

Requiem for a society

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HARDLY had the painful memories of Sony's murder erased from our fickle memory, the entire nation's sense and sensibilities were assaulted once again by the despicable episode at one of the women's hostels in Dhaka University. What happened on the night of 25th March 1971 and thereafter in the students' hostels (and particularly those populated by girls) will remain ever imprinted in our nation's psyche as a tragedy of heinous, barbaric and inhuman proportion where the perpetrators' lust though satisfied momentarily, they will remain culpable in the annals of civilisation for their crimes against humanity. But then they were foreigners and colonisers, unleashing their hatred on an unarmed but determined people whose thirst for freedom waited to be quenched. But what happened the other day has left people baffled, seeking answers to questions they never thought would need to be asked in an independent Bangladesh.

Do the events at Shamsunnahar Hall and the con-

sequent infernal situation at Dhaka University irrevocably strengthens the argument favouring ban on student politics? Or are these incidents harbinger of social destruction by unshackled Frankenstein so long mothered by different political parties? Or do these events portend the unarrestable decline and decay of Bangladesh society where lines are being sharply drawn between the rulers and the ruled; where the culture of violence has cut a deep swathe on the body of culture of compassion, of civilised values which used to be so integral and so intrinsic; or indicative of Rosenau's exploration of disintegrative forces leading towards fragmentation, localisation, and individualisation? (Turbulence in World Politics-James Rosenau 1990)

Society essentially emerged out of a struggle between good and evil and human beings agreed to submit themselves to a superior authority for their own protection. And so certain norms were born as were rules and regulations and institutions. It is difficult for democracy to prosper unless all its concomitant institutions are also allowed to prosper naturally with-

There have been many casualties of this sordid event. General public's growing suspicion about the ability, impartiality and integrity of the law enforcement authorities would further increase. People's confidence in the government, so enthusiastically endorsed so very recently, would be rudely shaken. If the guilty go unpunished then criminal elements would be further emboldened and the victims and potential victims would take up law in their own hands as evidenced in the increasing number of deaths of alleged criminals at the hands of angry mobs.

out undue political interference. If one were to become so overriding then the society may become subject to the tyranny of the demagogues and of "multitudes drunk with power" whose rule would be as bad as that of kings and oligarch (William Godwin). As preventive and remedial measures societal agreement would be necessary for all institutions inherent to a democratic system to flourish without political interruptions and restrictions. But if criminality is unbounded and legal process remains imprisoned in the statute books and is shackled by evil nexus between criminals and their would be prosecutors then all efforts at socio-economic-political developments would be in vain. Bangladesh society has become

so submerged in the tidal waves of crime that dim lights of light houses extend only flickering ray of hope to the people. It is not so much the commission of crime which is so galling; after all, crimes are no less on the streets of New York or Washington D.C.; it is the impunity with which crimes are being committed, the complacency of the society and its insensitivity to crimes committed, people's constant fear that they may be the next victim and their continuing quest for an answer to the Latin question: Quis cotidie ipso quostidie (who guards the guardians), emerging creed of untouchability (not in the religious sense) emboldening the marauders to tear asunder the not yet dead body of the society.

The current volatile situation also has an economic side. Good law and order situation is sine qua non for economic progress. Predictable and peaceful environment is imperative for foreign investment, an essential ingredient for economic development. To generate international confidence transparency and accountability of the actions of the rulers would be necessary. In this age of globalisation no country is a cocoon, divorced from its surroundings and the rest of the world. Multinational entities increasingly view the world as a single source of production ingredients and as one market. Though due to disparate purchasing one globe will perform have to be fragmented into several globes (the poorer ones supplying

mineral and productive human resources) the inter-dependency among these globes is more likely to occur than not. If Bangladesh is not to be left behind on the wayside then such episodes as the one which has currently seized all our attention must not recur.

There have been many casualties of this sordid event. General public's growing suspicion about the ability, impartiality and integrity of the law enforcement authorities would further increase. People's confidence in the government, so enthusiastically endorsed so very recently, would be rudely shaken. If the guilty go unpunished then criminal elements would be further

emboldened and the victims and potential victims would take up law in their own hands as evidenced in the increasing number of deaths of alleged criminals at the hands of angry mobs. Resultant chaos and break down in law and order could encourage extra-constitutional forces to come to the fore.

Questions are being asked about the reasons behind the JCD quartet's forcible occupation of a room in the girls' hostel long after they have passed out of the University and in the face of the opposition of other residents and Provost of the hall. Had it been because of their wish for further studies then nothing more could have been said. But their alleged involvement in the forcible closure of the only photo copying shop at the hall because the owner refused to pay extortion money does not support the argument of their wish for further study. Their reported meeting with the Vice-Chancellor, sub-servience of the police to their will in enacting the shameful episode give out odious smell of a

nexus among the student activists, the University authorities and law enforcement agencies. It would be both pre-mature and presumptuous to draw conclusions before the reports of the three committees are made public. One cannot, however, fail to notice the oddity of this peculiar situation. The object of this enquiry of this sordid event is not to apportion blame (hopefully appropriate punishment would be awarded by the authorities to the guilty), but to explore the extent of social decay in Bangladesh and to look for remedies to free ourselves from the vicious circle of underdevelopment -- political, economic, intellectual and moral. Unless we can do so, we will become disposable like yesterday's newspaper and would not be able to keep pace in the new global construct where in the first place like Alice in Wonderland we will have to run all the time to be in the same place.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a retired Secretary to the Bangladesh government and former ambassador

Trade in the name of poverty reduction

FAZLUL ALAM

BY this twenty-first century, we have learnt that the world has shrunk so much that even living in a remote village of Bangladesh, provided we have appropriate technology, one can work for a company situated in the city of New York. We are also certain about this shrinking for we can watch television programmes from all over the world, download information from various web sites, buy foreign goods made in the western developed countries in our local shops. We are supplying ready-made clothes for the western developed countries. Soon, we may also be able to supply computer software to those lands. All are well, but all these must have purpose; and the purpose is usually aired as eradication or reduction of poverty.

Most of the developing nations including Bangladesh have once had the misfortune of being ruled by colonial powers, and these are now independent sovereign nations. The independence of these nations has been hard earned, in many cases after long period of struggle in one form or other. Certainly, one concrete objective of independence was to bring relief from poverty for all the people, if not prosperity. But in most cases, poverty did not vanish, nor any true prosperity landed on the people. In this context, I keep remembering a well-documented piece of history.

It is about Mauritius. The Movement Militant Mauricien (MMM) won the long-delayed democratic election in 1976 mainly with the support of the "exploited sugar workers". The colonial power supporting party handed over authority including all trade matters to the MMM, who on assumption of control expected that the "surplus value" that was being taken away by the colonial power would uplift personal as well as the country's economy. But they found that the "exchange value" of sugar was not realisable any more. This happened because almost immediately sugar price fell sharply in the world commodity market, mainly controlled from London and it could only have its "use value" and not the "exchange value". The "exploited sugar workers" could barely get a subsistence wage after independence, and started sliding down, not up.

The same phenomenon struck most of the newly independent nations. Why did it happen? The answer is that when the accrued benefit of the surplus value in the new set up (i.e. after independence) will no longer assist the capital, the latter would decline to act to maintain exchange value. In case of

Mauritius, clearly the sugar was a colonial product the exchange value of which was dependent on the colonial power's economic strategy to benefit from it. Most certainly, the falling price of sugar in the commodity market in London was engineered, but that was the name of the game and price for "independence".

One may argue that immediately after post-colonial situation was necessarily difficult for the new emerging independent countries, and that situation is long past. The new nations and countries should be able to embark on international trade and benefit from it. That this is not the reality is amply evident as we look at the map in which developing nations (an euphemism for poor countries) occupy more than half the world.

labour should change. Based on this the North manipulated the South to organise FDIs. Some poor countries and some countries known as Newly Industrial Countries (NICs) have indeed tried this with generous and liberal "trading arrangement" ensuring no local tax, profit can be taken out of the country, multiple visa, no trade union in their factories etc etc. So, the *Capital of the Centre* has reached the periphery to use what is ironically called 'human capital'. That is fine and noble, but has it worked? We have been through nearly four decades of such investments in the periphery from the centre without any significant change in the poverty picture. Only the *middlemen* of the periphery, mostly the government and the people nearer to the

and produce with surplus value and then use internal market for maintaining its exclusiveness.

Trade is not a charity; it is a tool for creating wealth: In such a situation the *Free Trade* concept was developed to end *Protectionism* being practised by some, who were not opening up their *iron curtain* to buy from the western developed countries, but trying to sell to them. Most of the countries have eventually succumbed to the pressure and dumped their policy of protectionism for various reasons. Many Free Trade associations have been formed with control eventually vested with World Trade Organisation (WTO), with the active support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB).

It is ironic though that some

playing with words like non-discriminatory, equitable and so on.

The fact is that the poverty of a country is not a condition created by lack of trade, but by too many of trades in capitalist mode particularly without own capital: The capital comes from the capitalists of the centre. Capitalist mode of production will work for peripheries like us when we would be able to decide what to produce, how to produce and how to distribute. Are we in a position to perform all three activities under any trading system -- Free, Fixed or Fair? Mauritius managed to undertake the first two after independence, but did not have a clue about the third. We in Bangladesh are in worse state than Mauritius being dependent on others for all three activities. However, the present style of trade has at least managed to bring affluence and wealth for some creating more poor than less, just as it is so not only in the NICs, but also in the western developed world including the US, where the car manufacturing Detroit is fast becoming a ghost city.

What do we do then to achieve a poverty free state? Demand equitable, respectable, non-discriminatory, non-monopolistic, barrier-free fair trading system. Sure we may try, but who would assure that there will be light at the end of this tunnel? For smaller, powerless nations such fair trade agreements need to be drawn carefully with certain amount of protectionism. The best would have been to start a machinery for reducing foreign exchange dependence, but one cannot expect to achieve that in the present globalisation era. The question of foreign exchange brings up another issue. The world has replaced gold with US dollar as its reserve. So, for non-US countries, US dollar is a must. Trade and FDI can bring the foreign exchange, emigrants can send foreign exchange, WB can lend foreign exchange, and there should be no problem. But if the profits of the trade are siphoned out of the country, and our imports (many of which are absolutely unnecessary) cost more foreign exchange than what can we earn by exporting, how can poverty shy away? Any solution?

The only answer a genuine economist may offer, when asked to link trade with poverty reduction in a country like Bangladesh, is a sigh and possible shout 'get lost!'

Dr Fazlul Alam, a researcher, is Librarian, P&D, Dhaka University Library.

The world has replaced gold with US dollar as its reserve. So, for non-US countries, US dollar is a must. Trade and FDI can bring the foreign exchange, emigrants can send foreign exchange, WB can lend foreign exchange, and there should be no problem. But if the profits of the trade are siphoned out of the country, and our imports (many of which are absolutely unnecessary) cost more foreign exchange than what can we earn by exporting, how can poverty shy away?

There are well thought out explanation for the poverty of these countries including Bangladesh. One theory by distinguished economist Samir Amin tells us that the socioeconomic formations of *capitalism of the centre* (the developed North) bear distinctive features of being *dominant* as well as *exclusive*. Its exclusiveness arises because it is based on the expansion of the *internal market*. On the other hand, the *capitalism of the periphery* (such as the South or the poor nations) can never become *exclusive*, because the spread of capitalism here is based on *external market*. This explains the Mauritius experience well, and this may very well explain why after decades of high export earnings, a country's poor population remain poor all the same or even poorer, as it has happened in Bangladesh.

There is no denial of the fact that the western developed nations are more than eager to eradicate poverty from the face of this planet earth. The only problem is that they could not yet figure out how to achieve this. At times, they argue that *Capital* creates the objective conditions of labour, and therefore, capital is the key factor in changing the conditions. According to that theory, if the capital can be flown out to the poor countries, say in the form of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), the objective conditions of the

government have benefited greatly amassing disproportionately high amount of wealth at the cost of the 'human capital'. This 'human capital' unfortunately has no means to translate their 'notional capital' into the 'real capital'. Time has not come yet to confirm whether it is working even in the NICs. The popular unrest and uprisings in the NICs (including the Philippines and Malaysia) are mostly attributed to 'ethnic clashes', but are they really so. One may suspect that the 'ethnic clashes' are the result of 'dominant new rich' and the pariahs, the dividing line between them are state determined. That such "trade arrangement" has not worked for the poor countries need not be retold here.

It has not worked because the very basic assumption that "capital creates the objective conditions of the labour" is wrong. Marx explained this long ago. According to him, value existing in money-wealth is enabling to *buy the objective conditions of labour*, it does not create the objective condition of the labour. In other word, capital uses the existing state (usually poverty) of the labour for its use.

Trade is the end part of investment, production and distribution. This, in another expression may mean that the capital is poised to strike a better deal wherever the opportunity exists for investment,

powerful countries who are proponents of Free Trade practise protectionism for themselves in the form of high tariffs and many regulations governing imports, and also by prescribing a quota system for specific products. President George W Bush, the symbol of power for the American people, has recently slapped tariffs on importing steel into the United States, and this makes a mockery of the concept of Free Trade. The anger of the European Union countries at this is not likely to subside without some definitive response.

That is where the rub is, particularly for the poor countries. If Free Trade and Globalisation go hand in hand, they do so for the benefit of the rich and powerful nations of the West. That has always been so. Now this situation has become untenable as pressures are mounting on the organisations like WTO, IMF and WB. China's membership of the WTO is regarded by many as a breakthrough, which would eventually change the decisions taken at the WTO, but there are sceptics too. China may not be able to play any decisive role since its multilateral trade policy itself does not seem fair to others.

What then is left to eradicate poverty through Free Trade? Fair Trade? May be, we can give it a try provided the poor countries play vital roles in defining it -- not just

Pilot Adnan: A personal tribute

RABEED IMAM

I was happing the TV through channels rather impatiently and getting increasingly flabbergasted that there was nothing worth watching on the afternoon of July 30, when my eyes caught a headline on an Indian news programme: 'Four killed including the pilot in airforce plane crash in Bangladesh.'

As I scurried for details of the accident I started feeling a bit uneasy and disturbed as just one face that I've hardly remembered for the last few years kept popping up in front of me. When I reached The Daily Star office, the first thing I inquired of the joint news editor was, "What was the name of the pilot?"

"It's Flight Lieutenant Adnan." My heart skipped a beat.

"Could you please check if his full name is Adnan Mukid?" I asked again, already trembling.

"Yes...how did you...do you know him...?" I wasn't listening as my mind raced back to July, 1996.

I had just joined Bangladesh Military Academy (BMA) as a gentleman cadet of the 38th BMA Long Course. During those first days, the academy was a living hell for us first-terms and senior cadets made sure that we curse every second of our stay at the BMA.

Very few individuals can instantly adjust to the ordeal of not

being allowed time to rest (let alone sleep), eat and talk freely but those were permanent rules at the BMA, especially for the first term cadets. So when one lad of Platoon 22 at Mustafa Company (dormitories are termed companies at the BMA) appeared unfazed at the hardship, punishments and peculiarities associated with military training and smilingly took everything in his stride, the rest of us became curious. Friendship and camaraderie just flowed after that.

We found out that this chirpy yet remarkably gentle boy's name was Adnan Mukid. He was a Bangladesh Airforce cadet. Of relevance here is that cadets of Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) and Bangladesh Navy (BN) go through a 11-week joint forces training at the BMA before moving to their respective academies.

Adnan was not at all what you call 'military type'. He was of a rather short stature. He wasn't athletic by any stretch of the imagination. He was a weak swimmer and dreaded the BMA swimming pool. He wasn't a cadet college product like most of our platoon and course mates, a reason why some of us 'civilians' felt more at home with him.

All in all he was just another everyday kid and that made him different in a place where everyone else was trying to act tough. And

above everything, he had that ready smile which I never saw leave his face during those 11 weeks.

When I met him for the first time, there was a distinct air of warmth in



his approach and I knew in my heart that moment that I've found my first friend at the BMA. Adnan had that effect on people. From the Term Commander to the Havaladar, not to mention his mates and seniors, Adnan was well loved by all for his genial behaviour and purity of heart and that's an understatement.

At the BMA, there was just a handful of BAF and BN cadets and the senior cadets would often indulge themselves in 'minority oppression' by ridiculing the airforce recruits as 'crows' and the

navy cadets as 'cows.' Sometimes we too joined in the chorus. Adnan, unlike many of his 'minority' colleagues, never took those jokes and abuses personally. He was like that, innocent to the core and without even a shade of malice.

In the military academy, sometimes the competition between individuals to become better than the other is so fierce that well-preached lofty words like 'comradeship', 'team-spirit' etc. goes out through the window. To make a name for himself and to remain in good stead in the eyes of the instructors, cadets at times unwittingly become selfish. Adnan never took that route, it was not in his system. He charmed everybody with his politeness and simplicity and was always willing to lend a helping hand.

Adnan had a soft voice that unmistakably reflected his nature. One of our favourite topics of idle discussion was how he was going to command his troops with that tone of his. Senior cadets would often wake us up at 2:00 AM or at some outrageous hour of the night and order us to sing or face the consequences. Adnan would be the first to volunteer and it would always be the same song. While we struggled to keep a straight face, Adnan would by sheer work of miracle (had you heard his voice you would've had the same opinion too) soothe

the hearts of those menacing looking seniors and spare the whole platoon from punishment. He had wonderful handwriting, another quality that often saved him from punishment.

On September 12, 1996, the BAF and BN cadets who trained with the 38 Long Course bade BMA farewell and headed for their own academies. As we hugged and said goodbye, tears rolled down Adnan's cheeks.

"I shall never forget you, write to me regularly," these were the last words I heard him say and it would be the last time we would be seeing each other in this world.

All these years I never bothered to inquire where he was and how he was doing. But since July 30, I just can't stop thinking about him. That's the kind of person Adnan was. Even if you had met him once he would've surely left a lasting impression on you.

As my eyes get misty remembering him, I can't help feeling that his soul is now flying as free as a bird. That's what he had always wanted - to roam the sky without inhibition.

Rest in peace Adnan. Although I'll always miss you, it still gives me comfort to know that heaven is a better place with you there.

Rabeed Imam is a sub-editor of The Daily Star