

## Netting the criminals

*BDR deployment is okay for the short term, but the real answer lies in police reforms*

THE government is finally waking up to its responsibility and becoming aware of the enormity of the problem of rising crime at hand. It wasted valuable time by blaming the opposition and trying to find a conspiracy behind it. When such claims are made without any proof, we are forced to reject them as mere excuses for failure.

We are heartened by the decisions taken at a meeting on Monday of the National Committee for Fighting Crimes which provides for joint operation of BDR (a para- military force), police and Ansars (armed militia) to fight the rising wave of crime. We support the government's move as a part of emergency measures but not as a long-term solution. We must point out that when multiple forces are put together to work for a particular campaign problems of command and control arise. Who is in charge, who commands, how orders percolate down from top to bottom, who will take responsibility for failures, all these questions will have to be clearly addressed if we want this joint operation to succeed. We hope that it has been, or is being done.

The most important thing to remember is that such moves by definition must be shortlived for them to be effective. The real and long term answer lies in police reforms and its modernisation. We have written several times before that we need to take a serious look into our police force and make a realistic assessment of its capacity to perform the task that has been given to it. Police's low public image severely affects its morale and its highly inadequate budget makes it incapable of delivering the needed service. Its very low pay structure is another serious problem crying out for redress.

We suggest that the government must make both a long term and a short term plan to fight crime. However to make both these steps effective what is absolutely crucial is political will to round up the real culprits. We have seen in the cases of both the AL and the BNP that when they come to power they shelter well-known criminals and let them remain outside the purview of police. This party patronisation of the criminals must be genuinely stopped, not by statements but by action. BNP can be credited with having started on that course early on but stopped after 'godfathers' of the criminals were able to scuttle it.

It is our hope BNP realises that the single-most important reason for their failure to net the criminals is that its own powerful members have protected them. Acting on this realisation holds the key to the success of its present drive against crime.

## Floating death-traps

*Make a scientific appraisal, set things right*

THE time has come to decide whether we should tolerate these floating death traps in the name of riverine transports. The launches, whether small or big are now part of one of the largest sectors in the Bangladesh transport world. And if official and other versions are to be taken seriously, there is very little safety control and planning involved. The only reason concern has surfaced now is because the recent Meghna ferry disaster was one of the largest maritime disasters anywhere and couldn't be explained away as a routine sinking and killing by drowning. It was indeed the worst maritime disaster in Bangladesh's history and shows how bad the scene has become in general.

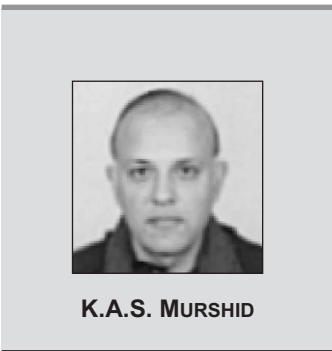
Media reports that most of the 2100 passenger launches that are running commercially are unfit for carrying passengers and only 800 even went for fitness certificates. Thus, many of the launches have managed to go on transporting without having to be fit. In situations of danger this means willfully courting deaths of passengers.

What has to be recognised is that the problem is rooted not just in the immediate safety capacity of the vessels but in the construction of the vessels themselves. These are built according to antiquated and discarded designs which have managed to survive because there is no one to ensure that safe designs are developed and used in building vessels. Obviously, such lapses are part of the system which regulates riverine and other forms of transport.

Various quarters are suggesting that numerous life threatening defects have emerged in this sector due to neglect and lack of supervision. Thus, it's important that not just the immediate safety factor but the sector should be overhauled to work off what has become dangerous and free flowing mismanagement. Unfortunately, safety is often considered an add-on issue in the industry and not a critical part of the same.

However, things have become so serious especially after this incident, and the iron has to be struck when it is hot. What we can do is to look at developing both safety as well as management guidelines. People from all the relevant sectors, like marine engineers and experts from BUET, should be brought in on a body to make a scientific assessment of the navigability of all river-crafts and recommend remedial actions. Basically, it should set in motion a no-nonsense standardisation drive to ensure that only river-worthy vessels are in business.

# What do they want?



K.A.S. MURSHID

KARACHI is a troubled city and used to all kinds of strife and violence: sectarian, ethnic, factional and political. Yet what happened here recently has managed to faze even the battle-hardened inhabitants of this once-proud place. Indeed the shock waves emanating from the suicide bombing that killed eleven Frenchmen and two Pakistanis continue to alarm and horrify. It was in these columns that I recently wrote that South Asians have a special gift -- we are able to sink further deeper into the mire even after the bottom has been reached. If any proof of this was needed here it is once more, for all to see! This bombing episode is a 'first' in Pakistan -- i.e. this is the first ever suicide bombing. The question now is 'why the French?' Indeed this choice of target suggests either a serious blunder or a perpetrator other than the Al Qaeda. What did it achieve? Well whatever faint hopes there were of

stimulating foreign investment to the country, it has now all but disappeared. The demons unleashed on September 11 will continue to wreak its fearful revenge for a long time to come. One thing is fairly certain however: this mystery will also remain unsolved, just as the perpetrators of numerous murders and target killings all over Pakistan have remained largely undetected. Sounds familiar doesn't it? Remember Udichi Mancha in Jessore?

nary, garden-variety law and order problem which any government worthy of the name should be able to contain. This is essentially reflected in what we refer to as *mastani*. I don't worry about it too much although I understand the real potential for damage here is in terms of changing norms of behaviour in our society, to the point where we now accept the unimaginable and the unthinkable with total equanimity. The day may soon come when

to convince myself that it is not too late and that the days of the *mastanraja* are numbered -- although I must admit I have no solid basis for such wishful thinking. I am more worried about the second type of evil, the evil perpetrated by Good Men. And we all know who they are, don't we?

Who are they? In Pakistan (and to a certain extent in Bangladesh), a massive outbreak of apparent religiosity appears to have

classes in his regular school. I was shocked.

Closer to home, my son came up to me one day and accused me of being 'strange'. Apparently all the (male) children in the neighbourhood regularly went to Friday prayers with their fathers. My son was under a bit of peer pressure to conform. The following Friday I obliged my neighbours' children and took my son to the nearby mosque. The place was packed like a can of

without batting an eye. Perhaps many are equally comfortable in both worlds. Who are they you asked? Look within, as the sage would say.

Actually, I started out by wondering what it is that good and violent people want. From Udichi Mancha to Gujarat, from Karachi to Batamul, there seems to be a certain refrain that is shared -- of a certain type of zealotness, bigotry and intolerance. No this trend is not limited to South Asia. It is a worldwide trend where everything is now seen in black and white, where the world has become neatly divided into those 'with us' and those 'against us' -- thank you Mr. Bush. The symptoms have been there for sometime now, in France, Germany, the U.K. and of course the U.S. -- countries that are desperately trying to retain a foothold over the 'high moral ground' even as the earth slips under their feet. The support given to Sharon by the forces of good is indefensible and unjust. The impending strike against Iraq and Iran will irrevocably convince the Islamic and the developing world that if you don't play ball you will be squashed. And if that is indeed your fate why not go out in blazing glory all the way to *Jannat*? The forces of darkness have cast their long and heavy shadow. What has happened in Karachi is just a small reminder of what lies in store for the future. Perhaps Mr. Home Minister you should reopen the Batamul case?

Dr K A S Murshid is an economist and Research Director, BIDS.

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Remember the bomb blasts in the Ramna Batamul? Or the ill-fated Commissioner who was successfully decommissioned by one of his con buddies? No those murders and bombings will not be solved either. I suspect that investigations into the bomb attack e.g. in Ramna, have been discontinued. If indeed this is the case, one should ask why.

There are two types of evil that currently afflict us: the evil of evil men and the evil of good men. The first type of evil leads to your ordi-

the word itself becomes devoid of any derogatory connotation so that you would be quite proud to introduce your son-in law as, 'meet my son in law -- he is a *mastani*!' Or your son may say, 'Baba, I want to become a *mastan* when I grow up.' Just ask yourself how much evil we now accept without question, indeed sometimes with pride: Here is my great cousin the meter-reader! He has twelve houses in Gulshan', or 'Jodumodu (remember him?) has invited us to dinner!' I am trying

occurred. Take the case of Mr. Nasim (not his real name), a management consultant working for a well-known multi-national company. He looked 'modern', spoke good English and appeared to have all the trappings of a secular mind. He has taken his eldest son out of school and sent him to a Madrasah to become a Quran e Hafez. 'Does he study any other subject?' I asked. No, he did not. His main goal is to memorize the Quran in the next two years after which he will rejoin his

sardines and it was with great difficulty that father and son managed to participate in the ritual. I had no idea that Friday prayers had become so popular.

So here we are faced with a massive outbreak of good counterpoised against an equally massive outbreak of evil. Thus, people are more religious minded today, more prone to say their prayers, fast for thirty days and go to *haj* than ever before. Similarly, people are just as prone to steal, plunder and pillage

# After the neofascist cataclysm -- lessons from France

PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

DEMOCRATS everywhere must heave a sigh of relief, but no more, at the outcome of the French presidential election in which the conservative Jacques Chirac trounced the extreme-Right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The choice before the electorate, as the conservative *Economist* magazine put it, was between "a washed-up... opportunist regularly lampooned on television as 'Superliar', or ... a thug whose message is one of hate."

The voter's rejection of a distasteful option must be welcomed--but with grave reservations.

Mr Le Pen's performance in the April 21 first round was stunning. He overtook Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. This was a cataclysm in French politics--and a shame on democracy.

However, the extreme-Right's xenophobic, racist fringes are not about to seize power in Western Europe. The French contest, along with other recent developments in Europe, highlights something else: a crisis of many "mainstream" ideologies and parties, in particular the "New Labour"-style Social Democrats.

Mr Le Pen came first in as many as 35 out of France's 100 departments or districts. He scored especially well in high-immigrant areas. Sadly, he got twice as many working class votes as Mr Jospin.

But Mr Le Pen's tally of 4.8 million votes was only marginally

higher than in the 1995 presidential election.

Mr Le Pen's success can be attributed less to his appeal than to the mainstream candidates' failure, and above all, to *the Left's fragmentation*. Put simply, "the Left defeated the Left".

Twenty-seven percent of the Left's supporters voted for parties more radical than Mr Jospin's.

the poorest, and reduction in working hours from 40 to 35 per week.

Further complicating matters was Mr Le Pen's energetic campaign about "insecurity", meaning high rates of crime, largely blamed upon France's four million Arab immigrants. Mr Le Pen's rivals accommodated to some of his prescriptions: e.g. a clampdown upon crime, violating fundamental

They must now recognise that neoliberal economics has failed. They must move towards a "Fourth Way", a more anti-capitalist agenda, which alone can secure economic and social rights for the masses. Unless this "Fourth Way" gathers momentum, the Far Right's challenge will remain too stiff for the lily-livered to repulse... France has clarified the choice. Europe's real options are: socialism, rooted in democracy and popular empowerment, or, descent into racist violence, ethnic nationalism, and chaos.

These notably included the Trotskyists.

The broad Left coalition which supported Mr Jospin in 1995 had 44 percent of the vote. Mr Jospin was looking for an additional six percent. But his support had eroded.

Mr Jospin's technocratic style of functioning disappointed many, especially recently, when he failed to prevent the closure of factories owned by multinational corporations.

Mr Jospin couldn't decide whether he was running as a Socialist, a Social Democrat, or as a centre-Leftist. This indecisiveness undermined his significant achievements as Prime Minister: reduction in unemployment by almost one million, extension of healthcare to

rights.

Therefore, Mr Le Pen charged that Mr Chirac "copied my programme". Many voters preferred "the original to the photocopy!"

In the second (May 5) round, most of the Left backed Mr Chirac--to keep Mr Le Pen out. Many voted for him with the utmost reluctance.

Mr Chirac is mired in controversies over personal corruption and shady political deals. He is widely despised. He lacks decent ideological moorings or political vision. Even *The Economist* says, he "does not deserve to stay on".

If the coming (June 9-16) parliamentary elections produce a centre-Left victory, France will have yet another phase of "cohabitation".

This shift is paralleled by similar, if less alarming, developments in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Norway and Denmark. These all have Right-wing parties in government.

Since 2000, even the neofascist Far Right has grown: like Austria's misnamed "Freedom Party", Belgium's Vlaams Blok, Italy's Northern League, and the British National Party.

Some, like Mr Pim Fortuyn's List in the Netherlands, have created enormous strife over immigration--leading to violent reprisal, as in Mr Fortuyn's condemnable assassination.

Western Europe's Rightward shift can be explained by three factors. First, the end of the Cold

A second factor is the bankruptcy of the neoliberal market-fundamentalist economic model. This has neither produced equity, nor even growth.

Politically, neoliberalism led to the abandonment of European reunification. This has produced a catastrophe in Central and Eastern Europe: bloody wars in the Balkans, economic and social collapse in Russia, and crime, unemployment and destitution elsewhere.

These in turn fuel irrational fears about "Eastern" immigrants "snatching away" Western European jobs.

The third factor is the climate created by the US's overplaying of the "anti-terrorism" card post-September 11. This provoked

# Bertil Lintner and all that

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

If anything Bertil Lintner's article (Far Eastern Economic Review of April 04, 2002) has caused intense debate in Bangladesh. So much so that one wonders whether criticism or otherwise of Lintner's article has not become a barometer of patriotism (notwithstanding Samuel Johnson's oft quoted saying that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel). In most developed countries patriotism of a citizen is rarely questioned. It is taken for granted. In developing societies due to fragile conviction and confidence both in ourselves and our surroundings citizens sometimes have to prove their degree of "patriotism" in proportion to their intolerance of Lintner's elk. Thomas Jefferson in

his first inaugural address told the American people that banishing religious intolerance would be in vain" if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of bitter and bloody persecution."

Lintner in the eyes of his detractors is "guilty" of writing that Islamic fundamentalism is on the rise; that government seems powerless and unwilling to stem the tide; that a political party which actively opposed our independence from Pakistan now has a voice in the government for the first time; that this political party clearly opposes the US led war on terrorism; that 64000 religious schools regularly churn out thousands of students every year who are poorly equipped to enter the mainstream of life and profession and could become easy targets for exponents of Islamic Revolution. Lintner also emphasized that law and order situation unless tackled properly could contribute to economic collapse and political crisis which in turn could galvanize religious extremists into embarking upon an Islamic Revolution. This grotesque picture painted by Lintner, some would argue, is far from the truth and was engineered by "foes" of Bangladesh both at home and abroad.

We, in Bangladesh would like to believe that ours is a moderate Muslim country practicing democracy, however imperfectly. Our image of moderation has been furthered by the fact that recent carnage in Gujarat did not result in a

corresponding situation in Bangladesh. Whether it was due to preventive measures taken by the government or because the people have truly become moderate or both it is difficult to say. Whatever may be the reasons Bangladesh refused to be provoked by the continuing tragedy unfolding in Gujarat. We should however not forget that immediately after the October general elections our media reported on many incidents of barbaric persecution of members of religious minorities. The Daily Star itself published a series of investigative reports on these horrific incidents. Public at large, however, remains to be fully informed yet if the guilty parties have been brought to book and if so, what punishments have been

meted out to them. In today's increasingly integrated world refusal to submit to international scrutiny can only be self-defeating and ultimately suicidal. Classical definition of sovereignty has changed over the years. Kosovo has taught us the lesson that Milosevics of the world cannot wage war against their own people and get away scot free. Carnage of 11<sup>th</sup> September in New York and consequent moral and legal authority given to an international coalition of parties to bomb Afghanistan to stone age has given new meaning to traditional concept on territorial inviolability. In recent days one has seen the release from detention (albeit not for the first time) of Aung San Suu Kyi. The point to be made

here is that the days of injured innocence are gone. In today's unipolar world many things are happenings which before the fall of the Berlin Wall would have been unthinkable. Therefore despite presumed indiscretions of Bertil Lintner and the Danish diplomat we cannot escape nor should we try to escape introspection. We have to prove to us and to the world at large that thousands of religious schools are not producing potential Frankensteins and that Mendelson, George Fernandez and Lal Bahadur Shastri can also exist in Bangladesh to set examples when accused of alleged wrong doings.

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## OPINION

# Deteriorating law and order : Can't it be improved?

MOHAMMAD ISMAIL

FACTORS responsible for worsening law and order situation in Bangladesh are many. The most important and dominant one at present is, perhaps, the rising terrorism. Terrorism-related media reports have been a common phenomenon for quite sometime. The terrorist activities are now spreading fast all over the country. All the past governments repeatedly expressed their concerns over terrorism. They expressed their strong determination for curbing down terrorism, too. The present government is not an exception to this. But the scourge is yet to be curbed.

We would perhaps be unkind to the governments if we always cast doubt about their sincerity in this respect. It would rather be nice of us if we tend to believe that for some genuine reasons they could not succeed in their attempts. In that event one may ask: what are the factors that have refrained them from achieving the desired suc-

cesses? To get the answer, the factors responsible for growth of terrorism and other related issues need to be properly analyzed.

Non-democratic political societies with poor economies are breeding centers for growth of terrorism. Non-observance of democratic norms by the political parties makes their leaders dependent on henchmen for supporting their interests within and outside the party leadership. The responsibilities of the henchmen are to protect the interest of the mentors mainly through suppressing their opponents. Usually these henchmen are politically motivated emotional youngsters. In exchange of their supports, they ask for some benefits. With mentors in power, they become more demanding and try to extract more benefits for them. In the process, they begin to grow unruly too. The mentors, however, can neither meet up all of their demands nor can they distant them considering their services and necessity.

In such situations, they start influencing authorities so that some undue benefits accrued to them.

Very often they succeed too. Then comes the issue of accruing financial benefits capitalizing on their relationship with the political bosses and their own muscle-power. During this process, opposing groups often come face to face and get inevitably involved in serious tussles. To strengthen themselves, these groups often recruit some professional criminals at this stage. More or less this is how terrorism originates and spreads. The areas of operation of these groups expand gradually. The one-time henchmen of the political leaders in this way become full-fledged terrorists. Many other non-political criminals join them subsequently to serve their own purposes making the terrorist groups bigger and more violent.

Can such terrorism be curbed down only by the law enforcing agencies? As has been seen from the above that terrorism develops primarily due to political cynicism while ordinary crimes develop due to economic crisis and other social imbalances. Under certain circumstances, the terrors care the members of law enforcing agencies a

hoot while the ordinary criminals are usually afraid of them. Whenever terrorists are about to be hit by the members of law enforcing agencies, they take shelter of their political mentors. The latter cannot but protect their henchmen-terrorists. Willingly or unwillingly, they are to ask the law enforcing agency members to go slow. Most of agency members for obvious reasons find it inconvenient to go against the wishes of such bosses. And for that reason the terrorists very often remain untouched.

The law-enforcing agencies can control ordinary crimes, if they so wish, but they cannot effectively control terrorism unless they get the political support. They can play supplementary role here. The political support invariably means support from the politicians in general, not politicians of the ruling party alone. The whole issue hinges on this. Interestingly, the ruling parties in Bangladesh have always been found to seek support of the opposition political parties for curbing terrorism down but ironically they do not seemingly want terror-

ists backed by them to be controlled. They have rather been found to be interested in seeing the opposition-backed terrorists silenced leaving theirs untouched.

The law enforcing agencies find it highly difficult to treat the terrorists in two different ways not on moral ground but of fear that opposition parties might take the matter seriously in the event of their coming to power. This is why the attempts of successive governments for curbing down terrorism never succeeded.

Then is it not possible for the governments to curb down terrorism at all? Perhaps, yes. But under democratic system, 'yes' only if the ruling party determinedly wants it. Unless it is so, every exercise will be merely eyewash. In fact, it has repeatedly been happening in Bangladesh for quite a long time. For curbing down terrorism, the ruling party shall have to start initiating action simultaneously against terrorists supported both by it and the opposition parties as well. But the crude reality is that a party with no democratic practice within itself

cannot exist without its terrorist-supporters. Even smaller parties with democratic practices, if exist at all, need to have some terrorist-supporters to protect themselves from the terrorists of the major ones run by non-democratic practices.

By this time, the readers may have understood where lies the fault and where the shoe pinches. The present day terrorism of Bangladesh, like that in many other developing countries, originated primarily from the absence of democratic practices amongst the major political parties. Electing party leaders, taking party decisions and executing them through democratic processes would certainly reduce party leaders' dependency on the henchmen-terrorists. This would allow the leaders to work freely resulting in the fact that they would not be under obligation to support the illegal and immoral activities carried out by the terrorist-supporters. Thus terrorist activities would ultimately decline.

Perhaps, any citizen with ordinary prudence would not doubt that the politicians do not understand this. If so, then why do they not do

that? Here there are some problems for the politicians. The major ones are difficulties in introducing democratic norms in the party activities and the lack of confidence of the political parties on each other. Is there any guarantee that the opposition parties would follow the ruling party if it starts disbanding its terrorist-groups? Should or can the ruling party trust that the opposition parties would not use their terrorist-supporters in winning elections if its terrorist-groups are disbanded? To get rid of this situation, the parties need to start practicing democracies amongst themselves and initiate dialogues amongst the political parties with a view to creating congenial political environment for a terrorism free society.

It is now the political parties who are to decide whether they like to behave properly or not; whether they like to curb down terrorism or not. Without introducing democratic practices within party, the situation will not improve. Neutral and efficient law enforcing agencies can only improve the situation a little bit. However, passing of a bill for regu-

lating party activities, inter-party relationship etc. may help in introducing democratic practices in political parties, which will have strong and positive effect on curbing down terrorism.

It is now high time for the politicians to democratise their party activities. This is not all that shall have to be done for curbing down terrorism but this is the first and foremost one. If done, terrorism is then bound to be curbed down to a major extent. Other steps would be supplemental. If, however, it is not done, then terrorism would be intensified further. Street killings, rape, hijacking would be order of the day. Democratic-minded people of the country certainly do not like it. At the same time, they cannot afford the luxury of suffering so much for the benefit of the so-called leaders who apparently do not appear to care for them at all. May the common people of the country hope that all concerned would come to sense and behave properly!