

Joint assessment mission report on CHT

Green signal to development assistance welcomed

THE Chittagong Hill Tracts region hitherto starving of good news must have woken up last morning to a rather musical note of an auspicious tiding. The donors are set to resume development assistance to all but one of the 27 police stations under Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari districts. Even though Mahalchhari under Khagrachhari is going to be left out for the time being, due to its risk potential, it won't be long before its susceptibility to trouble evaporates. How other thanas gain from the massive development undertaking is likely to have a positive demonstrative effect on Mahalchhari by way of improving its security standing.

By hindsight, there has been a prolonged stoppage of development assistance to Chittagong Hill Tracts since the abduction of three expatriate road engineers from Rangamati on February 16 last year. The foreigners working on a DANIDA project were waylaid and taken hostage. After month-long manhunt accompanied by painstaking negotiations they could be rescued unharmed. In a sense that was the furthest the outlawed elements could get in their extortionist forays and yet remarkably, to the relief of everybody, it fell short of the spine-chilling consequences of a few kidnapping incidents one has known in relation to some other hot-spots.

After nearly one year and quarter long suspension of assistance to the CHT by the development organisations and donor countries, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the UNDP felt the need for a re-assessment of the security situation in the region. It was this common realisation that, in May this year, led to the formation of a joint assessment committee comprising representatives of the government and the donor agencies and its dispatch to the CHT region for a review exercise.

The objective, modalities and speed with which the joint committee has delivered its report merits commendation, let alone the very high quality of its outcome. The whole range of safety and security concerns for the Bangladeshis and expatriates who may visit or be stationed in the CHT for development work have been addressed.

The findings of the report sound positive with a tinge of pragmatism and also highly comprehensive with the recommendations appended to it. The joint assessment committee has reached the conclusion that the prevailing law and order situation admitted of an immediate re-start of the suspended development activities. While making such a recommendation, the committee has been duly cognizant of an incidence of kidnapping and extortion of development workers, albeit on a reduced scale. The crimes are put down to regional party conflicts and fund-raising through illegal toll-collection. There is also a recognition of the fact that potential for tension and conflict exists owing to tribal and non-tribal differences and persistence of problems concerning land, election and law and order situation. All the differences cannot be ironed out overnight but the common yearning for development should act as a catalyst.

It's heartening to note the mission was primarily inspired by the knowledge that while many development partners of Bangladesh were ready to resume socio-economic assistance to the CHT, in some cases, they were even willing to raise the quantum of it. It's imperative therefore that peace reigns supreme among the tribal communities themselves and as between them and the settlers from plainland.

On the security front, the suggestion that the risk management capacity be enhanced in the CHT merits immediate consideration. To this end, we need to set up monitoring and reporting mechanism by a close networking between the local police and the communities. The local police will have to be strengthened so as to make them competent to run the camps which are now being operated by the army. The latter would like to be in the garrison.

The best underpinnings to peace and stability can come from an all-round development of the area. The economy has stagnated during the last 25 years of insurgency and the society caught up in the whirlwind of poverty and low literacy levels. The region needs massive investments to grow. Now that the risk to development workers and equipment in the CHT is 'at an acceptable level', there should be no dearth of FDI infusion alongside an ODA inflow. Our own private sector could be enthused to invest if they receive equity support from banks. We should turn our attention to the region that offers golden opportunities for a whole range of processing, furniture, service and tourism industries to develop.

Do not go gentle into the night



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

YOU were an inveterate traveller. Whatever the destination and length of sojourn you came back, come rain or sunshine. But not this time. You have now gone to a place from where no traveller returns. As I try to concentrate my restless mind and collect the runaway feelings you are beyond all earthly cares and mundane thoughts. It appears so incongruous for some one like you who savored life down to the dregs.

In this city, where you were born, grew up, worked and breathed your last only a few hours ago, nothing has changed except the shifting sands of time. Evening is approaching now, it having nothing else to do, as Beckett wrote about sunrise. Darkness is gathering around me like relentless shadows of advancing marauders. I can already feel the stillness of night spreading out like icy cold wind. But there is no shiver down my spine, no tingling feelings of the unknown. I did not know that knowledge of irrevocability could bring such numbness in body and spirit. But deep down there is restless stirrings. Memories swirl around as if caught in a maelstrom. Six feet under, where you are lying now, no human experience has access. It is terra incognita to the living. You left all the memories behind to remind us of you. So here I am sitting alone in my room gradually swallowed up by gathering darkness and trying to put pieces together. It is a painful act.

This evening could be an occasion full of joy and laughter like one of those many evenings at your house. You believed in celebration of life, rejoicing in its many splendored beauty. I can visualize you briskly moving about in your living room, the walls brimming with mementos of the past. I can hear you regaling your guests with wit, humour and wholesome jokes. You and Nashid were the epitome of hospitality, exuding warmth and friendship. As usual I would be the odd guest out, asking for this and

several years. We did not attend the same school or college. Our professions were different. Yet when fate brought us together at a very late stage in our lives the chemistry started to work slowly but steadily. You had those qualities of head and heart that make friendship inevitable. Besides, we more or less shared the same attitude to life. It was, as Bogart said in Casablanca in a different context, "the beginning of a beautiful friendship". Reduced to cliché it still captures the spirit poignantly.

was you found your calling as a teacher by accident and that too, very late in your life. You became a successful teacher though teaching was not your original profession. You proved that with dedication and will a person can reach new heights even in a new field. For whatever little time was granted to you it was spent unstintingly for the development of the college. You were both strict and affectionate, as any good teacher and administrator has to be. You might have inherited this trait from your father, Prof. Abu Hena. As

extended family. The solemn silence was punctuated by paroxysm of sobs, muffled sighs and shuffling of benumbed feet. It was evident that they begrudged your departure, almost refusing to accept the inevitability of mortality. Words of consolation were recited again and again which echoed under the roof: "From Him we cometh and to Him we returneth." Even when faced with such finality minds baffled with a sudden sense of loss desperately search for rationale. It is a heart-rending try. Reconciliation is

into such momentous decisions. You viewed the rapid growth of private educational institutions with mixed feelings. They had to be saved from crass commercialism by quality education. You strongly believed that the justification of private institutions could be only in the development of intellectual excellence and high academic standard. You strove hard to achieve that goal together with your colleagues.

Your struggle with the deadliest and meanest disease was an object lesson in courage and fortitude. At no stage of your terminal illness I saw you breaking down in grief, shock or helplessness. You fought like a brave general in the battlefield without cringing or cowering before the treacherous enemy. In your illness and the grim battle to cope with it you became larger than life. You just would not allow the killer disease to get the better of you without challenge. The calm composure and determination to remain non-chalant were epic stuff. Even the last time when we met, only three days before you passed into eternal sleep, we engaged in our usual bantering and pleasantries as if nothing ominous had cast its long shadow. There was no expression of dark foreboding or fear of the imminent end. The abiding image that I will always have of you will be that defiance in the face of death. It said: "Death be not arrogant."

As I stood at the threshold of the hospital cabin for the last time, you were reclining on the bed looking towards the door kept half-ajar. There was a boyish and even jaunty smile on your face. Right then you were suffering from excruciating pain but gave no hint of it. I waved at you not realizing that I was actually bidding farewell. Turning back, as the door closed, I remembered the hauntingly plaintive words of Dylan Thomas: "Do not go gentle into the night." But you had to go.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

As I stood at the threshold of the hospital cabin for the last time, you were reclining on the bed looking towards the door kept half-ajar. There was a boyish and even jaunty smile on your face. Right then you were suffering from excruciating pain but gave no hint of it. I waved at you not realizing that I was actually bidding farewell. Turning back, as the door closed, I remembered the hauntingly plaintive words of Dylan Thomas: "Do not go gentle into the night." But you had to go.

that which were not programmed for the evening. You would bring those tidbits with mock irritation muttering darkly that guests like me would not be invited in future. I had heard it so many times before that I would laugh it away. It was a common refrain of the evening's merry making. I am not so sure even now whether you liked me in spite or because of those childlike antics. Did I take too much advantage of your indulgence? If I did it was because of the closeness of our hearts.

It is one of the supreme ironies of my life that I should have become one of your best friends. We came to know each other only a few years ago and that too through serendipity. It was not friendship, not even liking, at first sight. It would have been natural for us not to pass beyond general acquaintance. We did not belong to the same age group, you being senior to me by

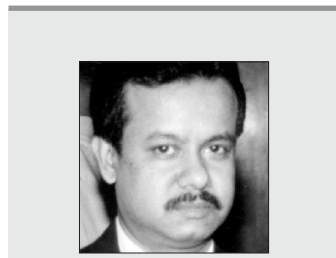
You won over people with effortless aplomb because you could understand them and engendered a feeling of security. You related to people as easily as dewdrops fall on petals. You were considerate to a fault. There was no end to your help and compassion. Students, patients, ordinary employees, all were beneficiaries of the greatness of your heart. The endless stream of mourning people filing past your coffin in the basement of the college bore testimony to your popularity. "Principal Anis Waiz is dead. Pay your last respect to his mortal remains". The students did not wait for this call. They had come in droves, boys and girls, all overwhelmed in shock and grief. They knew that a friend, philosopher and guide was lost forever. They looked crestfallen which is more than what can be said about teacher-student relation these days. Yet the irony

the Provost of our hall (S M Hall) he endeared himself with his administrative capability and scholarship. His eloquence on the stage was mesmerizing as it was legendary. When I wanted to know how could a doctor learn to write and speak English with such proficiency you told me that your father used to teach English while he took you on daily walk. How many fathers do that kind of thing now-a-days, not just for English, for anything of importance? I wondered. G. K. Chestertons don't write wonderful letters to their sons anymore! Was it because of that upbringing that I was so considerate and affectionate to your sons and daughters? It was a marvel to see your grown up daughter, a doctor of repute in her own right, being so dependent on you.

As you lay in eternal sleep in your coffin the motel crowd who came to pay you last respect became an

rendered more difficult when the mourners know that their loved one was so full of energy and zeal. The thought that you had and could contribute more for the development of the college and promotion of welfare of people under your responsibility made the loss appear abrupt and exceptional. You also knew that you had "miles to go before you sleep" and you had "promises to keep." That is why you were caught unawares, suddenly outflanked by the wily enemy. After the diagnosis was final you calmly broke the tragic news to me one day and said, "I don't want to go now." It was not greed for living but the awareness about missions remaining unfulfilled that made you utter those words. The unfinished businesses went beyond the personal and private. Your sense of duty and commitment was too profound to allow personal desires to intrude

Poverty, crime and affluence



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

POVERTY and crime were close cousins once, but now they are strangers. If hunger and destitution created perversions of mind leading to criminal propensities, that isn't true anymore. Nowadays crime is committed not because people don't have any, but because they don't have enough.

In other words, the centre of crime has shifted in our mind. It has shifted from subsistence to comfort, from necessity to luxury, from sufficient to surfeit. Gone are the days when hungry children stole loaves of bread or starving women sold their honour for food, shelter and cloth. Crime back then had a voice of its own. It was an utterance of conscience, a scream of protest, and a metaphysical siren that reminded us that not all was fair in the game of life.

One can say that while absolute poverty is in decline, relative poverty hasn't changed much. If lack of basic necessities tormented people back then, they are now tormented by the lack of basic luxuries. Herbert Marcuse, the American socialist, cautions that the relentless capitalist machine would churn out products to incessantly hurtle luxuries

into necessities. It means, the centre of crime will keep on shifting because need is going to chase greed forever.

Just think of the nature of recent crimes. Children are abducted, held for ransom and then murdered when the deals go sour. People are stabbed or shot on their way from banks. Women are raped by gangs of men, and then wasted like disposable products. There are fights over plots of land, political rivalry, family fortune and social influence. You

of diminishing poverty? How do we explain the increase in our living standard, while quality of life is heading for the pits? Why should we encounter so much bloodshed and violence if our purchasing power has been soaring in the wind of economic prosperity?

And let there be no doubt that that wind of prosperity is blowing. The abject poverty of the 60s and 70s is certainly gone, as people in general are better fed and clad in this country than before. Since 1980

pushed him to death.

This is perhaps an appropriate example of how poverty and crime have detached from each other. In some cases, poverty was ennobling and it lifted those who had learned to take it as an opportunity to purify their souls. Great men chose to be poor and ordinary, because the primacy of the soul could be diminished in the ecstasy of the body. Poverty was a sort of religion for those who feared the sacrilegious power of affluence. People like

from the urgency of keeping body and soul together. Necessity is demanded by survival, inclination is the urge to abuse when one is comfortable with life.

If we closely look at the crimes of our time, they are mostly caused by that urge to seek and abuse comfortable life, our satisfaction level galloping like a horse gone berserk. A man rented a house for two women, introducing them as his wife and sister. Then he engaged these women in prostitution, and slaugh-

when ransom isn't delivered.

Somehow crime has become an euphoric passion, something Dionysian when reveling men commit atrocious acts. It is no longer the desperate act of exasperated mind. Instead it is the rapacity of rapture, something people commit in the pathetic frenzy of unrestrained delusions. Crime is no longer the depravity created by deprivation; it's the madness created by excess, the impulse promoted by the sense of abundance that nothing is wrong in the pursuit of pleasure.

Which makes crime unpredictable, an elusive instinct that lurks behind the smiling face of a cousin, friend, parent or neighbour. Which makes it difficult to identify suspects in the array of faces, which look polite, sophisticated, devout and friendly as crime pervades across social frontiers. Poverty and crime have become strangers, but it has shifted the geographical centre of crime from the unknown to the known, from the predictable to the unpredictable, from the unfamiliar to the familiar.

Previously crime was connected with pain, now it is connected with pleasure. When miscreants chased a little girl in Gaibandha, she jumped into a pond finding no other escape. The miscreants stood on the bank of the pond while the girl sank in its water. One of the miscreants wanted to save her while two others held him back. What was fun to them, was death to her. If she couldn't live to give them pleasure, they chose to extract that pleasure from watching her die painfully in that water.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

CROSS TALK

Somehow crime has become an euphoric passion, something Dionysian when reveling men commit atrocious acts. It is no longer the desperate act of exasperated mind. Instead it is the rapacity of rapture, something people commit in the pathetic frenzy of unrestrained delusions. Crime is no longer the depravity created by deprivation; it's the madness created by excess, the impulse promoted by the sense of abundance that nothing is wrong in the pursuit of pleasure.

have the psychotic killers, who poison their relatives, strangle their wives and children, and then sordid stories of men and women, whose scandalous behaviours bring havoc on their families.

Many crimes remain unresolved. Gang wars, underground conflicts, and unexposed enemies bring dead bodies to our rivers, parks, ditches, roadsides and fields. None of these appears to have connection with poverty. Instead these crimes are outcome of inordinate desire for wealth and power, the catastrophe of reckless men driven by their infinitely elastic ambitions.

How do we explain the growing incidence of grisly crimes in the face

the number of people living on less than \$1 a day in the world has fallen by about 200 million, even as the world's population has risen by 1.6 billion. In Bangladesh, amenities of life have improved as a part of this worldwide trend of increased earnings.

That doesn't tell us why crime is growing. That doesn't tell us why a high-ranked police officer shot himself to death despite the fact that he was a good provider to his family. His wife lived in his flat, cruised in his car, slept in his bed, but her heart wasn't into the marriage. For all the money that the poor guy had spent, he could buy everything except the peace of mind, which eventually

Swami Vivekananda gave away their riches to protect their souls.

But there were others who differed with them. Daniel Defoe, the English novelist and journalist, prayed, "Give me not poverty, lest I steal." According to him covetousness is the root of all evil, so poverty is the worst of all snares. "Vice came in always at the door of necessity, not at the door of inclination", he concluded.

Perhaps one can argue, which comes first between inclination and necessity. Inclination is purely a mental thing, which arises from the complex stream of experience and perception. Necessity is largely biological, something that arises

tered them one night before vanishing in the air. He pushed his comfort level from one notch to another, from the unspokeable to the unthinkable, from falsehood to murder, from blasphemy to bawdiness to bloodshed.

It is amazing how people become comfortable with comfort, how they are inclined to catch up with inclinations that work, and crime becomes fad. When policemen raped under-aged girls, it went on for a while. Then came raping of women and killing of them afterwards, slaughtering them, skinning them and cutting them into pieces. The latest fad is abduction of young children, who are brutally killed

OPINION

Absence of parliamentary oversight

BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

IN his commentary, "The dangers of two-thirds majority," Mr Mahfuz Anam cited several examples of undemocratic behaviour by governments in South Asia and attributed such behaviour to the so-called "curse" of the two-thirds majority. He argued that armed with an overwhelming majority governments in this region often misinterpreted the people's verdict and instead of initiating bold programmes to improve the conditions of the people, they undertook coercive measures against those who opposed them. This is an interesting argument about the psyche of our politicians. However, I feel that it is the absence of effective legislative oversight - rather than the curse of the two-thirds majority as such - which is the real culprit. Minus the precautionary measures in their system of governance, such excesses could also happen in other countries.

The repressive behaviour is not unique to our politicians. Human beings, irrespective of their national origin, are not angels. As Bertrand Russell observed, people have possessive instinct - instincts to

concentrate power, dominate others, accumulate wealth and so on. Every mortal is born with these weaknesses. However, social values, norms, traditions, sense of morality and laws prevent people from nakedly catering to such instincts.

When human beings assume governmental powers they gain the opportunity and the authority to indulge in these human frailties almost with impunity. All governments enjoy, in the words of Max Weber, the "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force" over its people. Such lawful authority can easily be misused and misapplied, resulting in the concentration of power and the creation of tyranny. The "tyranny of the majority" is one of its ugliest manifestations. The bigger the majority, the more arrogant the government obviously could become by enacting the so-called "black laws" or taking despotic actions. This is what happened many times in South Asia. It could happen anywhere if there is no restraint on the exercise of legitimate powers.

The true challenge even in a democracy therefore is to restrict the powers of the government to

prevent excesses by elected officials. The principle of separation of powers was developed by political philosophers to put in place such a restraint. Under this principle, governmental authorities are fragmented and diffused among three competing organs or branches, namely the executive, legislative and judiciary. It is designed for each of the three branches to check the others' powers and balance those powers by its own. For the principle of separation of powers to work properly and effectively in practice, the three branches must be co-equal, autonomous and independent of each other. They must not perform the tasks of others and transgress the limits set by the Constitution.

In mature and well functioning democracies, the principle of separation of powers is practiced aggressively and effectively, safeguarding people's liberties. In those countries, the legislature, for example, performs, sometimes over zealously, an oversight or surveillance function that prevents the government from degenerating into tyranny. The judiciary, as the repository of the judicial powers of the state, interprets and safeguards the

Constitution in order to check excesses by the other two branches.

Although the doctrine of separation of powers can be more easily put to practice in a Presidential form of government, its exercise may be relatively more challenging, requiring more vigilance, in a Parliamentary system. In the latter, voters choose the legislators, who then choose one of their colleagues to be the Prime Minister to serve as the chief executive. The Prime Minister finally appoints a Council of Ministers, who serve as executives, from both within and outside the legislature. In such a system, the legislative and executive powers are thus, on the surface, combined in one institution - the legislature. The situation is further complicated by the fact that there are enormous attractions on the part of the legislators to perform executive functions, and at the same time the chief executive also has the incentive to "take care" of the legislators in order to keep them in line. However, in order to prevent the parliamentary government from becoming tyrannical, separate and autonomous identity of the executive and legislative branches must be maintained at

all cost.

In a unitary system, the principle of separation of powers is even more critically important. Unlike in the federal system, in the unitary form of government no demarcation is made between the Central and Provincial subjects. In addition, in a federal system opposing parties could be in power at the Centre and in the Provinces, automatically putting in place a restraining influence. In a unitary system, one party or a coalition of parties hold powers at all levels, magnifying the potential threats to liberty. A strong, autonomous and self-governing system of local government could have a moderating influence on the governmental excesses. (Unfortunately creating such a system has remained an illusive goal for us for the last 30 years). The lack of judicial independence only makes things potentially worse. In the absence of such built-in restraints - as provided by the federal system, the local self-government and the independent judiciary - the role of parliamentary oversight becomes even more important. The Parliamentary Standing Committees can provide the primary safeguard against executive

excesses by holding the Council of Ministers and their colleagues to account.

It countries like ours, the principle of separation of powers does not work, although it is a fundamental pillar of our Constitution. We may not be even serious about it. We also hardly make any distinction between the executive and the legislative branches, compromising their independence.

In parliamentary democracies the oversight role is normally reserved for and vigorously performed by the opposition. Unfortunately, the continuing absence of the opposition from the Parliament has been depriving us, as a nation, of this vital safeguard. As a result, as our experience since 1991 shows, the successive governments became more intolerant with the absence of the opposition MPs in the Parliament. Ironically, a vigorous watchdog role of the opposition in the Parliament could perhaps prevent the excesses of the government - the very excuse used by them for not participating in parliamentary activities.

Another reason for the absence of effective legislative oversight and

thereby the failure of the system of checks and balances in our country is the concentration of powers in our political parties and also in the government. Such concentration puts the Members of the Parliament under the iron grip of the party/government heads, turning them "voiceless" and restraining them from becoming adversarial. The Article 70 of our Constitution, ensuring absolute party loyalty, accentuates this problem.

The essence of democracy is the rule by many rather than the rule by an individual or a small coterie. Where the whims of an individual rule, not the collective wisdom and the judgement of many reflected in laws and procedures, there is great danger of misrule and autocracy. Our experience from South Asia and elsewhere teaches us that every individual is capable of abusing powers and if he/she attains it, it is likely to do so unless there are restraints in the system. Effective parliamentary oversight and the judicial independence - that is a system of checks and balances - can provide such much needed restraints. Failure to institute the restraints is the prescription for governance failure.

If the parliamentary oversights were effective in our country, the relevant Parliamentary Standing Committees would hold hearings following the unfortunate event at Dhaka University last month to identify and recommend action against those who were responsible. With the necessary administrative/legal action taken against the offenders, the repetition of such events would be prevented in the future, making our democratic system work. Both the parties in power and in opposition are and must be equally responsible for such effective working of the system.

To conclude, democracy requires good, honest and responsible people running the government. More importantly, it requires external and continuing vigilance which will keep people honest and make them responsible. Mere holding elections after every few years is not enough.

Professor Badul Alam Majumdar is Country Director, the Hunger Project-Bangladesh.