

Mob killing must be stopped

Public-police cooperation, a dire need

SOMETHING grotesque is happening in our society. It is as if we have been sucked into the time of public lynching and mob execution. What has been happening in Dhaka in the last few days is abhorring to the core and despicable in every sense of the term. Mob killing is against every value that the civilised world and our own culture and religion hold dear. We must do everything we can to root it out.

It is around the shopping centres and bus terminals that most of the mugging occurs. Victims are an easy pick for the waiting gangsters in these areas where people are known to carry ready cash and valuables. The Eid shopping has made the situation worse as the criminals find it easy to hide in the crowd both before and after attacking the victims. The festive season adds urgency to the situation that needs to be immediately addressed. We suggest police deployment in greater strength in the big shopping centres of the city and also in the bus and launch terminals. This will, hopefully, help improve the situation for the moment.

However a deeper question needs to be asked as to why this is happening in our society. Reasons are several, the most important among them being the gradual erosion of public confidence in the law enforcement agencies. The open nexus between a section of the police and the criminals, the incidence of bribery, and widespread corruption that seems to have penetrated all the branches of our law enforcement agencies have enormously reduced public trust on police. This has led to the tendency to take law into one's own hands when a criminal is caught. What we have seen in the last several days is that when an alleged mugger is caught by the people they do not wait to hand him over to the police but start punishing him on the spot which leads to mob killing in some instances.

The only way to stop this is by creating greater public-police understanding and co-operation in the long run. For this to come about police will have to become more accountable to the public for their actions which at the moment they are not. But in the short run some stringent measures need to be taken. We think radio and TV messages urging people to hand over criminals to the police and some exemplary actions by the police in protecting the public from muggers will greatly help restore public confidence in the system. We request urgent attention of the authorities in this regard. Otherwise mob rule will overtake the rule of law.

TB detection rate falling

Efforts to control the disease hindered

OF all the dreadful diseases that plague us, nothing is as insidious as TB. Once thought to have been annihilated, TB has made a deadly come-back and now threatens to become one of the most difficult infectious diseases to control.

Bangladesh is not only a huge TB burden-carrying country but the gap between the infected and the treated is becoming wider by the day.

In fact, there is a global TB control programme and its called DOTS or Directly Observed Treatment Short Course. The basic idea is to ensure early detection, to ensure proper diagnosis and to ensure regular and unbroken treatment. This includes large-scale infection, detection and reducing ineffective sporadic treatment.

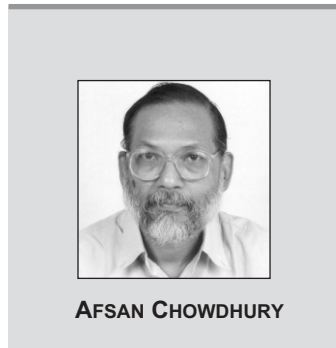
Experts say that at least part of the crisis lies in conventional treatment regimes where the patients are improperly diagnosed or there is no supervision of the medicine intake. The result is lapsed treatment, which is then often followed by resistance to drugs. Unfortunately, the dreadful multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) has begun to emerge in Bangladesh, too. And that is practically untreatable even in the West.

Yet strangely enough, our medical colleges are not attuned to the DOTS control programme and static non-supervised treatment that is generally followed by general practitioners and hospitals has in fact led to higher incidence of TB. Thus we live in a strange paradox. While our hospitals are failing to arrest TB, in fact in some ways encouraging TB, we have a fully internationally supported programme which is battling the disease and advising the same government to go for the control approach through field level treatment and supervised drug consumption for specific periods. And yet the government is running both, the TB control programme and the medical colleges. This of course is a general crisis in South Asia caught between a traditional syllabus and a modern danger.

The detection rates in Bangladesh are well behind and this year it should have been at least fifty per cent but has dropped below 30 per cent. The cure rate where detected is high which means DOTS works as far as treatment regimen is concerned but many social factors contribute to this including uncontrolled urbanization, malnutrition and risky life-styles. The fact that TB is an air-borne disease doesn't help matters either. We are mostly talking about the rural areas and once we look at the congested cities, the size of our nightmares will increase.

Control of TB is possible but it still has an image as a poor man's disease, which is why the rich including the rich countries have neglected its control. But as all reports say, TB spares no class and it's highly imperative that the decision-makers step in to stop TB.

Mumtaz Khan : The Pathan Freedom Fighter



AFSAN CHOWDHURY

THE last time I met Mumtaz Khan, he was trying to save his house. He had been allotted a building on one of the lesser roads of Mohammedpur, sharing that mangy lane with families of retired policemen, secret millionaires, part-time drug dealers, fully nice bank officials who acted in plays after work and such other people who fill the diaries of the forgettable. Yet Mumtaz Khan was utterly unique. He was the only Pathan Mukti Jeddha the only Pathan freedom fighter in the 1971 war. It said as much in the small tin board done in peeling paints. It hung harmlessly from a nail atop the main door slight askew. He said he would probably soon be dead from stomach cancer.

My friend Ishrat Firdausi, the editor-author of the book, "The Year that Was", a collection of self-addressed memories of the experience of 1971, told me first about this man. "Ask people about him and you will get his home. Ask for the Pathan mukti. And don't let him bull shit you. You get taken easily you know." Promising to be careful, I went looking for him. A young friend, AKA Khalid - now in ETV - and I were shooting a video. We were using a 1 CCD camera that kept tilting to the right for no real reason. But the subject seemed very inter-

esting. He was a tall man like you would expect any Pathan to be. His face had a weather beaten leathery look, which confounded any guess about his age. He looked like someone who knew how to be arrogant standing in a dung heap. I suppose that's natural dignity for you. He had asked us in after due introductions and references and bade us sit down in a decrepit sitting room. Pictures of his latest family hung on the refugee houses inside the camp. "And they listen to you?" "Why not? I am an honourable man." That made sense to me. "I am a Pakhtun nationalist. I have never liked the Punjabis and always hated them. I am a follower of Abdul Ghaflar Khan, the Frontier Gandhi. We believed in a separate homeland for the Pathans. Nobody

farm in Tangail. It was a good thing. We didn't think of East Pakistanis the way the Punjabis did. We thought they were always repressed like we were. "In Kohat I met a person from East Pakistan who was being trained there in the military academy for the non-commissioned. He was called Kader Siddiqui. Soon he left the school there but our friendship remained. When I saw his picture in the papers after the

also knew how to cover myself. And most probably they didn't have enough evidence. I also said that I had a lot of people working for me. "But I was stopped later on my way. I had to, when I found that a bridge had been blown up on way to Tangail. So I had to hire a boat in the nick of time and got away just before I was arrested." SUDDENLY he stopped and fell

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

"I don't remember any song. I can't speak my language anymore. I have not gone home again. I have a new family here. I don't know what has happened to my family there." Mumtaz Khan is a Pathan nationalist who became a Bangladeshi partisan, has forgotten his own tongue and ultimately speaks three languages, all with the imperfection of a stranger in all of them. Who is he?

the walls. A few pictures taken in better days. The walls had also seen better days. We counted the cracks, the room painted before paint adverts were fashionable. He had no money for repairs he told me. He had a couple of tenants too in the upper two floors. He knew he was down but he said he would never be out. Very much the gallant, tough sounding Pathan.

Ghalib had started to shoot in the slightly dark room as the window let in the lazy noise of the street and the roaming vendors selling small mercies and joys. He said he didn't like Biharis too much.

As I wondered if it was an ancient Pathan hate of the Biharis or not, he told me that his main work was to arbitrate disputes inside the Bihari camp. So it was high racism of the casual variety that's common in this land.

"What kinds of dispute did you settle in the camps?"

"All kinds but mostly on allotment

ever did anything for the Pathans. The Punjabis have always taken advantage of us. I was an activist from a young age. You learn two things when you are a young Pathan. You learn that you must respect the Pathan tradition. And you must learn how to use weapons. I too learnt both.

"I first had a real fight when I tried to unfurl the Pathan flag at a meeting when I was a young boy. There was a stiff resistance and I was attacked but I held myself well. I was also armed. But I also learnt that you could never trust the Punjabis.

"Later I became involved in the family business. We had different kinds of trade. We also had close connections with the then East Pakistan. We used to import paan from here. We also bought other goods. We actually had good connections with people from here.

"I had many East Pakistani friends. Soon our business was doing so well that we set up a paan

Pakistani attack, I realized my friend had become a warrior. I was soon in Tangail looking after the family business. And I was in touch with the Kaderia Bahini.

"He is my leader and my commander and I listened to his orders. I am proud of having been part of that war. In those days communications was very difficult. So coming to Dhaka and returning safely was a very difficult task. At that time there was a desperate need for medicines. So I was sent to collect them. I had a list and I thought that it was a relatively simple task.

"But the Pakistanis were smart. They were watching the medicine shops. Those medicines were for treating injuries. And after I left the shop, they tracked me. But I outsmarted them.

"I was once interned for interrogation by the Pakistan army. But due to a variety of reasons I was saved. After all, I wasn't a Bengali. I

back on he rickety chair, tired and drained. He doesn't look well. By this time we have decided to shoot the place where he nearly got caught and the other places where he was active. We didn't know if we could shoot in Tangail. He was on Kader Siddiqui's side and Kader Siddiqui had gone against Awami League and just lost favour and thus he too was not a popular figure there. Cases had been revived against KS and so the Pathan was a bit hard pressed. And so the government was breathing down his neck too. The allotment of his house was under challenge. The anti KS supporters at a meeting of freedom fighters had told him off. He showed us the documents of his allotment but we understood little except that he had once been given the house and now someone wanted it back. The usual 'now in favour and then out of favour' story that populates Bangladesh all the time.

Let not morning show the day

A R SHAMSUL ISLAM

MORNING shows the day's an adage held by us with traditional respect and credibility. We are used to use this proverb quite frequently, sometimes with reflex effect. Still there are some occasions when we, under cruel necessity, would like to believe that it (proverb) might not come true. The post-election political scenario of Bangladesh is like that.

It has been just two months since the four-party alliance led by the BNP was catapulted to power. In fact, two months is a period too short to be reckoned as appreciable compared to a five-year term of governance. It is particularly so in the initial stage when a newly-inducted government remains engrossed with the fallout of the previous rule. And the people of Bangladesh cannot be blamed to be so inconsiderate as to expect that the new government will figure up fledged by that time. They may have their watchful eyes on the pattern of governmental activities but for the fruits of good administration they will not refuse to wait for a considerable length of time.

Unfortunately the way the BNP and its allied forces have started to work up has caused concern of no mean degree to the public. Practically from day number one following the unofficial publication process of 1st October national election results the BNP cadres swooped on occupying accessories of profit. First in the lap of honour came the overrunning of some residential halls of Dhaka University which were held almost as 'jaigirs' by the student front of the previous ruling party. Amusingly, the unwritten transfer formalities were observed quite peacefully as the former occupants fled the term-bashed 'jaigirs' stealthily under the cover of darkness before the arrival of their successors. The whole schedule of makeover and takeover

was signalled with the gradual declaration of the results of 1st October election over TV and radio.

Swiftly and in some cases simultaneously came the occupation of other places of profit like the bus terminals, ferry ghats, markets, shopping malls etc. Though unprecedented, even the public toilets were not spared.

The BNP cadres could not keep lagging in the gymnastics of tender collection. In this affair their open remarks are indeed thought provoking: "The Awami cadres have appro-

the activities of the BNP in the first two months of its tenure have not sounded anyway positive in reference to the objectives it was seated by the people in the government to achieve. Right now the BNP wisdom ought to take an accurate and realistic stock of the situation and get down to adopting corrective measures to let us hope that contrary to the usual urge the foggy morning will be reversed by a sunny day.

riated benefits for long five years. It is now our turn."

People expected a reasonable size of council of ministers. Khaleda Zia also hinted like that. Further the donor partners heavily pressed for that. But what a mare's nest! A 60-strong council of ministers emerged. People had the first taste of disillusionment.

Far worse was the systematic repression on the Hindus across the country. Curiously enough, it started with the coming of the caretaker government. Probably everybody has by this time become aware of what kind of atrocities was meted out to them. The DS did a commendable job in publishing a serial of stories on the subject under the caption of "Harrowing depravity" by sending out a roving team to the far-flung inaccessible places of occurrence. Strangely, the government, first denied, then said it was highly exaggerated and finally concluded the affair being contrived by the Awami League. Can the people be befooled by these sorts of throw-away, hackneyed allegations and

argumentation?

The attendant evil of the above affairs is the deteriorating law and order of the country. Whereas it is the expectation of the improvement of the latter that has largely contributed to the return of the BNP to power. In the past it is the Awami League cadres who broke the order of the society. It is this menace that the people wanted to be got rid of. If the BNP cadres also behave in a similar fashion the people know not where to fall upon in future to get relief.

till now refrained from attending the parliament. But the BNP should not lose sight of the fact that it is the prime and almost bounden responsibility of the ruling party to make atmosphere so cordial and compelling as to bring the opposition to the house. This demands utmost restraint and tolerance in behaviour, speech and activities of the ruling party regardless of provocation from the opposition. During its rule the Awami League failed miserably to meet this demand. The BNP should on no account repeat the failure to

omy of the country? If it is crippled, who is to blame? These are the pertinent questions that have shaken the whole nation. In the prime minister's address to the nation immediately after her taking rein of the government and in the presidential speech in the parliament, the economy of the country was termed as extremely fragile and the last government was directly vilified for crippling the economy by massive corruption. The latter sharply retorted by condemning the allegations of the present govern-

be equated with the Awami League as in the October election the people evinced a greater interest in the BNP and as such their expectation from the party also rose higher.

The behaviour of the police remains as undemocratic as ever. The other day it unnecessarily fell upon the Awami League torch processionists. Further, on the day of hartal, on the 2nd December, called by the Awami League, the police virtually made several hundred partymen imprisoned in the party office and adjacent road.

That further went to the length of fouling up a party sitting MP. If we can freshen up our memory we can recall that during the past Awami League government, BNP MP Sadek Hossain Khoka was also mauled up by the police. As an episode of just retribution this may be a valuable reference. But the impact of such police repression and insolence, obviously at the behest of the government, are highly derogatory to the flourishing of democratic norm.

Truly, to the inglorious tradition of our present day political system the opposition leader and the immediate past prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League have

ment as blatant lies designed to sully the Awami League's image and to provide an advance cover to the failure of the government to ship-shape the economy. The Awami League furnished a number of statistics to prove the upward trend of economy during its rule.

The present government seems set to sell gas to India. Curiously enough, it is the BNP leaders who only the other day, when in the opposition, rent the sky by declaring that they would lay down their lives to prohibit the Awami League from selling gas to any foreign country. In our country change of stance with the reversal of political positions occurs so glaringly. Indeed our political leaders are masters of blowing hot and cold from the same mouth.

The cyclone of reshuffling govt. and autonomous bodies employees in the form of transfer, forced retirement, removal, OSD etc. has not yet abated. It may have sapped the energy and initiative of the incumbents rendering the govt. machinery moribund.

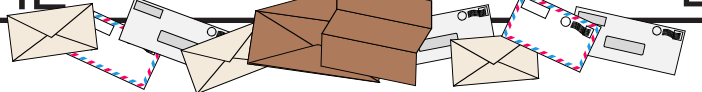
The Health Minister gave in to the pressure of striking nurses and other non-gazetted employees by committing that it will be reverted to its previous status of P.G Hospital. But nothing was heard about making of an alternative medical university.

In the past rule of Awami League the main opposition BNP had alleged almost unendingly that its leaders and activists were put to repression by instituting false cases, denying them their basic democratic rights like holding hartal, procession etc, obstructing them from speaking in the parliament, maiming and killing its activists etc. Is that having formed the government it is now on a vengeance course against the alleged perpetrators of repression and the Hindus branded as vote bank of the Awami League? But under no circumstances it should forget that the people have voted them to power not for wreaking revenge on any quarter but for working heart and soul to do good to the people by restoring law and order of the society and put the country on road to progress and prosperity standing above all party and parochial considerations.

Understandably, the activities of the BNP in the first two months of its tenure have not sounded anyway positive in reference to the objectives it was seated by the people in the government to achieve. Right now the BNP wisdom ought to take an accurate and realistic stock of the situation and get down to adopting corrective measures to let us hope that contrary to the usual urge the foggy morning will be reversed by a sunny day.

A R Shamsul Islam is retired principal of Govt. Mahila College, Pabna.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Thank you George Harrison

My heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of George Harrison. My lifeline passion for Beatles was made richer and more pleasurable by his music. His message of freedom through the "Concert for Bangladesh" during the war of liberation in 1971 revealed a man of the most delicate sensibility. I pray for eternal peace for his departed soul. Today, after 30 years of independence of Bangladesh and to pay homage to George Harrison I got enthusiastic to write some of my memory as a recollections of the 1971 struggle.

It is neither to glorify any political party nor any individual's role in the liberation war but its purpose is to recollect the horrific days of the nine months, to remember the determination of the people to make the country independent, and to remind the strong emotion that united the entire nation. I was at that time a young Bangalee freedom fighter a College student with full of energy, and George Harrison's music was an inspiration for me. Monaz Haque, on e-mail Afghanistan saved

With reference to the letter: "Muslim cleansing: Anti-American propaganda," by a member of the next generation of US citizens (December 7), I would like to add that the American military intervention to flush out terrorists in Afghanistan has saved the country from total destruction. The brilliant display of the American airpower broke the back of the brutal Taliban regime and helped Afghanistan's Northern Alliance liberate the country from terror and darkness. With the Taliban on the run, the Afghan girls can now go to school without being molested by the Taliban who had banned all education for girls, women can again aspire to become teachers and doctors, men can shave their beards if they like and children can play freely. It was a veritable liberation of a whole people and American intervention made it possible.

Why are Americans so successful in Afghanistan where the Soviets have failed miserably? Why are American forces and their Afghan allies achieving such success within a few months, which the Soviets and their Afghan allies failed to achieve in 10 years? The answer lies in the fact that while most Afghans viewed

the Soviets as occupiers, they are seeing Americans as liberators. The Soviet forces came to Afghanistan to prop up a hated communist government. The Americans are there to get rid of the hated Taliban and their foreign legions.

We should all thank America for saving Afghanistan from the brutal yoke of Talibanism. Anti-American propaganda should not be allowed to confuse the world the good Americans have saved a poor country from tyrants of worst kind.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Canada

Black is beautiful

18 year old Miss Nigeria has been awarded the most prestigious "Miss World" crown for the year 2001. It is the first time in the history of "Miss World" competition an African black girl has won the crown. No doubt, the selection of an African girl in this heavily ornamental competition is very significant.

It has been recognised now that fair skin and beautiful face is not the only criteria for selection of beauty. Merit, educational qualification, personality, personal behaviour and conduct of the applicant are also being considered for selecting the

"Miss World". The judges of the competition are now searching for the inner beauty along with the outward beauty. So, we could say that the definition of beauty is changing.

Hope many girls including Bangladeshis would get rid of their inferiority complex for having darker complexion. At the same time our fair complexion girls may take a note that it is not the colour of the skin but the virtues in her should be honoured.

MH Bari
Khulna

Toll collection

The contrast now, in regards to extortion and toll collection, from the period of the caretaker government is quite amazing.

Having enjoyed a semblance of law and order for a while makes us hungry for more. It also begs the question, what good is an elected government with 60 ministers? The only thing we can look forward to is the next caretaker government.

MAI, on e-mail

"Nirmul Committee"

This is in response to Mr. Kianto's letter on Nirmul Committee. Mr.

Kianto is asking why Nirmul Committee has offices internationally. Mr. Kianto should know that any organisation has the right to have international offices. May I ask, in this regard, why a political party such as Jamat-e-Islami exists in a Muslim dominated country?

Whether you like it or not everybody has a right to organise. Mr. Kianto should be aware of the alignment of present government towards Jamat-e-Islami and what Jamat stands for. This itself is the greatest reason for Nirmul Committee to have international offices.

Anup Deb
San Jose, USA

Hit list

This is a wise decision that government is going to take action against 120 corrupt officials by force retirement. The stern action must be taken even if it is 1200 or more. I observed that corruption and jonatar moncha officers are identical. During the previous regime, they created such a situation in the administration that patriotic and honest officers were suppressed to the extreme. The situation was so adverse that honesty and sincerity

became offences.

The Daily Star is one of the most prestigious newspapers. Therefore, you should support the action of the government measure, if necessary new law should be enacted to eradicate corrupt, and indiscipline. If corruption can be brought under control; extortion, intimidation of tenders, toll collection would reduce automatically.

MS Islam, on e-mail

Weird spellings

One is appalled by the strange spellings you use for words related to Muslim rituals. Words like namaz, Janaza, Zohr (actually the word is Dhuhr) are written by you as namaj, janaja, johr etc to name a few.

Yours being one of the leading English dailies should correct people's mistakes rather than encourage them to make more.

Mahboob ul Malik
Abu Dhabi

Bhutto's banalities

Benazir Bhutto's recent public statements in India and in a spate of media interviews--one of which you published in abridged form (November 30)-- are both infuriating and risible.

Most ordinary Pakistanis with healthy memories must surely find her renewed public bravado and sermonising entirely unsurprising, though equally unwelcome. It's truly banal and disingenuous of Ms. Bhutto to shamelessly insist that America's craven war on Afghanistan is-- as her American buddies falsely claim--a "war on terror". In India, her attempt at "stateswomanship", in ludicrously suggesting a de-linking of the Kashmir question from the Indo-Pak rapprochement process, was the height of political vacuity. I remember her confused, faltering policy on Kashmir, when she was the PM, in the past. Certainly, her Indian hosts must have fancied the notion that Benazir, and not Gen. Musharraf, had turned up at Agra last July.

Further, it's excessively rich of Ms. Bhutto to hypocritically extol the virtues of "democracy" in Pakistan. For all the faults and failures of an unacceptably "unelected", "undemocratic" Musharraf government, I reckon that, nothing today can remotely match the unforgivable ravages of the "two-time" Bhutto administrations in Pakistan. Ms. Bhutto's twin stints in power are regarded by most Pakistanis as being mostly about rampant institu-

tional venality, sleaze, overbearing arrogance, incompetence etc. She led Pakistan's economy, headlong to the ditch; routinely repressed political opponents; systematically weakened and subverted the 'democratic' ideals she now spends all year championing. Ms. Bhutto and the PPP must acknowledge that they have 'twice' badly betrayed the Pakistani electorate, and have perhaps, like another two-time debacle, a.k.a Nawaz Sharif, rendered themselves unselectable. Ms. Bhutto seems to fatuously hope that her American admirers and sponsors would be able to 'plant' her in office one more time, to do her ever-loyal bidding in these turbulent times. That notion may have as much success of materialising as the presently misguided and ultimately futile U.N. (read U.S.) experiment sought to be imposed on Afghanistan. Ms. Bhutto's egregious failures in governance in the past and her present antics may make her as electable in Pakistan as a Imelda Marcos is in the Philippines.

Sajjad Husain
Dhaka