

Scared ward commissioners seek police protection

Situation moves from absurd to the comical

THINGS concerning law and order aren't just getting desperate but almost absurd to the point of being comical. Since the last city corporation election, two ward commissioners of the city have been gunned down. It's well known that both had criminal connections but their link to high crime was not a deterrent factor in getting nominations in the last city hall polls. However, many had warned that by mixing professional politicians with professional criminals, the government was risking an even more unmanageable law and order crisis. The Cassandras have once again been proved right.

But what makes the entire scene weird, if that word describes the scenario, is the panic setting in amongst the newly elected neighbourhood managers. Media reports say that many ward commissioners are now seeking armed protection from terrorists. Considering that the law and order scene has been the top issue in the last election, the fear of the ward commissioners from fellow rivals, criminals or political, is top order black humour. Since many of them are criminals themselves or close to them, this is even worse. And since the party in power knowingly nominated hardened criminals who now think that they need protection from fellow criminals, where are the ordinary citizens of Dhaka going to seek protection from the entire lot?

The police have of course been blamed but then that is the oldest story in the hat. What however is not is the recommendation made by the Dhaka City and District Law and Order Committee to set up vigilance teams to supervise the work of the police. Since the committee is headed by top notch BNP leader Barrister Nazmul Huda, we are witnessing a formal and an official expression of concern regarding the law keepers. The death of a number of people under police custody has added to the anxiety.

There could be various reasons for the death of the ward commissioners but it's no secret that more criminals have entered the Municipality structure than ever before. Obviously, the parties thought that they would gain by having people in who could "control" the area for the party but as events have showed, such plans always fall flat and no city has survived by encouraging criminals.

We are confident that the situation can be brought under control if there is a will to do so. And the government must display that it has this will by acting immediately.

Arresting launch owner is not the solution

Overhaul the riverine transport system

THE Marine court has turned down the bail petition of one of the five owners of the launch that sank and killed over 400 people in Meghna. This fact is noted for the historic first that it is because no owner has ever been arrested before for such acts. It shows that nobody ever bothered to install some discipline and order in this sector. This free for all playing with life and death has now extracted a huge price but even now an organized process of accountability is missing. The total accumulation of neglect over the last few decades would show how deep is official indifference. The fact that the owners even if found guilty would face only a maximum of a year in jail and a fine of Taka 10,000 only is a further proof of that attitude. One hopes that normal criminal charges of wilful manslaughter will also be brought against them.

But as we have mentioned before, the solution lies not in prosecuting individual owners or pilots but in improving the safety factor in the sector as a whole. It is surprising that the authorities have not yet gone about organizing a whole scale inspection of the plying vehicles and certify those that are fit to carry passengers and those that should be put to sleep.

The shipping ministry can easily organize this mass checking. There is skill, capacity and manpower but it's only will to do so that is missing and we aren't sure what will light that fire.

The tendency of doing post-mortems has to shift to ensure that such dissections of death are prevented from happening. Why after all the public dismay and lack of confidence, the authorities don't want to run a thorough check of the vessels remains as much a mystery as anything.

It's fine to prosecute the launch owner and finer still to do something under the criminal code but the key need is to ensure safety. For that to happen, all the vessels, only a few hundred in number, should be re-examined and re-certified for river worthiness.

It's not really much, is it? The passengers deserve it and the people demand that.

Trouble-ridden trips



M ANWARUL HAQ

WHEN a foreign traveller arrives by air at Japan's Narita or Hanada airport and moves to the immigration counter, he or she is invariably greeted by a bow and a courteous smile.

Neither the humble bow nor the effusive smile will guarantee an entry into the land of the rising sun unless the papers are in order. But Japanese courtesy at airports and inside has enamoured millions of visitors to that land every year with every visitor craving for another trip back, if opportunity provided.

Immigration and airport officials worldwide generally tend to be very suspicious looking, drab and unsmiling. However exceptions are there, when some do say hello to the incoming visitor after a tired flight and also tell, 'have a nice stay' after they have seen the papers and stamped the passport. After all, as we all know, courtesy costs nothing. Rather a good smile will carry one to several miles.

Studies have revealed that foreign travellers, whether visiting a country for business or pleasure tend to be considerably affected psychologically by the behaviour pattern of airport personnel like persons belonging to customs, immigration, the luggage porter, the money changer and the taxi driver.

People at an international airport who deal with incoming or outgoing passengers are the actual image

bearers and image creators for a country, any country.

For Bangladesh, sprucing up the image, or giving a facelift to our national character is the real challenge as we all know. Thousands of our own folk who depart on a trip abroad or those who take a short trip back to Dhaka often vow (momentarily) never to return back to Bangladesh because of the hassles they have to face at the airport. These unforgettable experiences

toe. And all these are officials belonging to one of the known 19 agencies charged with the airport security, surveillance and facilitation purposes. Every official has a name tag protruding out from his lapel and most of them seem to possess clearance for entering the most sensitive zones of the airport.

The number of officials and people having access to sensitive areas must be limited and a chain of command established. When most

to the arriving passengers which perhaps would entail a maximum cost of Taka 500 per arriving aircraft.

The customs people, with few exceptions fleece the incoming passengers carrying electronics equipment. Thousands of Bangladeshis who had put in much sweat and toil while working abroad become victims of 'hefty taxes', a large amount of which has actually to be passed on as gratification

arriving at ZIA have to contend with an empty booth run by the Board of Investment having really no detailed literature or facility to inform about investment prospects in the country.

Recently the government created a serious confusion by changing the immigration rules overnight without informing the missions abroad or even putting up the information in the various government web sites that are always characterized by outdated information. Nearly

Has Biman or the Parjatan Corporation or any government ever tried to sell Bangladesh as a brief stopover destination from major tourist hubs in the neighbourhood like Kathmandu, Delhi, Mumbai, Bangkok and Singapore? On the contrary several foreign airlines carry out occasional promotional campaigns to route their passengers through Bangladesh because they need to fill their seats on their homebound flights or on feeder routes.

Bangladesh has failed till now to work out seriously on proposals given by the Nepalese government and tourism officials on several occasions to market jointly to foreign citizens packages to visit the mountains (of Nepal) and the long-gest beach at Cox's Bazar while visiting Kathmandu or Dhaka. We really need to take up matters of foreign investment and tourism more seriously if we mean business than doling out rhetorics.

We may take a cue from Malaysia which being a Muslim country drew more than 12 million tourists last year, the bulk of whom were from Asia. Abdul Kadir, Malaysia's Minister for Culture, Arts and Tourism during his trip to Dhaka last month said, "We are concentrating on the Asian market. You too could attract tourists. I can give you a tip: Tourism could give the highest return with the lowest investment."

Of course more recreational facilities and some exclusive zones could help attract more tourists and this could begin by allowing them to function in the export processing zones, at the least.

And we need to smile more at our visitors and not stare at and scare them. After all we now live in a global village. If our neighbors can do, we too can.

M Anwarul Haq is Diplomatic and Defence Correspondent of The Daily Star

ACCORD AND DISCORD

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occure either with officials or by an assorted crowd gathered inside and outside the airport. The travellers are generally assaulted with a litany of requests like 'helping them' with their luggage by pulling them in different directions, getting their money changed, taxis and their agents pleading furiously to board their vehicles and beggars accosting them to part with some alms, the better if it is in foreign currency.

Leaving aside the problems faced by our nationals, it can be said there are too many roadblocks for travellers to feel encouraged to visit Bangladesh. In fact, talking to any foreigner it is evident that Dhaka is not a welcome stopover. There is simply too much bureaucracy, too many officials and too many hassles to contend with. Very few foreigners will be convinced that this is a country where 'hospitality reigns' and it is an 'investors paradise' with a professed one stop service.

While disembarking from the aircraft and coming through the boarding bridge, one is greeted with at least seventy pairs of eyes looking at the passenger from head to

airports are relying more on electronic technology for surveillance purposes the CCTV fitted after long delays at Zia International Airport is known not to be properly monitored.

What is seen is that, despite having a ratio of two or three official or airportmen present at hand for every incoming passenger and his baggage, the cases of smuggled goods coming in like gold still find entry into Dhaka. It suggests that a network or nexus exists among a few of the assigned people. The officials who monitor the airport must be monitored themselves and transferred frequently.

Despite the high number of employees, pilferage and theft of luggage is a normal feature at ZIA.

Arriving passengers enter into dimly lit airport corridors and immigration counters giving their first impression of a country that it is both bleak and poor. It only needs imagination to brighten the corridors of the airport. Even as a welcome start the 70 men, and some of their female colleagues standing at the gangway or the air bridge could hold and present a stick of *Rajanigandha*

money. Dhaka airport which caters to more than a dozen foreign airlines continue to be badly handled by the Biman personnel who do most of the handling for the foreign airlines. Rules should be liberalized so that airlines could appoint other handlers or employ private companies who will have scope to develop handling expertise.

The tremendous potential for ZIA becoming a hub in the region is being lost with every passing day. Airline fuel costs, parking, landing and handling charges continue to be very stiff and generally higher than most airports of comparable nature in the region.

It is good common sense to lower all tariff barriers and costs and generate more landings and passengers rather than overcharge the few airlines that come. Some airlines for reasons other than economic have been forced to cut down on flights or shut down operations completely in and out of Dhaka and this calls for probing.

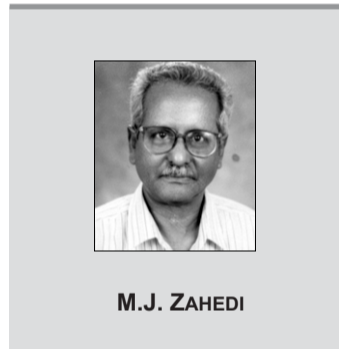
When Bangladesh is looking for investments, the foreign traveller

200 foreign visitors had to depart from the airport terminus, some spending three or four days, without proper facilities.

There is every reason for Bangladeshis to feel bitter facing long visa queues, embarrassing questions and visa refusals while applying for entry to some particular countries. But if authorities feel that visa refusals for foreigners intending to visit Bangladesh should be on a reciprocal basis then we are definitely on the losing end. At least for now. We have to look for every avenue of foreign investment and earning and that includes encouraging foreigners to come and spend a day or two at the least while visiting a neighbouring country so that they spend some dollars, pounds or euros.

By creating a more liberal visa regime we can encourage first time visitors including investors coming to the region. We can also market Bangladesh and encourage a sizeable number of tourists travelling to Nepal, India, Thailand or Singapore to make a holiday stop-over in Bangladesh.

Are they doing what they should do?



M.J. ZAHEDI

ALTHOUGH it is said to be the fourth attack on foreigners in Pakistan, the recent suicide bombing in Karachi had many ominous firsts. A strategic defence project in Pakistan involving the project was for building three Agosta submarines for the Pakistan Navy (PN) with French assistance. The deal was clinched in October 1994 after six years of negotiations. Agosta submarines are capable of remaining submerged for longer duration in water. They are fitted with the most modern system of Exocet missiles and torpedoes.

The project is said to be the centerpiece of the PN's modernization drive. But the most significant part of the project is related to the transfer of technology. The first Agosta for Pakistan was built in a French shipyard by French and Pakistani technicians and commissioned in the PN about two years ago. The second was to be built partly in France and partly in Pakistan while the third was to be built entirely in Pakistan by Pakistani engineers with only remote French guidance and assistance. Work on the second was in progress when the bombing took place, forcing the French to withdraw its experts. This has obviously raised questions about whether Pakistani experts are trained enough to finish the project.

The French shipbuilders recalled all French workers within hours of the incident, placing a big question mark over the completion of a strategically vital defence project. The French once before pulled out their engineers and technicians. That was when Wall Street Journalist Daniel Pearl was

LETTER FROM KARACHI

The killings in the church, the death of Daniel Pearl and of the 12 Frenchmen say that the answer is in the negative. Many say, Pakistan cannot afford to lose more face. Whosoever is responsible, state or group or individuals, must be located and exposed. But who will do it? The administration, or the agencies or either FBI or French intelligence?...It must be done by Pakistan alone.

murdered. But they returned only recently after the French demanded, and Pakistan promised, maximum security.

The bombing introduced for the first time in Pakistan the element of suicide bombing. Experts envisage a real danger of more such bombings in the context of the country's large population, thickly populated areas, and large number of foreigners working in different fields. Naturally, the media is fully covering the incident and its multifarious implications. Pakistan has said that the incident had Indian hands behind it but the French chief of staff has discounted this view saying that the Al Qaeda had a hand in the attack.

Daily *The Nation* also said that the violence is not entirely of Pakistan's own. The dominant part of it, the paper said, has an international aspect. The violence that we see in Pakistan these days, it said, was introduced by the late Zia-ul-Haq in Afghanistan, in Pakistan and elsewhere about 23 years back with collaboration of the USA. Since then it is rising and rising. "If not checked today, what it will do to us is difficult to predict and is anybody's guess", the paper said.

Meanwhile, many odd things such as drug trafficking, arms trade, religious extremism and ethnic biases flourished in Pakistan, the editorial continued. All of it was done to destroy whatever roots politics had started to take. Its destruction was successfully achieved. The last decade and the present situation is witness to that. Pakistan's siding with Americans on September 11 had a national connection. This time there was no political opposition around.

The generals were in command and they needed no external sup-

port to perpetuate their rule. What they did was in the greater national interest, they had no other option either. Whether Pakistanis are doing a favour to America or the other way round, are questions that are not and should not be raised, many feel. It should be understood that there are two sides to Pakistan's Afghan policy. One moral and the other material.

The first has two angles of its own. One is that the violence that is nowadays to be seen in Pakistan is not entirely Pakistan's own, it has an international side as well, perhaps the dominant part of it. It started during Zia-ul-Haq's time, in Pakistan, in Afghanistan and elsewhere. This time the generals had no self-interest, no political opposi-

tion was around, politicians stood disgraced due to their own innumerable mistakes and they needed no external support.

The generals were in complete command of all national affairs. Not many in Pakistan understand about the kind of fate they would have met had their country not participated in America's war against terrorism. But some people have started to feel that it was time now that Pakistan told America that enough was enough. Pakistan is doing a favour to you, but it has its limits.

There are two sides to Pakistan's change in policy on Afghanistan: moral and material. The moral side again has two angles of its own. One, violence and terrorism are negation of humanity. Pakistanis are fulfilling a moral obligation: they

are favouring no one in particular but entire humanity to whom they also belong. The other moral side is that the terror and tragedy inflicted on Americans had origin in a country that was friendly only to Pakistan, that is Afghanistan.

The material side was equally or even more compelling. For all practical purposes, Pakistan's day-to-day survival has an undeniable link with external assistance, most of which comes through or from America.

So the question is not whether what Pakistan did was right or wrong. It is what else could Pakistan have done. President Bush has said that Pakistan was given a chance. Now that it has the chance, many think, Pakistanis should ask themselves are they doing what they

should do? Are they siding with the Americans fully?

But the killings in the church, the death of Daniel Pearl and of the 12 Frenchmen say that the answer is in the negative. Many say, Pakistan cannot afford to lose more face. Whosoever is responsible, state or group or individuals, must be located and exposed. But who will do it? The administration, or the agencies or either FBI or French intelligence?

Neither nor any one else, it must be done by Pakistan alone. It is all the capacity to do it; it can do it --- all by itself. The government has already taken the first step by deciding to radically overhaul the law and order machinery and creating a special anti-terrorist unit.

But the authorities should be cautious that the various agencies do not work at cross-purposes. Dawn reminded the authorities that the country had a depressing history of such elite units misusing their extraordinary powers. The government must make sure about this, the editorial said.

M J Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the *Khaleez Times*.

Buddha Purnima : Message of peace

UDAYAN BARUA

B UDDHA Purnima is the greatest festival of the Buddhist community and is being observed with due solemnity almost all over the world. This full moon night is worth remembering for the birth, attainment of wisdom and passing away of Lord Buddha. He left kingdom in search of eternal peace of body and mind. Shidhartha, son of Sudhdadhan, a king in Nepal, after attaining wisdom was popularly known and revered as "Buddha." The simple history of Buddha is more or less known to all. Buddha Purnima is a reminder of what Lord Buddha preached for the noble cause of the many. The noble eight-fold paths

are: Right understanding, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. These eight noble paths or ways are easy to understand but have so far been proved difficult to emulate in our day to day life. The humans for not being conscious about these rightful ways, resultantly fall victims to untold and unpredictable number of miseries.

Every religion principally prescribes mindful methods for development of moral and spiritual values and Buddhism stands akin to all religious fundamental principles. Buddha in his first sermon to the monks asked, "Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many." This

message is wide, loud, and broad and to all and meant for the cause of happiness of all living beings, irrespective of caste, creed and race. Modern environmental scientists call for saving the nature and all creatures towards protection and safety of eco-system for the greater interest of existence and safeguard of human race and civilization, which is in consonance with Buddha's philosophy. At the moment the world, i.e., human race and civilization, is tormented by conflicts arising out of racial, regional, religious, cultural, financial and a host of other discriminations. Every conscious and religious person realizes that peoples at different parts of the globe are now engaged in immaterial, unethical

and immoral fighting, which has so far claimed innumerable innocent human lives and also caused loss of millions of dollars. In these circumstances, all religious, political and social leaders of all countries, right at this moment, should sit and think together. This would help change the scenario.

Amongst many others, Buddha stressed on "Metta" i.e. "Maitri" in Bengali. It implies a sincere heart of a true friend. It aims at the welfare and genuine happiness of all living beings without exception and discrimination. On this holy night, let all of us take a noble gesture to sit and think together for the cause of peaceful co-existence. Let Buddha Purnima shine on us with its eternal message of peace. "Let all beings be happy."

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

Banning channel in the name of alien culture!

It's ironic that while many VCD shops sell 'blue films' illegally, and semi-naked posters of film actresses adorn the walls of the cinema halls, the authority decided to shut down the cable channels for having bad effect on 'religious' values! It's no less pathetic that no steps have been taken to air some equally good materials from the state owned BTV as compensation.

Want to save us from a foreign cultural impact? That is very commendable, but only when the people are given some equally good alternatives to resort to.

Narmin Tartila Banu
IBA, University of Dhaka

What is this BNP-Jammat government up to? Instead of tackling serious issues in the country, they are now hell bent on taking away people's right to watch TV!
The attempt to drive the IT sector to the ground by slapping on taxes to the ISPs, is an example of the negative and regressive attitude of this government and its narrow view on public information.

I live and work in the UAE, a solidly Islamic nation. Even here, there are no such restrictions. I fear that Bangladesh, despite its protests and denial is heading down the fundamentalist path.

K. Rabbyan
UAE

In this high-tech era, how silly it is to assume that cable channels might

affect the younger generation in a negative way! I too used to watch HBO and Star Movies, and I can safely say that all offensive terminology and scenes were erased. MTV or even Channel V for that matter hardly aired any music video that was offensive in any manner.

Are we merely the pawns of an elaborate chess game or are we the mice being stalked by the cat? Isn't it possible to get access to pornographic web sites in the Internet, buy obscene books, hire videocassettes with indecent pictures in it? So are we to ban all these?

And what makes it worse is the banning decision was withdrawn 24 hours later! It is like the "Hirok Rajar Deshe" making a decision one moment and immediately going back on it the day after.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak

Ban and the day after

The government banned the broadcast of 13 satellite channels for their 'adverse impact of alien culture on religious and social values'. The next day it has lifted the ban after reviewing the pleas by the channel distributors. And thus gone all the religious and social values with the wind. Pleas from a handful of distributors can so easily outweigh the national interest! Are our decision-makers so frivolous that they can change their minds concerning national interests within twenty-four hours?

We have the decision-makers in our government who can decide that right this moment on no tourist or foreign investors will be issued on arrival visas. After a few days they change the decision allowing investors to have on arrival visa. They

decide that right from today on no yarn from India can be imported through the land port. They did not bother to consider what adverse effects this 'right from today on' decision would have on the productions of the garment factories, who already had programmed their productions on the basis of yarns to be imported through land ports.

Like the Greek conqueror Alexander, we can only express our surprise and nothing else.

Faruque Hasan
Dhaka

It seems the ruling alliance government is continuously looking out for new avenues of making headlines. The huge cabinet is literally out of work. The poor fellows always hunt for something to make their earnings HALAL and save their jobs.

That's why the State Minister of Education is seen regularly catching copycats during public exams.

The Information Minister in the name of saving our moral character bans 13 satellite channels and on the very next day he differs from his previous opinion and lifts ban on 11 satellite channels. Most of the people in our country don't earn enough to provide them with two square meals daily. How, when and where they could watch satellite channel and degrade their moral character is a million-dollar question?

The few who does have access to cable network are adult and does have the option open to them what to watch and what not. If some one thinks the cable channels does have a deleterious effect on the little one's of the house they dose have the option of unsubscribing at any moment.

Dhaka Compensation for Magurchara disaster

I was very glad to read that Petrobangla is finally asking Unocal to pay the price for the Magurchara disaster. However, the compensation requested, 3900 crore Taka (\$660 million) seems very low compared to the damage done. Let's not forget that one of Bangladesh's few gas fields, which should have provided us with fuel and power for the next 20 years, literally went up in smoke.

As it is, Unocal seems to be set on squandering our gas reserves in questionable pipeline deals with India. Why should they be let off the hook for Magurchara?

Zeeshan Hasan

Dhaka Deplorable state of Wari Post Office

We would be grateful if the Mayor and the Director General of post office kindly made a surprise visit to Wari Post Office and see for themselves the horrible and awful condition prevailing there.

Tons of garbage is piled near the main entrance/gate of this post office spreading obnoxious smell and polluting the entire area. More-over three letterboxes installed in front of the post office are found, most of the time, sunk under the heaps of garbage. There are big holes under the small platform on which the letterboxes are installed.

OH Kabir
Wari, Dhaka