Journalist killing spells doom for society



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

NCE in a while, death becomes a matter of more than personal grief to the bereaved family. It comes as a cruel reminder of the social disruption in the country. In a media-driven environment, private distress is often catapulted into the public arena. Most ominously, when media people are killed, then all hopes for the recovery of the society from the ugly quagmire of politics are lost. While such cases may hardly affect the mightier matters of state, they certainly reflect the brazenness with which powerful people or danger-ous mafia gangs feel they can subvert law and justice.

Once known as the most tranquil zone in Bangladesh, standing not for from the lush green Sundarbans, Khulna and its environs has turned out to be a valley of death for jour-nalists. After the killing of Manik Saha, New Age's special correspon-dent, last January 15, Daily Janmabhumi (Khulna) editor Humayun Kabir Balu was bombed to death by unknown assailants last June 28 in front of his house. With the killing of Balu, a valiant freedom fighter and a journalist of repute and liberal values, who waged war against underworld crime, terrorism and the killing of thirteen journalists in the last ten years in the south western zone, the nation once again feels outraged and shocked.

Khulna has during the last few years featured as the nation's most crime-prone zone with deadly murders committed with increasing frequency. Most shocking has been the number of journalists who have been killed. Strangely, the Khulna police have proved to be totally incapable of arresting such a menacing rise in crime. There is a general sense of alarm across the nation, especially in Khulna, that has been aroused by such a crime-wave targeting newsmen with the sole objective of dissuading them from exposing the vices of society. Humayun Kabir received several death threats for focusing on the

cially voicing disgust, anger, and protest at the ineffectual and flawed investigation of the killing of Manik.

In the Manik Saha case, none of the 12 charge-sheeted accused belonging to outlawed organisation Janajudha could be rounded up. In this case, in the final report, the name of the godfathers masterminding the attack was missing. In the Shamsur Rahman (killed in Jessore in 2001) case, most of the charge-sheeted criminals are evad-

shattered economy and a mafiainfested country. But the mafia infested regime has obviously continued to flourish and this has serious repercussions since it puts normal living, business activities, and investment climate into jeop-

Dhaka, Chittagong, and Khulna have attained the dubious distinction of being a criminal's paradise, where the most heinous crimes are committed at will with alarming frequency. Armed with the most Far from inspiring confidence in

the administration, these measures and assurances that seem to be mostly hollow, have increased the sense of insecurity among the people. Shockingly, the administration's blatant failure to book the perpetrators of journalists' killing one after another have thrown the journalist community into utter despair and many of them are under pressure from their families to leave this hazardous profession. Unless the government takes some drastic

It has to be said ad nauseam that the criminal laws of the land are inadequate to secure the punishment of such murderers and extortionists. What is lacking, however, is proper judicial administration, resolve, and lastly, executive nod. It is ironic that judicial activism and state run policies have never addressed this problem nor demonstrated its concern for the journalists, let alone ordinary peoples' security. No wonder politicians and policemen are encouraged to short-circuit the process.

ing arrest or are now out on bail. The same goes for Saiful Islam Mukul who was killed in 1998 and Harun ur Rashid who was killed in 2002.

Drastic changes in police administration in Khulna have come and gone in the last few years, but the one thing that hasn't changed in Khulna is the law and order situation. Tragically enough, in recent times the law and order situation slipped so drastically that the mayor and minister in charge of Khulna admitted the failure of the police administration to control crime and made the somewhat uninspiring gesture of relinquishing his job.

The ruling alliance speaks in parliament and in the media of the good work done by the police, but the multi-pronged strategy launched to combat crime draws only jeers from the unconvinced citizenry. The words also seem hollow because a good number of influential political leaders and some insiders who prop up the government are history sheeters. Shockingly, some such insiders have been indicted in the recent currency racketeering detected at the Zia Airport. Several incidents this year have established that many of these political giants are still running mafia gangs in their region.

Patronage of criminals by politicians and a demoralised police force have pushed up crime in the country. During the past year, there has been an alarming increase in murder, dacoities, and looting compared to the corresponding period last year. The present alliance government tried to absolve itself of all blame saying that it had inherited a

sophisticated weapons, mafia dons have become a nightmare to the illequipped and ill-trained police in the large metropolises. For the past year or so, the country has resembled a circus. One wonders if there is anything remotely close to a government having administrative control of the country. The administration, apparently has been obliged to play second fiddle to either Bangla Bhai group in the northern part of Bangladesh or PBCP (Janajuddha) in the southwestern part of the country.

Having committed the most atrocious crimes including about fifteen murders, Bangla Bhai and his operatives are virtually running a parallel empire. Should people be inclined to believe that the honourable persons adorning the government are there on the strength of their supposed competence? Surely, to give the country a semblance of governance, one has to rise above cadre politics whose raison d'etre is self-enrichment. If politicians of integrity and competence allow themselves to be browbeaten by their less wholesome colleagues, should they not share the responsibility for the disgraceful state of

The murder of scores of businessmen in Dhaka and Chittagong at the behest of cadre politics has struck terror in the city's business community. The administration has been assuring stringent measures against killing, extortion, and abduction of business people and journalists as well as other members of civil society, who are up against such menacing brutality and crime, but precious little has been achieved.

measures to provide security to the members of this vital community, democratic values would be put to severe test. Given the fact that the present alliance government has been in power for more than two years with such an impressive majority, there was so much these government could have done to give governance a new direction, but they did nothing but tinker. They tinkered with economic reforms instead of giving them a new thrust. Somehow they forgot that law and order was their first priority.

Should the government be reminded again that unless the law enforcers are given a free hand to curb crimes and criminals, regardless of party affiliations, mere spending of crores of taka on import of sophisticated weapons will be of no avail. The tragedy perhaps could have been avoided. For some time now it was reportedly known that the outlaw organisation, the PBCP gangs operating underground, had been hurling death-threats at Humayun Kabir Balu, and Balu reported the matter to the police. It has been reported that Balu survived some previous attacks also. Balu, Manik Saha, Shamsur Rahman and their like tried to identify trends in the society and trace the tensions that lie underneath. Killing of journalists in the southwestern region of the country one after another appears to be the only logical culmination of years of soft pedaling and apathy to such a grave issue, which has totally discredited the administration, and allowed criminals and armed gangs to hold sway over a region which is now on the brink of

The cult of terror, extortion, abduction, and killing began in the late 80s in this second industrial town of Bangladesh when its jute mills, the lone newsprint mill, shipyard and Mongla port activities ground to a halt. Large sections of the adult populace in Khulna and adjoining districts Jessore, Faridpur and Barisal swarmed Khulna for work, but livelihood went suddenly out of employment. Evidently that sorry state of affairs marked by poverty and joblessness bred the ideal situation for criminality of all hues. But crime has now expanded and engulfed the entire southwestern region of the country and even the political system. Neither of the parties has proved to be immune to the contagion.

The growing criminalisation of the state has hoovered up every element in the society including the bureaucracy and the law and order machinery. With the BNP led alliance coming to power in 2001, there has been wide spread transfer of officials from the level of DCs, SPs, right up to the level of IGP and secretaries. The trails of crime investigation has been lost in the process and even the simple maintenance of hospitals and schools remains unattended to in the midst of personnel switches. The swing door phenomenon in the bureaucracy and the consequent policy waffles has turned the country into an investor's nightmare.

In the country, the law lacks its proverbial long arm. And the fact is that criminals have given the slip to the police or are in connivance with them. People by now have come to know the cosy nexus between police officials and criminals. It has to be said ad nauseam that the criminal laws of the land are inadequate to secure the punishment of such murderers and extortionists. What is lacking, however, is proper judicial administration, resolve, and lastly, executive nod. It is ironic that judicial activism and state run policies have never addressed this problem nor demonstrated its concern for the journalists, let alone ordinary peoples' security. No wonder politicians and policemen are encouraged to shortcircuit the process. Getting tough on crime requires the active concurrence of the administrative machinery. Without that helping hand, the rule of law and civilised governance suffers.

Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations, BUET.

The end of cheap money era in the United States



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid

N the 30" of June, 2004, Mr. Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve (the Fed), who was appointed to this position by President Reagan in 1987, finally announced an increase of one quarter per cent (from 1 per cent to 1.25 per cent) in the US benchmark interest rate (also known as the federal funds rate at which banks charge each other for overnight loans). This announcement did not catch anyone by surprise. Actually, almost everyone in the financial world has been expecting such an increase for the last few

If it were the central bank of any other country, no one would bother much about its raising inter-bank rate by one quarter percent. But the Federal Reserve happens to be the Central Bank of world's number one economy and any movement in its interest rates sends ripples throughout the financial markets of the world and often forces central banks of other countries to review their monetary policies. A movement in the benchmark rate of the Fed not only affects inflation, labour market, currency market and the economic growth in the US but also in the EU and the developing countries. This year, it may also have an impact on the results of the November presidential elections in the United States. So in this context it is relevant to ask: Why Mr. Greenspan has chosen this moment to raise the

inter-bankrate? Money has actually been very cheap in the US for a considerable period of time. The recent US bank rate (1 per cent) has been the lowest since 1958 and this modest increase (0.25 per cent) is the first such increase in four years. This easy-money policy has not been accidental. After the collapse of American stock market in 2000, when there were genuine fears of the spread of deflation (when prices fall or remain the same for a long time) in most industrialised countries, the Fed started slashing interest rates. Actually before yesterday's increase, the Fed had resorted to thirteen interest rate cuts to bring it down from 6.5 per

been the lowest among the major create havoc to many companies industrialised countries of the world except Japan (0.10 per cent), which for a number years has enjoyed (or suffered) near zero cheap money without worrying too interest rate because of falling prices (deflation). While the current inter-bank rate in the UK is 4.50 per cent and 5.25 per cent in Australia, in the euro area it stands

The principal reason for Mr. Greenspan's recent announcement

at 2 per cent.

cent to 1 per cent. The US rate has too high and too fast, which would and families, who have acquired properties and assets worth billions of dollars during this long period of much about the level of their indebtedness. He does not want to provoke an uncontrolled slow-down of the economy either, which has grown at an average annual rate of 5.6 per cent for the past nine months or so. No one is sure of the depth and possible duration of this recovery.

ter of 2004. No doubt, this situation is partially due to high oil prices -the US continues to be the world's number one importer of crude oil. This situation together with its huge fiscal deficit (caused by Bush's reckless tax-cut policy) is weakening the dollar, thereby increasing the prices of imported goods According to some analysts, the US government may be forced to borrow \$5 trillion or more over the next 10 years to finance these deficits which will inevitably force the

LETTER FROM EUROPE

The US government may be forced to borrow \$ 5 trillion or more over the next 10 years to finance deficits which will inevitably force the interest rates to rise because the simple rule in economics is : If the demand for a commodity (in this case money) goes up, the price (in this case interest) should go up as well. Unfortunately, higher interest rates in the US have a negative impact on debt-ridden developing countries as well because debt-financing and debt-repayments become more expensive.

of a "measured increase" in the interest rate is the fear of inflation, which has been creeping up slowly. Actually Mr. Greenspan has himself been warning since last year that the benchmark rate of 1 per cent could not be sustained any longer without fuelling inflation. According to many analysts, inflation is still under control but if corrective measures are not taken now, things may get out of hand. (No one wants to go back to the double-digit rates of the seventies.) In the US, while annual inflation up to May, last year was 2.1 per cent, this year the rate has shot up to 3.1 per cent for the same period. There is also a clear tendency that it will go up even further in the next few months, if measures are not taken now. There is a similar inflationary trend in the EU, where annual inflation to May has risen to 2.5 per cent. (In Spain, it now stands at 3.5 per cent) . The European Central Bank had forecasted a maximum of 2 per cent for the euro area. True, in both cases, the main reason for this rise has been higher oil prices. In China, inflation may exceed 5 per cent at the end of the year. Even Japan, which for years was in a deflationary situation, consumer prices have stopped falling. There are clear indications that this year, the consumer-price inflation will be positive. Now the question is: Is this small increase in American interest rate enough to head off inflationary pressures?

Here, Mr. Greenspan is performing a delicate balancing act. He realises that such a low interest rate is not enough to stave off inflation. Yet he realises that he cannot raise it True, productivity growth has been spectacular and hundreds of thousands of new jobs have been created . But Mr. Greenspan, as the head of the Federal Reserve also wants to keep inflation under control, hence this policy of measured increases in the interest rate over a period of between 12 and 18 months.

According to some economists the US economy still has considerable "slack". The more slack there is in an economy, the better the chances are for keeping the inflationary pressures under control. Even though the employment situation is better than before, still there are many millions of unemployed or underemployed workers in the labour market and by all accounts considerable spare factory capacity is also available in the industrial sector. The unemployment rate now stands at 5.6 per cent and the industrial capacity utilisation is 76.9 per cent. So Mr. Greenspan hopes that by keeping a close watch on the pace of economic growth, the unemployment situation, the wage pressure and by raising the interest rates gradually to a maximum of say, 4 per cent by the end of 2005, he will be able to maintain control over the economic recovery and the infla-

However, at present there are several other economic factors at play and it is difficult to foresee how they will affect Mr. Greenspan's gradualist policy. The latest published figures indicate that America's balance of trade and current account deficits are not getting any better .On the contrary, the current account deficit has reached a record 5.1 per cent of GDP in the first quarinterest rates to rise because the simple rule in economics is: If the demand for a commodity (in this case money) goes up, the price (in this case interest) should go up as

Unfortunately, higher interest rates in the US have a negative impact on debt-ridden developing countries as well because debt financing and debt-repayments become more expensive.

Although some analysts expected

the European Central Bank (ECB) president, Mr. Trichet to follow the Fed policy, on the 1" of July, he completely discarded any such idea for the moment. Of course, he kept the door open for a rate increase at the end of the year. The ECB is forced to pursue this policy because of uncertain economic recovery in the euro area. In fact, in Germany, which happens to have the largest economy in the euro area, retail sales declined 1.5 per cent in May. This fragile situation was further under scored by an unprecedented agreement between Siemens and IG Metal, Germany's most powerful union, under which the workweek was extended from 35 hours to 40 hours without an increase in the wages. Meanwhile, higher interest rate (the speculators are convinced that this modest increase is only the first in a series of increases to come in the near future) in the US should strengthen dollar against the euro, which in turn should help the euro area's export efforts. This, in turn, should help this area's economic growth, which is lower than that of the United States. However, one should add a word of caution here. For reasons explained above, dollar's rally against the euro (fed by expected interest rate increases may be short-lived.

The Fed is scheduled to meet

twice (on August 10" and September 21) before the November presidential elections. An increase in the rate of interest will most probably hurt the current incumbent of the White House. Now the big question is: Following his gradualist policy, will Mr. Greenspan dare raise interest rates again before the election? If Mr. Greenspan's past record at the Fed is anything to go by (after the end of the first Gulf War, he refused to manipulate interest rates to favour Bush senior's chances of victory), my guess is that Mr. Greenspan will not hesitate to take difficult decisions if he feels that they are necessary for a steady economic recovery in the United States.

Global economic order and developing countries



QAZI KHOLIQUZZAMAN AHMAD

LOBALISATION is a much used term. Millions of words ave been written and spoken on the subject, both in support and against. There are different views as to why and how globalisation is occurring this time around. The late 19" and early 20 centuries also saw a globalisation in economic markets, although not as pervasive and wide-spread as is the case at the present time. Some claim that globalisation has originated from the dynamics of the phenomenal technological advances, while others, particularly anti-globalisation lobbies, contend that big multinational and transnational companies are the responsible parties for both initiating and carrying he process forward.

Athird viewholds that the origins of globalisation lie in the political decision by the developed countries, led by the USA with active support from the UK. The purpose, it is suggested, was to develop such an international financial architecture and a trade regime as would mobilise savings from around the world to serve the economic interests of the developed countries, particularly the USA which faced high costs of Vietnam war as well as high levels of deficit, without having to make unpopular structural and policy adjustments to their econo-

Thus, those countries insist that the developing countries open up their markets; but they themselves do not walk the promises made and even the agreements entered into under the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations in relation to granting preferential market access to imports, particularly to non-agricultural imports, from the developing countries. They continue to provide very heavy agricultural subsidy, including on livestock. The level of agricultural subsidy in the USA and the rich EU countries runs at such a high level as US\$1 billion a day. On the other hand, they insist that the developing countries do not provide subsidies to agriculture or to any other economic activity. Moreover, international free movement of labour is not allowed, thereby making the on-going globalisation a partial process, denying the developing countries the one opportunity from which they certainly stand to gain.

The Washington Consensus (WC) formulated by the World Bank and the IMF at the behest of the USA and other developed countries provide the basis for the emerging unequal international economic governance processes. The key focus has been on the removal of regulations and control over capital, both national and inter-national, the creation of a global free market in goods and services, and the rolling back of the government.

As to the shaping and working of the first two processes, the dominant developed countries are virtually in total control. Dogmatic down-sizing of the governments in the developing countries has been weakening them further in relation to any meaningful role that they could play to benefit from the evolving free market globalisation. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is mandated to promote free trade globally. But, here again, the shots are called by the dominant international powers. Thus, one finds that even after agreeing in DohaWTO meeting in 2001 to address the development issues (viz., special and differential treatment of developing countries, implementation issues, technology transfer, and commodity issues), they sought to relegate to the back burner those issues in 2003 in Cancun by insisting that the Singapore issues (viz., relationship between trade and investment, interaction between trade and competition policy, transparency in government procurement, trade facilitation) must e taken on board. In fact, as an agency of the United Nations which has proclaimed: "We the peoples", thereby embracing all homo sapiens as equal partners of the global

society, WTO should focus on fair

Can corrective measures be formulated and implemented to establish a fair world economic order, which will enable all nations -- big and small, rich and poor -- to participate effectively in its management and benefit equitably from the fruits it generates?

trade, and not on free, unfair trade. The Millennium Developing Goals

(MDGs), formulated by the United Nations, focus on issues of deep concern in the developing world. These issues include poverty reduction, promotion of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, ensuring environmental sustainability, increasing access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation. There is a lot to be excited about the MDGs, given their relevance to the developing countries, including Bangladesh. However, the question remains as to how far these goals can be achieved within the on-going neoliberal globalization framework, which has been accentuating disparity and exclusiveness among and within nations. In fact, according to UNDP Human Development Report 2003, 54 countries are now poorer than in 1990. Also, during the same time span, the proportion of people going hungry has increased in 21 countries, and life expectancy at birth has fallen in 34.

The concept of sustainable development that focuses on not only economic growth but also on social progress and environmental sustainability and recognises the centrality of the human being in the process has been showered with a lot of rhetorical support in 1992 Rio Earth Summit and 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Devel opment (WSSD) as well as in many other conferences and for a in between the Earth summit and the WSSD and since WSSD. But, in practice, it is the free-market globalisation that is being pushed forward by the international dominant powers through such institutions as the World Bank, the IME and the WTO and, also, using bilateral mechanisms, virtually discarding the oncept of sustainable development for all practical purposes.

The issue of environmental sustainability receives a lot of rhetorical attention, but not much in practical terms. Apathy on the part of the rich countries and lack of human and financial capability as well as of farsight on the part of most of the developing countries are allowing the process of environmental un-sustainability to continue to accentuate.

The USA, the largest contributor to the global emission of greenhouse gases that are responsible for global warming, has withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol on control of emission of greenhouse gasses, thereby jeopardising the prospect of the Protocol to come into effect. The other significant

contributors to this global warming process, including countries in both developed and developing worlds, are also continuing their greenhouse gas emission activities without restriction. Regarding capacity building in the developing countries, commitments made by the developed countries under various Protocols and Declarations for financial and technology transfers have remained mostly unfulfilled.

Clearly, therefore, the process of global economic integration, pro-moted by neo-liberal globalisation, has been accentuating global diversity, with most of the phenomenally increased global wealth and technological advancements being at the disposal of the developed countries. Within countries also, the existing glaring divergence between the rich and the poor has been increasing further in the wake of globalization. The emerging global economic order is, therefore, under severe strains and tensions. The challenges and disadvantages that the emerging global economic order has been generating for the developing countries are so much more than the opportunities created for them.

Can corrective measures be formu-lated and implemented to establish a fair world economic order, which will enable all nations -- big and small, rich and poor -- to participate effectively in its management and benefit equitably from the fruits it generates? I am firmly of the opinion that Frances Fukuyama is wrong in announcing "End of His tory", meaning thereby that neoliberalism has triumphed over all other forms of governance and eco-nomic management. I am sure 'History' has not ended. The accentuating disparity and exclusion cannot go unchallenged both at national and international levels. For a smoother reorientation, human ingenuity should be summoned by all concerned to design and introduce appropriate reforms in the international institutions and trading and investment arrangements.

It is also necessary within nations to address governance issues as well as other social and economic issues with reference to the prevailing realities within country such as the prevailing unequal relationships between vari-ous segments of society, inefficacious pattern and low productivity of eco-nomic activities, extremely narrowlybased export and free import regimes, burgeoning unemployment of both uneducated and educated people, external opportunities and constraints, and other relevant aspects. This will require the on-going reforms to be restructured to suit the country's particular needs. Dawning a strait jacker, which is now being forced upon the countries under the neoliberal dispensation often under aidconditionality, is doing them more harmthan good.

Finally, let me make a point, which is recognised widely and is worthy of repeating. The global economy today is able not only to feed all the world's inhabitants, but also to offer opportunities to all of them to live in human dignity. Obviously, it is a question of distribution across and within nations; and the distribution can be equitable only if the international institutions and governance as well as national social, economic market, and political processes are democratic and participatory, underpinned by ethics, morality, and human values. Only under such reshaped international and national economic orders can a country like Bangladesh and its people secure a better tomorrow in terms of equitable economic progress and social development and a worthy place in the comity of nations.

Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad is President, Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) and Chairman, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP). The article is based on excerpts from the author's address as the chair at inaugural session of the international conference on Emerging Global Economic Order and Developing Countries, organised by the Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) in Dhaka recently.

BRAC UNIVERSI

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

- Full Tuition waivers for Science students with GPA of 4.75 or more in HSC & SSC, Arts & Commerce 4.5 or more and 5 'A's in O-Level and 2 'A's in A-Level
- Full Tuition waiver for top student in each department based on Admission Test Results
- Tuition waiver at different rates for students with CGPA 3.5 or more at BU 25% tuition waiver for Economics, English & Law students Tk.500/=(per credit) tuition waiver to female students
- of all BU Programs FORD Scholarship: Full Tuition waiver, living allowance and book allowance for meritorious students from ultra poor financial background
- Parents with two children at BU: 50% tuition waiver for the second child. Parents with two daughters at BU: 70% tuition waiver for the second child

ATTRACTIVE FEATURES

BU housed in BRAC's own building .

Journals and Electronic Archives

- Tutorial/lab/workshop for practice and skill building A Residential Semester to groom the students to
- successfully compete in the job market globally Teacher-Parent cooperation for better performance by the students
- Digital Language lab, Digital Studio, LINUX, CISCO Labs, VIDEO Conference Centre Students' access to full-time Internet and own ISP

BU Library has access to a large number of Online

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

- ☐ Bachelor of Architecture (B Arch) BBA (Finance, Banking, Marketing, MIS, HRM)
- BSc in Computer Science & Eng. (CSE)
- □ BSc in Computer Science (CS)
- □ BSS in Economics
- □ BA in English
- □ LLB (Hons)

Students who appeared at the HSC/A-Level Examination can also apply

GRADUATE PROGRAM

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

APPLICATION DEADLINE : JULY 15, 2004 ADMISSION TEST: 9AM, JULY 16, 2004

For Admission Form and further information please visit www.bracuniversity.ac.bd Or Contact Admission Desk, Ground Floor, BRAC University Building, 66, Mohakhali, Dhaka.Ph: 8853948-9 Email: info@ bracuniversity.ac.bd