city prize in USA. My point is while developed countries are trying to promote NMT as they have already realised the problems of excessive usage of automobile, developing countries are doing just the opposite. They are discouraging NMT and encouraging automobiles. The government of developing countries like Bangladesh blames NMT as one of the main reasons for traffic congestion. But from experience, I can say that in Bangladesh, mismanagement is the main reason of traffic congestion. Traffic personnel are always seen neglecting duties and busy collecting toll from vendors, bus drivers, rickshaw pullers, even

from drivers of private vehicles as well. And the users of the roads are always seen neglecting traffic rules and regulation which ultimately result in unbearable traffic jam. So no way the government can blame only NMT for traffic congestion.

Motisi J Sarker Utsunomiya University, Japan

Cigarette smoking - a deadly habit

Sir, For the last few days we have noticed an advertisement of British American Tobacco Bangladesh Co Ltd in different newspapers, declaring that "Cigarettes are meant for adults." We are surprised by these words. With all the harmful effects of cigarette smoking it could not be meant for anybody of any age. Smoking is the cause of many disabling and life threatening diseases such as lung cancer, stomach cancer, heart diseases etc. It is very disappointing that knowing all these health hazards people do not refrain from smoking, they bring on their own misfortune.

Newspapers, radio and television earn money by advertis-

ing tobacco products but couldn't they forego this income for humanity's sake and refuse to publish advertisements of tobacco products? In this situation the government's role is most important, the government must not expose people to this menace only to collect taxes from tobacco companies because in the long run it would be a losing game.

In advanced countries people are becoming conscious and smoking is declining considerably. But in our country it is increasing day by day. It is about time the authorities concerned intervene and do something to prohibit this deadly habit.

Nur Jalil Chittagong

Small-pox, cholera and hepatitis-B

Sir, Long ago it was a routine duty for the municipal health personnel to visit door to door and vaccinate the city dwellers to save them from the diseases like small-pox, cholera etc.

Gone are those of public health facilities. Today even if the people themselves go to

municipal offices they are not provided with any sort of medical service.

These days another dreadful disease Hepatitis-B has surfaced in our country. There are lot of advertisements in the national press as well as in BTV about the need for Hepatitis-B vaccination. But we are being kept ignorant and unaware as to where, in which centre, place, municipal office or government hospital Hepatitis-B vaccination is being given and what is its financial implication, if any.

We would request the Ministry of Health which has been allocated a budget of Taka 2519 crore for the financial year 2000-2001 on health sector to arrange cholera, small-pox and Hepatitis-B vaccination to the people free of cost in the greater interest of health of the nation.

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