

Politics-crime nexus

Onus on ruling party to eliminate it

POLITICAL patronisation of criminals in Bangladesh is common knowledge but never owned up by the political parties. These criminals have an uncanny ability to change loyalty and join whichever political party is in power, to ply their trade with impunity. In fact, all major political parties have in their folds well-known criminals and lawbreakers.

The odious nexus of crime and politics in our country has been confirmed once again, if that ever needed any confirmation, by the antecedents of the leader of a criminal gang killed in the latest firefight with the RAB in Raozan.

In fact, the antecedents of almost all those killed in recent encounters with the RAB show that most of them had risen from rags to riches and the catalyst that propelled them to the phenomenal path of power and crime was the support and sponsorship lent them by the politicians.

The two most sought after criminals in Bangladesh to have met with their death at the hands of RAB, 'Ahmedya' and Jan-e-Alam, reportedly benefited from political patronisation of the ruling party. In fact, the former was chairman of a local union parishad in Chittagong, belonging to the BNP, having joined it from Chhatra Shibir. The latter was a hardened criminal, with a very influential BNP MP of Chittagong as his godfather.

As yet, twenty-seven such alleged criminals have been killed in encounters with the RAB. While the government's effort to nab these criminals is laudable, it is our opinion that, alive, they would be good source of information in the government's effort to address the sliding state of law and order in the country.

We feel these criminals can only be neutralised if they are divested of political support, which is possible only if the political parties de-link themselves from these elements by purging them from their folds.

Herein, we feel, lies the central role of the party in power. On the ruling party devolves a greater responsibility of ridding politics and society of these criminals. Failing which, the government's much-publicised action against the criminals, however pious in intent, will be ineffective, and its credibility and authenticity come to be questioned.

Fake launch crew

Where is the promised improvement?

THE issue of safe river journey received a lot of attention following a series of launch disasters in the country over the last few years. The authorities concerned promised that they would take the necessary steps to remove the risk factors. But a report published in the 'Prothom Alo' gives a different account of things. A number of launch operators are reported to be working with fake qualification certificates. This is true even about the so called category-A vessels, with the capacity to carry a large number of passengers.

The news is disquieting since untrained and inefficient launch crew have been identified as one of the major reasons behind frequent launch capsizes. Thousands of lives have been lost; yet the authorities have apparently failed to enforce a modicum of discipline and compliance with the rules in an area as important as issuance of certificates to the launch crew. The shipping ministry and BIWTA often talk about their limitations when the question of efficiency is raised. But issuance of fake certificates clearly shows that corruption is still the prime factor responsible for poor management of river transportation and the failure to enhance passengers' safety. It is really shocking to learn that the great number of deaths has not sensitised the men at the surveyors' office to the need for being honest. They are playing with the lives of launch passengers, which amounts to a culpable crime. It seems the launch accidents have had little effect on those who are in charge of ensuring safe river journeys.

The promised changes and improvements are far from visible. Launches with faulty designs are still plying the rivers and violations like overloading are taking place. Furthermore, the vessels have not been properly equipped with gadgets and devices that could lessen the number of casualties in the event of a mishap.

Against this backdrop, we observed the World Navigation Day on September 30, with a plethora of pledges to bring about a qualitative change in the existing services. But the launch crew with fake documents tell us a different story. We draw the attention of the government to the pressing need for an end to the corrupt and dangerous practice.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IF one were to argue that Europe's loss of centrality in the East-West conflict has weakened the Atlantic alliance one has to admit that "new sovereignty" as described by Professor Peter Spiro has not uniformly affected different parts of the world. Some analysts see the Asia-Pacific region less affected by the demise of the Cold War because the Soviet Union occupied a less prominent position in this region than it did in Europe. Japan, for example, is expected to follow its ascribed role of assisting modernisation of Asian states during the second Bush administration (latest pre-debates polls show President Bush leading Senator Kerry by 52% to 44% among likely voters). It is assessed that reaction to US unilateralism has been more subdued in Asia than in Europe. But such an assertion is contestable because Asia is not a monolith.

Confucian Asia subscribing to Lee Kwan Yew's views on freedom as having "a well ordered society so that every one can have maximum enjoyment of his freedoms (which) can only exist in an ordered state and not in a natural state of contention and anarchy" would have less difficulty in accepting American masculinism than say the Islamic Asian states, though historically suffering from democracy deficit, having been victims of American unilateralism. Regardless of the justification of American intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq sizeable number of people in Asian Muslim countries continue to view the war on terror as war on Islam.

China, however, has seized the war on terror as an opportunity to tighten its control over the rebellious province of Xinjiang but at the same time is playing a constructive role in the North Korean nuclear imbroglio. The North Korean crisis being dealt outside global focus is of critical importance to the security of North and Far East and had gripped the attention of both Clinton and Bush administrations. North Korea's October 2002 admission that the country was pursuing a uranium enrichment programme is in clear violation of Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, 1991 accord with South Korea declaring the Korean peninsula as a nuclear free zone, and 1994 framework agreement in which North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear programme in exchange of certain benefits to be provided by the US, Japan and South Korea. Therefore North Korea's admission of its truancy

came as a shock to the entire world.

The problem is further compounded by the fact that the country is being ruled for half a century by successive reclusive, totalitarian and unpredictable regimes that have scant respect for welfare of its own people. This unpredictability, perhaps, prevented the Clinton regime to abandon a project of selective military attacks on North Korean nuclear facilities. Instead Clinton administration opted to bribe North Korea through the framework agreement in the hope that the dictatorial communist regime would either collapse or transform itself into something other than what it has been so far. Otherwise, argues Ted Carpenter (of Cato Institute) Iraq war becomes totally illogical because Iraq was invaded in suspicion of doing something that North Korea has already done. Perhaps the possibility of mushroom cloud over Seoul, Tokyo and US bases in South Korea and Okinawa has prevented Bush administration from undertaking preemptive and proactive counter proliferation

measures against North Korea. This scenario has become more real in view of the recent North Korean declaration at the UNGA that it has turned plutonium from spent nuclear fuel rods into nuclear weapons to serve as a deterrent.

One hopes that with China's active participation the four nations' talks on North Korea's nuclear question would be solved. President Bush has already identified North Korea as one of the three members of the axis of evil and has declared terrorism and nuclear proliferation as national security threats. On both these counts North Korea should prove to be guilty. It is therefore possible that the second Bush administration after finishing its patchwork on Iraq would give greater attention to the North Korean issue. Whether the next Bush administration would take military measures given strong opposition from South Korea and Japan against such measures and given the general conclusion of international jurists that intervention without UNSC approval is illegal remains to be seen. But at the same

time it is difficult to overlook North Korea's serial breach of its international obligations and her role as a conduit of nuclear weapons proliferation and hence inaction to severely treat the problem would increase the risk of North Korea's growing menace.

If Bush doctrine of preemption shocked the Europeans it shook the seemingly peaceful foundation of the Islamic world. Yet the entire Muslim world stood alongside the Americans in their grief after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. So when the Taliban were decimated and driven out of Afghanistan the Islamic world supported the NATO actions against the Taliban. But when Iraq was invaded on what now appears to be on untenable and illegal grounds the Muslims as no less the Europeans and the less xenophobic part of the American people refused to sanction Anglo-American misadventure. Colin Powell's assertion of Bush administration's belief in a strategy of global partnership for the war on terror failed to calm the fear of a disbelieving world. Equally Presi-

freedom-constraining policies have also encouraged the adoption of the Arab Charter Against Terrorism allowing censorship, detention and torture. It is therefore not surprising that the American advocacy of redressing democracy deficit in the Islamic world is taken with a pinch of salt.

Yet the second Bush administration is expected to press on with the Greater Middle East Initiative because it is believed that: - (a) US support for democracy is extended as a matter of principle, (b) US will prosper more in a world of democracies than in a world of authoritarian or chaotic regimes, (c) history testifies that democracies do not wage wars against other democracies, (d) quantitative increase in democracy leads to qualitative improvement in diplomacy, and (e) democracy is closely linked with prosperity for which peaceful and predictable transition of power is essential. It is further surmised that the US will no longer tolerate "democratic exceptions" in parts of the Muslim world for the sake of its self-

The US has not fared well in Afghanistan and Iraq and is not expected to do so in future. What is essential to regain the lost confidence is to have inter-faith dialogue or something like the South African Truth Commission and opening doors to people of all races and religions and not to shut the door only because a few non-covenanted would sneak in through the open door.

dent Bush's West Point address of June 2002 urging the governments of the Islamic countries to listen to the hopes of their citizens for the same freedoms and opportunities as available in the West did not elicit uniform enthusiasm.

Historian Bernard Lewis interpreted the "Muslim Rage" in terms of millennial rivalry between the two world religions caused by the sense of humiliation felt by the Muslims over being defeated by the "Inferior Christians and the Jews". Lewis' interpretation of inter-faith tension, despite his outstanding intellect, was criticized by Edward Said who accused Lewis of advancing political agenda under the cloak of scholarship. The Muslim point of view has been reflected in the recently published Arab Human Development Report (AHDR2003) which observed that the adoption of extreme security measures and policies by a number of western countries exceeded their original goals and led to the erosion of civil and political liberties diminishing the welfare of the Arabs and Muslims living in those countries. These

measures against North Korea. This scenario has become more real in view of the recent North Korean declaration at the UNGA that it has turned plutonium from spent nuclear fuel rods into nuclear weapons to serve as a deterrent.

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interest.

But the most recent decision of President Parvez Musharraf to continue as the head of Pakistan army violating the agreement he had concluded with the opposition parties that he would relinquish the post of army head at the end of this year does not speak very highly of American determination to bring about democracy in the Islamic world. Given Pakistan's close partnership with the US in the war on terror it is inconceivable that President Musharraf could have taken this decision without US blessings. It is therefore quite possible that one democratic exception could lead to many other atrocious to seek a way out of the American imposed pluralism.

It is generally accepted that one-size-fit-all cannot be a sustainable foreign policy option for any major power. However moralistic a policy can be it can never be purely altruistic and must always be self-interested. Therefore it is unlikely that the second Bush administration would push on with its mission of Greater Middle East Initiative if it

political opposition who take the form of apocalyptic nihilism striking out violently to expel the "infidels" who they believe are sustaining the oligarchs. That there is a crying need to democratise these islands of autocracy is to state the obvious. This need has been reinforced by the findings of the Freedom House survey (2001-2002) of free countries around the world that while the number of "free" nations increased by nearly three dozens over the past 20 years not one of them was a Muslim majority state.

Since lack of democratic pluralism has been identified as the primary cause behind Islamic extremism it is possible that the second Bush administration would not abandon its mission to bring meaningful freedom to the Muslim states whose population is still denied a voice in the governance in their own countries.

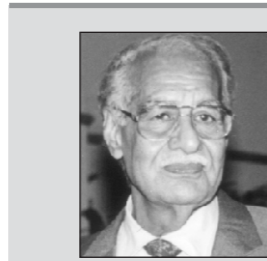
The Islamic world today is undeniably passing through a critical time in its history fuelled by prejudice, bigotry and various other forms of discrimination used

by Western societies against Muslims worldwide. To blame the West for this kind of behaviour will not be helpful. After all the Western response has been caused in order to confront al-Qaedaist terrorism in the US, Europe, Africa and in several Islamic countries as well. A small vena group spreading lethality in the name of Islam has stigmatised Muslims. The depth of Western anger can be gauged by the fact that Senator Kerry is accused of waffling on Iraq and American public do not appear to see another Vietnam in Iraq yet despite increasing casualties of coalition forces. It is unlikely that the West would relent on the freedom-constraining regulations imposed on the Muslims or that Western society would feel comfortable with Muslims as neighbours and working in their societies along side them. It took Europeans almost fifty years to get comfortable with the Germans though Nazism was physically annihilated by the allied victors and totally rejected by the Germans in 1945. Despite German membership of NATO it took the Kosovo crisis for the NATO allies to invite Germany to participate in the Kosovo campaign.

One wonders whether Western rejection would not force the Islamic world, regardless of its lack of monolithic character and housing divergent philosophies, to be introverted and a part of it intuitively adopting violence as an expression of frustration. This grim scenario can become more terrifying if the West were to increase their violence, because the degree of violence is proportional to the instruments of violence used and the West has a surfeit of such instruments, by expanding their "area of operation" by including Iran, Syria and who knows which other country would be the next. The US has not fared well in Afghanistan and Iraq and is not expected to do so in future. What is essential to regain the lost confidence is to have inter-faith dialogue or something like the South African Truth Commission and opening doors to people of all races and religions and not to shut the door only because a few non-covenanted would sneak in through the open door.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

Grab it with both hands



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

EXCEPT for the summit meeting between India and Pakistan at Agra, I have not known of any failure at that level. Although Jawaharlal Nehru never liked Martial Law Administrator General Ayub Khan, he did not let the Indus Water Treaty signing go sour. Indira Gandhi accepted Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's last minute plea not to let him return empty-handed and signed the Shimla Agreement. Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had a 'successful' meeting with President General Pervez Musharraf although the latter was responsible for the Kargil misadventure that had killed the Lahore Declaration between Vajpayee and the deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

That way Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has kept the tradition of honouring the summit even though his meeting with General Musharraf was on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. What is different this time is that both of them have struck 'confidence' in each other's 'sincerity'. This may well be the breakthrough because none of their predecessors has ever put faith in the other so explicitly.

What it means is that the talks between the secretaries of the two

governments on different subjects may see concrete results. After the talks had been conducted, the word was that a consensus had been reached but it had to have the final okay from the top. It seems some of the agreements reached may fructify in the next few weeks, if not days. Musharraf may have to explain the development because there will be progress in other fields without a solution on Kashmir. He can, however, justifiably say that Manmohan Singh's promise to talk on Kashmir itself is an achievement. His domestic lobby could present

that is Kashmir. A parallel authority that a new chief of army staff may create will come in the way of reaching a solution. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is quite right in saying, "if he (Musharraf) wishes his uniform the continuity of policies will break." But that is a stark reality in every military-run country. Pakistan cannot be any different.

From India's point of view, the agreement on any confidence-building measures is welcome. It can happily link it with Manmohan Singh-Musharraf meeting. This may well be the reason why the news

likely to be an understanding on the nuclear problem is significant. Islamabad may also extend to India the MFN (most favoured nation) status, something that it cannot help under the WTO agreement. Some trade concessions are also on cards.

What is important is that Pakistan has come around accepting the step-by-step approach. It does not say now that without progress on Kashmir, nothing can move forward. In fact Manmohan Singh has underlined Musharraf's view that he wanted "progress on all outstanding

issues between India and Pakistan." Why is this perceptible change in the attitude of Pakistan? And is it real when the anti-India stance is what largely sustains the military rule in Pakistan? It is too early to give any firm answer. We may get some indication after the US presidential election in early November. But Manmohan Singh may have a point when he says that the General has been "grossly misunderstood."

What needs to be appreciated is that the forward movement between India and Pakistan is largely the fallout from the people-to-people contact at every level and in every field. Washington's hand may well

be working behind the scenes. But it is only one of the factors. The main reason is that both New Delhi and Islamabad, after possessing the nuclear bomb, realise that there is no military solution to Kashmir. They also see that people want to turn their attention towards economic development. After a long time the Indo-Pak relationship is on the mend and this needs to be hailed.

Still, people need to know more. Transparency will give them a feeling of participation. A bald joint statement between Manmohan Singh and Musharraf does not tell much. The society on both sides

the beginning or at the end does not matter when the solution sought is to bring normalcy. In fact, both New Delhi and Islamabad are now looking for alternatives to sort out Kashmir. The proposals may not be to the liking of India, Pakistan or the Kashmiris but one of them may still be workable. At the meeting with Musharraf, Manmohan Singh requested Pakistan to suggest some options.

This is the time when the activists and experts should muster their thoughts and make some concrete proposals. The two principles to be kept in mind are that religion will not be the criterion for any solution. The partition of the subcontinent on the basis of religion has not allowed the two countries to settle down even after 57 years. Another division of any sort will revive all the terrible things we have gone through. The two countries will not be able to withstand them this time.

The other cardinal point to remember is that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are directly concerned with the formula devised for a solution. Their concurrence is necessary. It is difficult to satisfy the hotheaded but the overall consent of the people is essential. What the three parties -- India, Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir -- must realise is that a settlement is well within their grasp. If they let the opportunity to go by, they may possibly miss the best ever chance that has come their way after the partition. Generations may have to suffer if the moment is lost.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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a problem. But the manner in which Pakistan's Islamic alliance has welcomed the summit talks indicates that the opposition is confined to the old dwindling group which is anti-India in its approach. Hafiz Hussain Ahmed, leader of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), has welcomed resolution of all disputes between India and Pakistan through dialogue. He did not mention Kashmir.

This attitude of MMA may help Musharraf to postpone the date of stepping down from the post of army chief. He can argue that his understanding with the Indian Prime Minister may cut the Gordian knot,

from Islamabad is that if Siachin were to be vacated, Pakistan would not occupy it. More or less, some years ago this was the agreement initially by the foreign secretaries to convert it a no-man's land. India unwisely stalled the agreement. Some top brass still propound the theory that Siachin is strategically important to the country. But there is an equal number which pooh-poohs this reasoning. That Pakistan will not try to occupy Siachin once India withdraws from it is one assurance that has to be foolproof.

I believe that there may be an agreement on Sir Creek in Gujarat. Musharraf's statement that there is

implications. **A Mahasen Dhaka**

Municipal reform

The government is neglecting the review of the city corps and municipalities. Urgent reforms are needed immediately to improve the amateurish services (DS editorial Sept 18). The management is outdated, considering the exponential urban growth rates, and migration to the cities. One reason is the absurd centralization of public services (cling like leeches to power, without the motivation to use it in public interest, at least 90 per cent).

The Municipal training institutes (too few in number) have also to be modernised and expanded, with

would like to know why the steps contemplated now -- they are welcome steps -- were not taken earlier. A country's foreign policy cannot be hostage to the mandarins who are hawkish at one time and softer at another. Foreign policy is not like the economic development which can be improved by increasing investment. It takes years -- and huge costs -- to build a credible foreign policy.

The BJP's criticism that the joint statement gives Kashmir "centrality" is out of pique. When the party was in power, its terminology was different. But Kashmir figured in every statement. By mentioning it in

negligence of the concerned authorities. Last year, we saw that the government awarded the first class first students of Hons (Final Year) with gold medals. However, what about the students of English Literature? There was no student of English department on that occasion because nobody got first class in this subject. Actually, getting first class in English Literature is rare and tough.

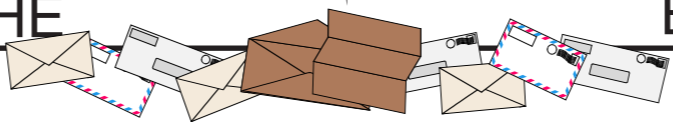
But should they be left out of the government's plan to encourage students?

Mahbuba Sharmin Dhaka

Aggrieved students

We always find that the government and other institutions give emphasis on the development of English Language. However, it is a matter of sorrow that the students of English Literature under the National University are always suffering due to the

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Evils of patronisation

Those who patronise too much, eventually fall a victim to the (elaborate) system which is thus erected around them. The principle applies at all levels, vertical or horizontal, in private or public life. Sycophancy is one of the low-key flags fluttering around the back doors. That is why we are talking so much about transparency in public services.

Therefore it is necessary to examine the boundary conditions for such non-essential luxuries or artificial fortresses in life, and review the system from time to time. Once the boundary conditions are exceeded, control slips, and chaos takes over. The disintegration is

quicker, because those who serve (stooges at one stage) do not and cannot plan and foresee the consequences, and the patrons are lost in smugness and a false sense of over-confidence. The readers can cite many examples from personal observation, in different fields.

Take a closer look at our political culture prevailing today. How far the deterioration is due to unbridled misuse of this micro and hidden, crafty art (in the background)? Nepotism is another face of patronisation. It is bahurupi (multi-faceted) manifestation of maya (illusion) alluring the greedy and the crafty godfathers living in a world of virtual reality.

Today the images of the major

political parties is rather pathetic. It cannot get out of the vicious circle of entrenched misuse of power and influence. The public investment returns are dwindling. The result of the preceding general election was stunning, the way the ruling party was routed, securing only one-fifth of the 300 seats. It cannot be explained to corrupt practices during voting; and expenditure of huge amounts of electioneering funds does not explain it either.

Human nature changes marginally, and the base effects ultimately turn the tide (mass effect, as seen in India at the recent general elections based on the Shiny [urban] India' slogan, according to media analysts).

Black money is another field, partly visible, and partly hidden. It is a system of unstable gain for a limited period. The half-life of this radioactivity is low. The same deterrent applies when applied to the patronisation of terrorism, to maintain hold and sway. Top-heavy. The center of gravity is too high for stability. This is science, not politics!

Solid roots and foundations can afford the gentle swaying of the branches and the sweet fluttering of the leaves. The climate is breezy, windy, cyclonic, or Kalbaishaki? Can we say our politics is working under "normal working conditions"? And our civil service, and the other public services? No. Let the experts analyze the intricate

more technical bias. The elected (political) heads need more orientation and management and administrative expertise. Nepotism in tendering and contracts have to be curbed. On the whole the municipal services are not very transparent (high systems losses). Start has to be made with the daily operation and maintenance services cannot keep pace with the growth rates of the cities. The municipal taxes may be raised slightly to provide better services.

In short, there is no scientific municipal culture in Bangladesh. Some think tanks have to pay attention to the garbage, roads, and drain industries! Lastly, there is no one-stop coordinating agency in the big cities.