

Police reform can't wait

Improvement in longer-term governance hinges on it

WORLD Bank Country Director Frederick T Temple has told the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) luncheon meeting on Monday that army deployment was a clear indication, among other things, of the police's inability to cope with the alarming rise in crime and violence. The failure, as Mr Temple pointed out, makes a strong case for immediate police reform, which should be viewed "as a priority component of any longer-term governance improvement strategy". He has stated the obvious, echoing the generally-held views on the subject.

Now, the army's involvement in anti-crime operations which has raised questions about its legal basis, more so after 16 deaths allegedly in custody since Operation Clean Heart began on October 17, should and, as the prime minister has promised, would be a short-term arrangement. We believe the troops will go back to the barracks once law and order improves to a point where the police can take over from. Ultimately, therefore, the police have to sustain the outcome of the ongoing anti-crime drive. Will the police be up to the task?

Let's face facts. Our police force is "overworked, underpaid and extremely vulnerable to reprisals (from various quarters)". The police-people ratio is abysmally low in Bangladesh even by South Asian standards. Our field-level policemen still use three-nought-three rifles of Second World War vintage whereas the criminals have modern weapons in their armoury. Their training regime also needs dramatic changes. Unfortunately, while successive governments have talked volubly about police reform, no one actually initiated the process. This can only be explained in terms of perpetuating political interference in police work. The police have never been allowed to work without fear or favour. Instead, the government of the day has invariably used the force as a tool to repress political opponents.

Therefore, any reform agenda for the police must attach top priority to its operational freedom. Next, there should be an improvement of their functional environment, which means better compensation, stricter departmental discipline, comprehensive training regime and, most importantly, civilian oversight of their services. We really believe that the police can rid themselves of their corrupt and inefficient image if they are given the support they need from the government.

Turkish election outcome

Points to ponder

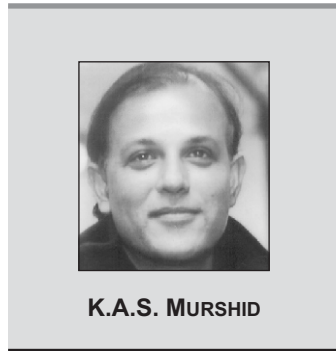
THE landslide electoral victory of the main Islamist party in secular Turkey has made the world sit up and take note. It is by no mean a small feat by a political party founded only a year ago, to have earned such widespread electoral support and, with that a rare opportunity, to form a single-party government in more than a decade. Though the leader of Justice and Development Party (AK), Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a controversial figure himself because of his conviction in 1998 for 'Islamic sedition', vowed to keep up the nation's secular image, maintain good relations with the West and keep on the EU track, the proof of his assurances will be in the pudding he makes out of his success. How secular he turns out to be with his two-thirds majority only time can tell.

There is no doubt though, the international political ambience tends to affect domestic politics. Otherwise how would one explain the recent change in the internal political make-up of Turkey which significantly is adjacent to Iraq? Seemingly, whenever the US plans to take up an aggressive agenda against a Muslim nation, a resurgence of Islamist tendencies can be seen in the surrounding area. The United States has something more to worry about: its key ally Saudi Arabia has backed out on its commitment to let the West use the country's land and other facilities in their possible war against Iraq.

How far can the victorious leader Erdogan pursue secularist western lines would be eagerly watched by all, especially since the former coalition government collapsed over massive differences of opinion on human rights reforms, an essential criteria for EU membership.

Erdogan has another tough job ahead and that is taking along with him the country's powerful army, which had ousted an Islamist-led government five years ago. Whatever the concerns we just have to wait and watch how the new leader tackles the challenges ahead and safeguards the country's 'national interest'.

Sing a song of joy



K.A.S. MURSHID

PERHAPS it is a little early to celebrate but even the mere idea of a crime free Bangladesh makes me burst out in joyful song. And clearly the day of deliverance is nigh. All the signs speak for themselves (or at any rate should): no acid throwing incidents; no rape and murder; no tolls collected on the highways; no kidnappings for ransom; no trafficking in women and children; no corruption in Government procurement contracts; no meter tampering; no Mig and Frigate deals; no extortion by *mastans*; no extortion by Customs or the NBR, and most importantly, no extortion by the Police. And what is this I hear? Even a *Jamaat* activist has been apprehended? That indeed must be our crowning achievement worthy of the highest laurels. Who knows how many people have thus been saved from having their tendons severed! From now on YOU GUYS can count on my undying loyalty. *Sonar Bangla* surely is just round the corner -- so let us sing a song of joy and happi-

ness! OK, so I have overdone it a little bit -- nothing really to worry about or even unusual. After all, we as a race are given to a little exaggeration, as so eloquently reflected in that famous *puthi* text which I shall endeavour to translate: 'Rows and rows of soldiers have fallen, lacs and lacs of men are dead, a body count however reveals only 50,000 heads'. The point however is that '50,000' is still a pretty large number

would not be fair to ask you to remain on our streets for so long -- after all it isn't as if you are going to be paid a *UN per diem*; (b) the 'human rights' chatter is, I am sure, beginning to bug? The longer you stay on, the louder will be the buzz, or should I say 'roar' -- therefore this is another reason to take a break; (c) diminishing returns are beginning to set in (or am I imagining this) so that it may become difficult to sustain success -- that is the most

newspapers are able to warn us of an impending crackdown on crime well in advance? Is this because of highly aggressive journalism operating in a cut-throat market? Or is it merely the result of a highly efficient public information system of the government? Next time I meet my editor, I must remember to ask him. While I am sure that no one intended to have all the top notch figures in the underworld flee from impending justice that in fact seems

kidnappers, the toll collectors and extortionists, the petty neighbourhood gangs ... they have made our daily lives utterly miserable up and down the country. If we have been able to strike fear and terror in their hearts, then that is excellent news and should quickly serve to improve our 'quality of life' index. I do wish, however, that we stopped the time-honoured practice of blindfolding suspects and tying their hands

workers with dire consequences if you do not cough up? I guess they are NOT referring to the dons and godfathers -- I mean the ones who are behind Frigate deals and huge construction contracts, the ones with the private armies, and the ones who appear to have left the country temporarily.

Actually, I concur fully with our business leaders' view of law and order. Let's get rid of the irksome small timers first before targeting the big fish. After all many of the big fish may well turn out to be members of this or that Chamber -- now that would be embarrassing. In the meantime we have to think carefully about what to do with our large 'standing' (or should one say 'watching') Police forces. I mean is it possible to motivate this body to actually move on crime instead of merely gazing on as bystanders as crimes get committed right in front of their noses? To put it another way what would it take to get these gentlemen (and some ladies) to become more effective crime fighters? Someone told me that the salary of a police constable is the same as that of a sweeper. Now that may well make our sweepers happy but I doubt if that is sufficient encouragement for more vigorous law enforcement. Oh well, let us nevertheless celebrate and make merry, although on reflection, I would request that you keep the volume down.

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

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

The acid throwers, the kidnappers, the toll collectors and extortionists, the petty neighbourhood gangs ... they have made our daily lives utterly miserable up and down the country. If we have been able to strike fear and terror in their hearts, then that is excellent news and should quickly serve to improve our 'quality of life' index. I do wish, however, that we stopped the time-honoured practice of blindfolding suspects and tying their hands behind their backs -- that is exactly what the Pak Army did to us in 1971. Really, we must find a better model to emulate -- time perhaps to update those military manuals (or at least to adapt them for civilian use).

so that even after all the exaggeration if we have been able to nab a significant number (including a few REALLY rotten apples) then perhaps we can all go back to the barracks with a sense of having accomplished something.

The question that inevitably arises is that if we have indeed been so successful why not hang around a bit longer in order to be able to FINISH the job? I can think of many reasons to shoot down that argument mercilessly: (a) the job is too big and cannot be finished off quickly; or even in our lifetime. It

dreadful stage where one gets bogged down into a long, unwinable 'war'. What I am basically saying is that beyond the 'short, sharp, shock' stage there has to be a longer strategy that has to attempt (to paraphrase Sharon) the dismantling of the infrastructure of crime and criminality. And that, I fear requires a cold reassessment of the nature of politics in the country and its nexus with organised crime, black money, private armies and big business.

I have sometimes wondered whether it is purely accidental that

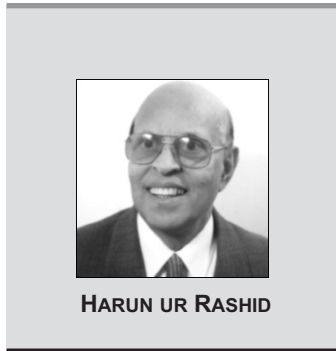
largely to have been the outcome. Next time Gentlemen, perhaps we can have the headlines AFTER the top goons have been caught.

I would however concede that the top notchers are necessarily more difficult to nab: they have resources, clout, connections and access, and will therefore be the LAST to be caught if at all. It is the small time hoods who are the most insecure, and must necessarily bear the brunt of any 'crackdown'. I was going to say 'how unfair' but I shall refrain. Small they may be, but they too are a vicious lot: the acid throwers, the

behind their backs -- that is exactly what the Pak Army did to us in 1971. Really, we must find a better model to emulate -- time perhaps to update those military manuals (or at least to adapt them for civilian use).

I was just trying to remember something else in this context. When our business leaders talk about the 'law and order problem', what exactly do they refer to? Am I right in understanding that they are in fact talking largely about the 'small guys' -- the ones who turn up at your factory gate asking for a contribution and who threaten your

Why does the European Union expand its empire?



HARUN UR RASHID

THE European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union (EU), has recommended for expansion of the EU from 15 member states to 27, 10 new members in 2004 and 2 in 2007. The 10 states, namely , Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia are poised to be admitted into the EU. Except Cyprus and Malta, the rest were former Communist states. At the end of the year the Copenhagen Summit of the EU is expected to finally decide the matter so that 10 new members may join by 2004. Bulgaria and Romania are set to join in 2007.

However the task will not be easy. For the European Union, it has to agree to finance the new members, in particular under the Common Agricultural Policy. As for the new members they are to undertake structural reforms so as to privatise state-owned industries with possible consequences of rise in unemployment. Furthermore they are to hold referendum next year on the question of joining the EU.

Asupranational authority
The European Union is a unique institution in that it is a supranational authority. A supranational authority is distinct from inter-governmental organisation. Supranational authority is composed of states and has the power to take decisions binding on member states whether or not they participate in its decision. On the other hand inter-governmental

organisation cannot take decisions on behalf of its constituent members. For example neither the UN nor the SAARC can decide on behalf of its members.

The European Union has become an international player on its own right as distinct from its members and it has its own currency *Euro* and as a result 12 countries have abolished their currencies such as French *Frank* or German *Mark*. The European Union reflects the combined policy of the 15 member-states while individual European states are free to have sepa-

be political, economic and strategic reasons.

First, the European Union wants to play an important and necessary role in international relations at a time when the US has been the lone superpower. It wants to counteract or moderate the US's aggressive role in dominating the world. The EU believes that it is not going to turn itself into a military power in the same way the US is a military power. The European Union uses "soft power" by influencing "the hearts and minds" of the people of other states. Therefore the bigger it is, the

ment. The EU wants to reverse the situation after the fall of communism and unify as far as possible to address global issues, such as environment, terrorism, drug-trafficking and organised crimes.

Fourth, the expansion the EU may strategically emerge a powerful entity as it intends to establish a separate European rapid reaction force in 2003. The US does not appear to be happy that it spends much more money for defence of Europe than the European countries do. The EU appears not to depend solely on the US in a Euro-

mobility of movement and access to jobs in each other member's country within the Union. The citizens have enjoyed the benefits of the integration of European countries within the Union and in that environment nationalism appears to take a back seat.

Impact of expansion

Seats in the European Parliament are being reallocated to make way for the new entrants. The Commission will need another 4000 public servants, 500 interpreters (21 official languages) swelling about 30,000 workers in Brussels EU's

given in the past because of its human rights record. Turkey introduced 13 EU-inspired laws which among others abolished death penalty, restored ethnic rights for Turkish Kurds and initiated political reforms to qualify as a member. Turkey was not given even a date to start negotiation on admission. The US is reportedly unhappy about Turkey's treatment by the EU.

Germany's conservative defeated candidate for Chancellor Edmund Stoiber reportedly said that Turkey should be kept out, not just because of the threat of a flood of Turkish immigrants but because he believed that the EU was based on "Christian values". This implies that Turkey, being a predominantly Muslim country, will not be accepted in the "Christian Club" of the EU. Turkish politicians were reportedly disappointed with the decision of the EU. Some politicians in the country are so much critical of the EU that it may go its own way and an Islamic-leaning party (Justice and Development Party) is likely to control the new government after the election in November. If this occurs, the US may find difficulty to use Turkish military bases in its war against Iraq.

Conclusion

If the expanded EU finally goes through the Summit in Copenhagen at the end of the year, it will represent almost the whole Europe, taking a unique shape of "United States of Europe" with new opportunities and new risks. At the dawn of this century Europe may leave behind what probably its bloodiest and darkest last century and may emerge to hold out peace instead of war. The strong nationalism which manifested in Europe after the French Revolution in 1789 seems to be replaced by a "new spirit of the age" of togetherness for economic prosperity in the 21st century.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

At the dawn of this century Europe may leave behind what probably its bloodiest and darkest last century and may emerge to hold out peace instead of war. The strong nationalism which manifested in Europe after the French Revolution in 1789 seems to be replaced by a "new spirit of the age" of togetherness for economic prosperity in the 21st century.

rate bilateral relations with developing countries. The EU independently enters into contract with other states and recently it negotiated a contract with Mozambique for fishing rights in Mozambique coastal waters. The European Union has a diplomatic presence in many countries in the world including in Bangladesh (Delegation of the European Union).

In recent years Europeans have been living history in quick motion. After the collapse of communism in Europe, the European Union has been confronted with a challenge about the purpose and objectives of the Maastricht (the Netherlands) Treaty of 1992 that created European Union in 1993 from its existence of the European Economic Community (EEC).

Reasons for expansion

The question is why does the European Union want to expand eastwards? The desire of integration of European states appears to

more influence it can exercise.

Second, the globalisation of economy led the EU to plan enlargement of the Union to include the former communist states of central and east Europe. The expanded EU will swell to 450 million people in 2004 from the existing 370 million. By 2007 with the entry of Bulgaria and Romania it will comprise of 500 million people. The current expansion will make the EU the biggest grouping of rich nations, surpassing the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) with its 401 million Americans, Canadians and Mexicans. The expanded EU would become the economic power-house in Europe that could influence global economy.

Third, it appears that the EU's agenda is to prevent war with or within the eastern European nations and to build an orderly and peaceful Europe. The last century witnessed Europe divided and pessimism and scepticism swept through the conti-

pean crisis as it was manifested during the war against Yugoslavia in 1999 -- US military leadership with its weapons took the centre stage.

Finally, nationalistic aspirations which have been the basis of nation-states appear to dwindle in an affluent society. People are attracted to nationalism because creation of nation-states will generate economic benefits to them. When people perceive that their way of life has become stable, affluent and relaxed it is argued that enthusiasm of nationalism declines.

Never in human history has such a large proportion of the population been as healthy and prosperous as it has become in Western Europe in the last one hundred years. The free-market economy has produced a social system in which the interests of the citizens of Western Europe encompassed a vast plurality of initiatives and aspirations. The European Union has provided to its citizens a borderless Europe, easy

headquarters. To ease the shift of suddenly being part of a powerful new market, transition periods were agreed for some reforms. Rich foreign farmers will not be allowed to buy Polish farmland for 12 years and many eastern workers will not be able to travel for work in the West for the first seven years.

The benefits of the expansion appears to be that higher incomes in eastern Europe is the best way to stem the flow of refugees from poorer parts of Europe. The lure of membership has already prompted important democratic reforms in most applicant nations, with voters turning away from headline nationalists, fearing their nation would face EU rejection.

Turkey left out

However the expansion with new members left an unpleasant political dimension, that is not to include the membership of Turkey. Turkey applied for the membership in 1961 but no serious consideration was

OPINION

Cross-border women labour migration: More responsible reporting needed

THERESE BLANCHET

A report appeared in the Daily Star (21 Oct. 2002), titled "Most women seeking jobs abroad end up as sex workers". What has been exposed is shocking and I feel especially concerned since I directed the research on which the report is based.

ATSEC, a coalition of NGOs working towards prevention of trafficking in women and in children offered a venue to present the 18-month research our team conducted under sponsorship from USAID. ATSEC's participation was limited to the organisation of a one-day seminar. The DS report wrongly credited them with having carried out the research. Considering the huge banner hung above the podium on that day, the mistake is not surprising. The researchers were not mentioned. As a result of this omission, confusion followed. Our research findings were made to fit ATSEC's agenda. Thus, the focus was said to be trafficked

women when we clearly targeted migrant women. Women who engaged in sex work were amalgamated with trafficked women. The important differences in migratory patterns between the Middle East and India were muddled up. We lost control. In the end, we hardly recognised the presentation made of our work except for the peak news: most migrant women engage in sex work.

Our research was hijacked. We got neither the credit nor the right to an accurate presentation of the research findings in the media. We fear women migrant themselves were harmed by this sensational splashing of the work some of them do while ignoring so many other aspects of the migratory process and we apologise to them. The only justification to expose what women migrant wish to hide is to actively work for their greater safety and less abusive working conditions. I am not sure the DS

report contributed to this.

The decision to disseminate our findings was not an easy one. After holding back for some time, we decided to go ahead and share the data for the following reasons. First, the thick cover maintained so far on the types of work offered or forced upon women in the Middle East has made it easier for unscrupulous *dalals* to trap new recruits unaware. Secrecy has always facilitated the work of traffickers. Second, Bangladeshi women are not the only ones facing such situations. We hope the Bangladesh government may join other sending countries (Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, the Philippines) and with them press for a greater respect of human rights, proper contracts, decent pay, etc from employers in receiving countries. Needless to say, such advocacy requires accurate and up to date data. Finally, women need to be informed about health risks so that they may protect themselves. It was felt that, if

speaking was risky, silence may be even more so.

The way our findings were presented in old wrappings make us realise how difficult it is to change perceptions. Report such as that published in the DS does not dispel old stereotypical views that migration for women is bad and leads to trafficking. It fails to recognise the new and potentially revolutionary impact of women labour movements on women. Actually, the consequences of women migrating without guardians, earning and sending remittances home, becoming family providers, buying land in their own name, inverting traditional roles and choosing their husbands are not realised. In this research, we discovered women who did not fit the image of total victims which many NGOs and media like to reproduce. In a locality of Jessore where women labour migration is common, one Union Parishad chairman claimed that he could no longer arbitrate conflicts with return-

ees. "They can speak to men, they have lost their shame and they have well garnished bank accounts. They don't listen to us anymore. How can we do their *shalish*?" This research shows a society changing far more rapidly and drastically than generally assumed. Beneath an unchanging surface, the strong current running underneath is shaking the foundation of age-old institutions.

Migrant women's experiences, their resilience and their coping mechanisms show a mixed picture. Women's reaction to *bidesh* depends on the hardship they experienced at home before migration. The denial of respect did not always start abroad. Commenting about sex work, some women we met conclude that it gives them greater value. "I do not have to cook for the men I serve, I do not have to bear their insults or their beatings. Or again: "I did not know I could be so attractive and that these well educated, good looking and

rich men could desire me." Should we not pay attention to the way the migrant women themselves tell their stories? Migration is a tough trial. When caught between a stone and a rock, we see most women developing a tremendous energy and determination to make migration succeed, eventually. Cheated or trafficked women often try a second migration. They do not have the option to fail. To be trafficked marks the beginning of some migrant woman's career but generally not the end.

Labour migration comprises many shady corners. Why speak only about women engaged in sex work? Has anyone bothered to find out what men do to survive in the Middle East, which *dhanda* they engage in to recoup the 1,50,000 taka they gave to the recruiters? When I visited Kuwait in June 2000, I met Bangladeshi men and women working for a Company. Both were paid the same meagre wages -- between 18 and 22 KD per month --

and some had not received their salary for months. When men engage in activities which are low prestige, illegal or illegitimate, there is always less curiosity. Would it hurt constructs of masculinity to expose these survival strategies or talk about men as victims? Why this fascination about women only? Media, researchers, NGO, we all bear a responsibility in the construction of the stereotype that men migrate and women are trafficked, an issue which must be addressed.

Whether one agrees or not with the need to protect women and keep them inside, within family, community and country, the government ban on women labour migration is not working. We met no candidate for migration who was turned back at the airport. An unofficial "tax" is systematically imposed by the airport immigration police for allowing illegal women to leave. It used to be 5,000 taka but with the crisis in passport books at the beginning of the year, the price

rose to 10,000 taka. This represents 2½ months of a maid's salary. Migrant women do not see in that way the government ban is protecting them.

Unskilled women labour migration is not part of a government or NGO-led project. It occurs in an unregulated manner and as a response to the growing international demand for female labour. The cost of unskilled women labour migration is lower than for men. With or without government permission, Bangladeshi women are migrating. Ignoring this, leads nowhere. Just like men, women contribute to the remittances which are so important to Bangladesh economy. It is about time their existence and their needs be recognised and some services set up for them.

Therese Blanchet is an author and researcher on women issues.