

PDB debt cripples Petrobangla

Is this Govt versus Govt?

ENERGY in general and gas in particular is a political issue in Bangladesh, but latest reports suggest, management of the sector is in a critical shape deserving to be the real issue. Many outfits including the PDB owe huge sums of money to Petrobangla which supplies the gas on which the generating units are run. The matter is so serious that Petrobangla has threatened to cut off further supply which means electricity generation will stop. Clearly, everyone including the government itself expects a bailout in the end and therefore acts irresponsibly. This is a lot like our proverbial loan defaulters, taking advantage of the size of the debt itself, not to pay.

It's no secret that the Government, instead of paying itself expects the public to pay the bill for its wastage, systems loss and corruption. This is like systemic looting from the public pocket.

The problem is not about unpaid bills but bad management. If public utility outfits can't pay each other, one wonders why the government expects the private citizens of the commercial variety to pay their bills and taxes regularly. Increasingly, it looks like nobody is in charge and that inspires serious concern.

Whichever way the matter goes, Bangladesh will heighten its reputation as a country where things can rarely go right as a result of such inefficiencies.

Our Finance Minister constantly mentions of financial discipline and we believe that here is an opportunity to display what one preaches. He should ensure that all the government run units are functioning without elephantine debts to each other which ultimately threaten public interest. In this particular case the matter is critical. Shutting out lights could be equal to shutting out life.

Reform of Section 54 being discussed

Replace the colonial law with a national one

OF all the institutions that survive in this country, nothing is more blatantly colonial than Section 54. The British rulers created it to arrest anyone without specifying any charges and this tradition has stayed on as one of the more enduring aspects of our society. Its abusive nature has allowed many governments to arrest innocents at will. The Law Minister has told media that the Government is considering bringing reforms to the nature, mode and application of the same. That should be good news.

Although the Law Minister has developed a reputation of sorts of being very positive when legal reforms are shaped but in the end delivering less than what seemed initially possible, we are hopeful. The Law Ministry has already forwarded the matter to the Law Commission upon whose submission this will be taken up by the cabinet.

The Minister has however defended the Section 54 on the ground that this greatly helps the police in investigating crimes. One has little against such probes by the law enforcers but what concerns us are the abuses and the Minister needs to say a bit more about it.

Most activists and legal experts are aware that everyone, from alleged hardened adult criminals to street children to plain by-standers are victimized by this law and it's most used when the efficiency of the police is in doubt. While defending the police and their process of work, the Minister could well have remembered that the misuse of section 54 is one of the most extensive and the focus of his concern could well have been that. In other words, laws should exist to facilitate the legal life of the citizen without diminishing his rights. Laws aren't there to facilitate the shortening of the gaps in the existing capacity of the police to bring crime under check.

We are however happy that the government has decided to reform this law and hope that while this is in process the application of this law will be measured and restrained since it will not exist in the shape we have known it for so long.

MD ASADULLAH KHAN

EVEN here, in a nation where life so easily exterminable, there comes a feeling of revulsion about some murders. It was as much the method of the killing as it was the kid who was killed. To abduct a boy of 13 from the school, throttle him to death without any apparent vengeance, and then slash his body into pieces is barbaric. That the victim was an innocent boy immune from all worldly sins made it even more horrific. That morning of April 2, when the news was flashed in the dailies, a chill ran down the nation's spine.

The spurt of violence, killing and other dastardly crimes is more than alarming in our country. But ours is a resilient society. We have weathered many crises, bad times and grim disasters on one side and horrific killings, repression on women and children, sleazy politicians, insensitive law enforcement agency and bureaucrats on the other, but gassing of this sort of course terrifies us. It is as if the only incident that can tear the soul of the nation. No sooner had the killing squad's macabre mission been completed than the perpetrators, four of whom have been arrested till now, melted away into the tranquil urban shelters. But the grief, pain, shock generated and the outrage stoked by the senseless killing of young and innocent Shihab were far from ebbing even 53 days after the incident.

The nation went numb with horror and shock after hearing of the way Shihab was killed. That means our children either at home or school or on the street are not safe even if they had not committed any crime and were not involved in any wrongdoing. This killing that defies any comparison in men's vocabulary belongs to the world's inventory of black deeds. The police who showed total indifference and gross neglect at the initial stage, on the

very day Shihab went missing, has now swung into a flurry of actions after the highest calamity has struck.

Not even the harshest words could measure up to the indignation felt in the nook and corner of the country. It is, as if, we all have had a personal bereavement. People, at least in the last one decade have seen violence and killing with alarming frequency but this macabre killing of Shihab has made people numb with shock. One reporter is learnt to have echoed his distress: "I hope I never have to report such a tragic incident again." Precisely true, every Bangladeshi feels guilty of

on its psyche.

Beating, rape, murder and extortion -- all these violent crimes are these days associated with the most deprived individuals. No one, it seems, is shocked any longer to hear of atrocities committed by such young adolescent kids in their teens, who are mostly drug pushers or psychopaths. As for Shihab's killing, things would not have come to such a grisly end had the police on the basis of Shihab's father's complaint shown seriousness on the very day Shihab was abducted. The most glaring lapse on part of the Moltijheel police which took a general diary

desh. Dhaka, of course is the worst: more crimes are committed here than in other cities. Metropolitan policing is falling apart, ridden as it is by a colonial lopsided structure, lack of equipment, an over-worked, corrupt and stressed constabulary with rock bottom morale. Investigation suffers greatly because of a horrendously burdened police and plain ineptitude.

People wonder how could Shihab's abductors all in their teens commit such a nefarious crime? Sure enough, appetite for money and craving for wealth must have lured them to mimic a dreadful

jobs and are absorbed in their concerns. Sometimes the parents are strung out on alcohol or drugs or an overwhelming preoccupation in money-making business, at times unethical, immoral or illegal. The result is that children do not get the nurturing, guidance or supervision to instill a set of values and a proper code of conduct. Young boys who grow up in absence or with uninvolved parents suffer doubly in that they fail to develop a healthy masculinity. The behavioural aberration in case of Shihab's killers has been compounded by the outright abuse at home. Raju, an accomplice was a

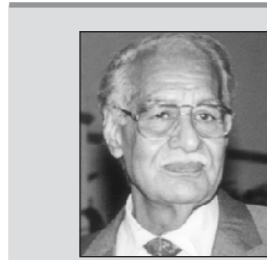
tainment media, especially TV and cinema play a powerful role in the formation of values. To day's children unlike those of earlier generations, are fed a steady diet of glorified violence.

In some cases, poverty can also help spur violent crime. Children belonging to jobless and poorer families have little sense of hope or opportunity and feel they have little stake in preserving society. Boys often have trouble forging a masculine identity without one of the primary accompaniments -- a job. As such violence is the weapon of the powerless. But a life of privilege can also be corrupting. Children who have everything given to them may come to believe that they are entitled to anything, that they are above their fellow human beings and above the law. And yet their busy, over-achieving parents may not be giving pampered teens what they need most: attention and supervision. And neglect is abuse.

Topping it all, the law enforcement agency has much to share the blame in the spiralling rise of crime-situation in the country. Restructuring and other police reforms recommended from time to time have been blatantly ignored. The lackadaisical approach to policing in the country has led to a severe loss of faith in the uniformed brigade. The administration as well as civic organisations in the country must note that 13-year-old Shihab's killing will remain a collective blot on the conscience of the society, it has made a country look ugly. But more dangerous, the failure of the police to secure convictions through impeccable investigation and prosecution is undermining the very concept of justice.

MD Asadullah Khan is Controller of Examinations, BUET.

BJP's castles in the air



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

IN the history of a political party, there comes a moment which it believes is momentous. More often it is not. The action it takes under the misconception has often resulted in the withering of the party. I am afraid the BJP is misreading the present situation in the country. This also happened when the Bharatiya Jana Sangh walked out of the Janata Party in 1979.

As the Jana Sangh, which merged with the Janata in the wake of the emergency in 1977, it never reached the two-digit figure in the Lok Sabha. When it was in the Janata, it won 80 seats. The success was because of the Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) movement and Mrs Indira Gandhi's excesses. Even when the BJP left the Janata, its aura of credibility, which JP had bestowed on them by making them a part of the secular combination, lingered for a time. That helped the BJP confuse the Hindus. The liberals had shunned it and its fountainhead, the RSS, after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. The disgust and suspicion against it lasted for almost four decades.

The Hindu card that the BJP played in 1990 paid dividends,

primarily because of VP Singh's acceptance of the Mandal Commission's recommendations, which made the upper strata of Hindus feel insecure. Some Hindu at that time accepted the BJP because reservations for the backward classes, in addition to those for the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes hit the middle class most.

Atal Behari Vajpayee also said at that time that had there been no Mandal, there would not have been kamandal (water vessel for sadhus).

abruptly. The party was defeated in state elections in UP, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh and just managed to scrape through in Rajasthan.

The BJP also saw that no political party was willing to join hands with it until it kept apart its 'Hindu' agenda: the construction of a temple on the Babri Masjid site and the abolition of Article 370 which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir. So the party put these two issues on the back burner and formed the govern-

ment at the centre. But after having stayed in power at the centre for nearly four years, it has begun feeling as if it is the BJP's pro-Hindutva policy which has brought it dividends.

In reality, it was the fear of the Congress coming to power at the centre that made some of the once-upon-a-time secular parties to join hands with the BJP. Because they felt that a Congress government at the centre would make the party stronger in the states and capture power. The

Telugu Desam from Andhra Pradesh also put its weight behind the BJP for the same reason. The predicament of the Telugu Desam is that it cannot afford to break away

from the BJP-led combination at the centre because then the Congress will stage a comeback in the state.

I do not know how the BJP can construe the Telugu Desam's negative support as something in its favour or, for that matter, in favour of Hindutva. The reason why the Telugu Desam has decided not to accept the Speakership, which has been lying vacant after the death of Balayogi, is this: It

has already registered its protest over the Gujarat happenings under

India's.

I am surprised over the absence of action against religious terrorism. Members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal are no different from the Taliban. The world woke up to their obscurantism and violence after their attacks in the US. India is waking up to their barbarism after their massacre in Gujarat. The Taliban disfigured Islam, the RSS parivar Hinduism.

Gujarat may well be a laboratory for the parivar. It is also a laboratory for others. They can draw the lesson that by effecting killings in the minority community the BJP will only lessen its strength or sway. Fanatics who control the RSS should realise that democracy does not go well with theocracy.

India needs economic development that could give two meals to lakhs of people who go hungry every night. As Maulana Abul Kalam Azad said long before independence, "the most vital and urgent of India's problems is how to remove the curse of poverty and raise the standards of the masses. It is to the well being and progress of these masses that the national struggle has directed its special attention and its constructive activities. And it will be judged by the well being and advancement that people make. Anything that comes in the way of the good of the masses of our country must be removed."

The Hindutva representatives -- the VHP and the Bajrang Dal -- are destroying the lofty aims of the independent struggle. Not only that. They are also demoralising the country's ethos of pluralism.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Gujarat has aroused all forces which want the country to stay pluralistic and democratic. They are marshalling themselves in different ways. On April 17, Delhi will see thousands of people in the streets of the Capital, demonstrating against those forces which are trying to kill the open and tolerant society that India is... Fanatics who control the RSS should realise that democracy does not go well with theocracy.

What he meant was that if the Janata government led by VP Singh had not tried to implement the Mandal Commission report, there would have been no Ram mandir movement. The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute was a shot in the arm of the BJP. LK Advani really believed that the entire northern India lay at his feet. His rath yatra created a wedge between Hindus and Muslims. Never had communal riots taken place on such a wide scale since partition as they did during Advani's yatra. Where he went wrong was that he mistook the simulated Hindu feelings as the real ones. The BJP came to grief when after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, its graph of support dipped

ment at the centre. But after having stayed in power at the centre for nearly four years, it has begun feeling as if it is the BJP's pro-Hindutva policy which has brought it dividends.

In reality, it was the fear of the Congress coming to power at the centre that made some of the once-upon-a-time secular parties to join hands with the BJP. Because they felt that a Congress government at the centre would make the party stronger in the states and capture power. The

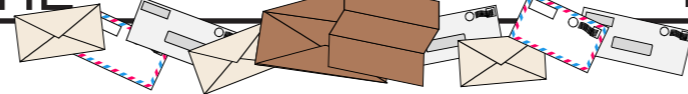
Telugu Desam from Andhra Pradesh also put its weight behind the BJP for the same reason. The predicament of the Telugu Desam is that it cannot afford to break away

from the BJP-led combination at the centre. It is difficult for the party to accept Speakership after that. The polarisation of Indian society after Gujarat is a figment of the BJP's imagination. Even though Gujarat has been polarised by the BJP in the state, Narendra Modi will not be returned if there is an election. People are too conscious of the economic problems. In the 546-member Lok Sabha, Gujarat has only a handful of seats. Even if all of them go to the BJP, it does not help the party. The killings and the atrocities in Gujarat have spread such a wave of revulsion and disgust in the country that the party would face a straight defeat. See what the intelligentsia did in the Delhi election after

safe place to hold a peace meeting and where peace-makers face the threat of death. Famous danseuse Mallika Sarabhai has taken refuge in another house since last week after her house was stoned because she was doing some relief work in Muslim refugee camps.

The BJP will rue the day when it put Narendra Modi, an RSS pracharak as the state chief minister. Gujarat has aroused all forces which want the country to stay pluralistic and democratic. They are marshalling themselves in different ways. On April 17, Delhi will see thousands of people in the streets of the Capital, demonstrating against those faces which are trying to kill the open and tolerant society that

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



"Where are our leaders leading us to?"

Your commentary "Where are our leaders leading us to?" makes interesting reading.

But reference to Mohathir Mohammed and Lee Kuan Yew's version of democracy is objectionable and unacceptable. Perhaps as the leading Editor of the most popular English daily your comment in this respect can never be shared by people who know about the miracle of social and economic changes the subject two great leaders brought about for their people.

The people of Bangladesh would certainly be lucky if they had leaders of their kind and the type of Democracy they established in their respective countries.

Sorry we strongly disagree with your particular view.

Z Rahman
KR Zaman
Dilkusha Commercial Area, Dhaka

Your comments on April 7th issue was interesting. You have tried very hard to balance between two political parties in their various failures. While their failures are huge, their inefficiencies or let's assume their destructive policies kept us where we are now. As you have mentioned we could have been in much better position had their policies and actions were right and their legacy of governance if not good but reason-

able. While I would like to consider it as a courageous analysis at the same time I would say it is not well enough to propagate the real causes.

These days the motive of labelling this country as Taliban or having a link with the Taliban is on increase at home and even abroad. The minority issue is still lingering even after the incidents have ceased. If you like to mention about repression it is equally on the Muslims as well. It is not only FEER who published a concocted report, our politician also shouted the same in New York and London only a few weeks ago.

A moulana might express his own view on Jihad, thousands of madrasa students, majority of whom cannot afford school education, naturally would vow for Islamic causes. One cannot associate the whole culture or government with this. If you cannot tolerate multiple belief and practices then what does democracy mean.

Even what our politicians have done in last 31 years never been interpreted in its real perspective. If the politicians played dubious roles to halt the potential progress of this nation what role did the media play? Their sub-standard role coupled with un-professionalism and corrupt reporting has made the nation suffer equally. The recent World Bank reports is the testimony of this. This report also did not get much space in your daily.

I personally have a strong belief that should the media perform in a befitting manner, the whole political and governance scenario would dramatically change.

Like politics, media is also divided into two, as a third power it has miserably failed to emerge with its expected or full potential.

MM Haque
Jeddah, K.S.A

I would like to add to the Editors clarification of the term Terrorist.

According to Title 22 of the United States Code, terrorism has the following definitions:

! The term "terrorism" means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatants targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents usually intended to influence an audience.

! The term "international terrorism" means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country.

! The term "terrorist group" means any group practising, or that has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism.

Albeit we probably do not qualify for the second and third statutes, but we certainly qualify for the first.

In Bangladesh, we have state-sponsored terrorism practised by all the parties on civilians to intimidate voters and finance their political thugs. We have not yet reached the extent of Zimbabwe or Haiti, but please, name another country where students have to form an association to push for the expulsion of politically connected rapists from a university?

Certainly it does not fit into the post Sept. 11th definition of Islamic Terrorism, but nonetheless terrorism it is. Our RMG and other export industries are in terminal decline, not only due to the perception of Bangladesh as a terrorist country, but due to the politically protected terrorists who can hold the commerce of our nation hostage at their whim. The ones who should be charged with sedition are the heads of BNP and AL.

MA Dhaka

To FEER

We, Bangladeshis residing in Hong Kong would like to express our discontent and protest against the FEER cover story of April 4th. We categorically denounce the context of the story, which is totally unsubstantiated. It is emphasised on the nonfactual assumptions, which virtually have no relationship to Bangladesh or its people.

It is hard to believe that a magazine like FEER allowed to publish such a raw and generic news which does not reflect the country's actual

situation, and moreover it denounces the wills over 130 million people. We found the basic spectrum of the article is extremely unacceptable with high objection on the contents. Analysing the article, it seems that the article is not in line with your corporate strategy, it is rather politically charged with ill-motivated thoughts.

This news implicates us in a questionable situation about the magazine's overall integrity, and it also puts question mark over the independence or neutrality of freedom of expression. The argument placed to substantiate the writer's claims was unfounded and impractical, irrational observation and illogical conclusion with perceived, unproven and unsubstantiated notions.

The country is currently undergoing democratic transformation process despite many odds internally, this article will undermine the whole process and definitely weaken the moral of nascent democratically-charged citizen and danger to whole functionality of the country.

We point out some positive attributes of Bangladesh and particular point from Lintner's article. Bangladesh is categorically classified as moderate Muslim country which is well recognised and widely accepted in International Arena. In the ongoing global hunt for terrorism, there is no particular evidence

that Bangladeshis have been involved and supportive or sympathiser directly to terrorist activities.

In reference to Moulana Obaidul Hoq's remarks at the Eid congregation to substantiate his thesis was an exaggeration. This isolated issue was, however, never been promoted by the State Authority, neither supported nor adopted by the government or public. This isolated issue does not have functional relationship to export terrorism.

Bangladesh has negative attributes like any country in the world, however, there is no concrete evidence that it is becoming a fundamentalist country or fostering terrorism to export.

Jamshed Hafiz
Representative
On behalf of Bangladesh Community in Hong Kong

Customs and RMG industry

The Bangladesh RMG industry has a world-wide reputation for making the cheapest garments possible and usually of the cheapest materials available. One of the ways of becoming competitive is to move up in the value chain and start exporting higher value garments. At least that's what a Dorji like me would imagine.

Well I was wrong. If you happen to be lucky enough to get high priced orders with expensive fabrics like

velvet or micro fibre some anonymous customs official can hoist the Bangladeshis bureaucratic baggage on you at his whim. He can pronounce that an official must be at your factory during the cutting of the fabrics. Keep in mind that you may be cutting these fabrics everyday for two months and this official would have to be practically carried in a *palki* to come to your factory! Well naturally faced with such absurd conditions there is only one viable option.

Dorji Dhaka

Wetlands

And what was the comment from the MD of BRAC when asked why his organisation was participating in the destruction of ecologically important wetlands?

With the kind of money BRAC has, they should purchase the entire *Jheel* and preserve it, rather than scramble to build multi-storied apartments.

Tintin Dhaka

Our judiciary

The headline "Cabinet body finalizes a draft on appointment of judiciary officials" (April 8) on "Judicial Service Commission Regulation, 2002" has drawn my attention. The Judicial Service Committee is a seven-member body chaired by one

of the judges of the Supreme Court Appellate Division. The members would include a Justice from the High Court Division, Law Secretary, a member from the judicial service cadre, a member from the Public Service Commission, and the Dean of the Law Faculty of Dhaka University. The specification of the Dean of Law Faculty of Dhaka University signifies that there is only one University Law Faculty in Bangladesh named as the Dean of Law Faculty of Dhaka University. But there are four Law Faculties in the Universities in Bangladesh including the leading Rajshahi University Law Faculty.

Certainly, the Judicial Service Commission is a national body and as such, it should represent the whole nation. If provision like "one Dean of the Faculty of Law of the Universities" is introduced, I think it would be more rational. This may also be considered as effective by principle of rotation/ seniority basis or by choice of the Government. With submission, I again draw your kind attention for consideration of my humble suggestion.

Dr. M. Habibur Rahman
Dean, Faculty of Law
University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi