

Rab and 'crossfire' killings

Death toll now around fifty

Law and order has been a serious problem in this country. Every day brought news of murder, robbery, rape, and extortion, and the criminal elements were running rampant, terrorising the general public and sowing the seeds of insecurity everywhere. People simply did not feel safe and it seemed as though the criminals were beyond the reach of the law.

It was in response to this dire state of affairs that Rab began its latest anti-crime drive in June. Since then it has gone on what appears to amount to a killing spree, euphemistically called deaths in crossfire. The deaths of four more alleged criminals in Tongi and Mirpur on Friday bring the total number of those killed in Rab custody and crossfire to around fifty in the six months of operations. In the latest incident there is even an element of doubt whether those killed were involved with criminality. There are no available figures for how many others have been apprehended in the Rab actions and are now behind bars.

There has been a fair amount of public support for the Rab with an element of relief over the fact that the special squad has struck fear in the minds of hardened criminals. That does not however preclude the expression of serious concern over custodial and crossfire killings or the virtual circumvention of the due process of law or rule of law.

It would even be fair to say that we at The Daily Star have not been as vocal in our protests against the killings as we might have been. The fact that the government was at last taking a strong stand against the criminal elements that dominate the country was seen as a positive step. Now, however, it seems as though the Rab operations have got to the point where killings are regular occurrences and seem more the norm than the exception. We would be failing in our duty if we did not voice our serious concern over the current state of affairs. The laudable goal of fighting crime cannot be used as justification for trampling the rule of law.

Street children

Take them under the wings

A survey conducted by a research organisation has revealed that around seven lakh street children, many of whom are addicts, might enter the crime world as they are grappling with a life devoid of paternal care or even the minimum requirements for survival.

The revelation is as startling as it is tragic and also a harsh reminder of the truth that a large number of children in society are subjected to inhuman treatment, despite the commitments made by successive governments to establish the rights of children. The underprivileged children represent, in a very conspicuous manner, social apathy and lack of government initiative to cater to their needs.

Clearly, there is more in it than flagrant violation of human rights. We must not forget that juvenile delinquency is a major social problem today. So it is worrisome news that such a huge number of children "run the risk of becoming criminals." If that be true, juvenile delinquency might assume unmanageable proportions in the very near future. Obviously, if there is any criminal proclivity among street children this would only be exacerbated if they continued to receive unkind treatment from society. It is extremely disturbing to learn that sometimes young girls among the children are subjected to sexual harassment by people who ought to take care of them. The authorities concerned should look into such allegations.

Things must be set right in this important area in order to avoid a social disaster. The government needs to have a clear policy and a rehabilitation scheme insofar as the vagrant children are concerned. An institutional framework will be needed to handle the problem which has already grown big enough, with seven lakh children living in the streets.

The street children are a deprived lot whose mental and physical growth are hampered by a host of negative factors. Society must play its due role in taking them back under its wings. They actually never had childhood in the sense it is generally understood. We must strive to create the conditions in which they can at least grow up as normal human beings. They are not asking for too much -- only a wee bit of love and the minimum for survival in a hostile environment.

Arafat's legacy

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

YASSER Arafat was one of those icons who adorned chameleonic personalities suited to different occasions: a revolutionary, "a bigoted and megalomaniacal extremist blinded by anti-Jewish hatred" (Israeli scholar Ephraim Karsh), a hindrance to the Middle East peace process as seen by the US, yet a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, a statesman, and above all, the undisputed leader of his people.

He was in exile when his people were forced into exile, he was besieged when his people were under siege, and he was a revolutionary when his people were forced to fight against the injustices inflicted upon them. In reality, Yasser Arafat can only be accused of constancy, fealty to his people who sought nothing but a place for his people who were thrown out from their hearth and home to assuage the guilt complex of those who had committed crimes against humanity.

When Theodor Herzl, the father of Zionism and the writer of the book *The Jewish State*, approached the British for help for the creation of a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, the British offered to investigate the possibility of Jewish colonisation in East Africa, the so-called Uganda Scheme.

The Balfour Declaration favouring "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" was predicated on the assurance that "nothing will be done which shall prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

In 1923, then Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill gave assurances

that the Balfour Declaration must not mean "imposition of a Jewish nation upon the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole but the further development of the existing Jewish community."

But these commitments proved to be hollow, not only because of Machiavellian machinations of the colonial powers, but also because of

The Arab defeat at the hands of the Israelis in 1948, creation of the State of Israel, exodus of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their home, annexation of the West Bank by Jordan, and attachment of the Gaza strip to Egypt marked the eclipse of the Palestinian national movement for decades. But inspired by the Algerian FNL's liberation

Arafat's acceptance of violence as a tool in his fight for liberation was not unique. Many freedom movements under colonial rule had to resort to violence in response to greater violence inflicted upon them. But these movements abandoned violence as soon as independence was achieved.

Contrary to Zionist demonisation

President Clinton describing Ariel Sharon as "the most aggressive, intransigent leader available" had perhaps given the impression that with Clinton and Barak gone peace in the Middle East may take a while to come. Some western scholars, however, look at the Camp David negotiations from a different perspective.

refusal to sign on at Camp David had the support of the Palestinians in occupied land. Therefore, rightly or wrongly, only the future can tell whether Yasser Arafat truly represented the will of his people.

The post-Arafat transition of power has so far been smooth. Now that Arafat, seen by the US as an impediment to peace in the Middle East, is dead the second Bush administration may take a more pro-active role in implementing the Quartet Road Map (US, UN, EU, and Russia), an impression given to the world at the Bush-Blair press conference in Washington in mid-November. President Bush, in particular, was very insistent that the upcoming Palestinian elections be free and truly democratic because, he said: "We will hold their feet to the fire to make sure that democracy prevails." Tony Blair was equally determined to "revitalise and reinvigorate the search for a genuine, lasting, and just peace in the Middle East."

Despite concerns over competing "old guard" and "new guard" national factions, increasing public support for Islamists, decreasing support for Fatah, the shift in the Bush administration's policy closer to the Israeli right wing government, the emergence of separate entity in Gaza following Israeli disengagement possibly threatening unity of Palestinian state and society -- there is no doubt that the institutions left behind by Yasser Arafat would be able to deliver a moderate, secular, and democratic Palestine, able and willing to live in peace with a Jewish Israel.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

the conviction of the Zionists of the superiority of their claim on Palestine.

Theodor Herzl was convinced that Palestine was "a land without people for a people without land (1907)." Even two years after the 1967 war Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir maintained that the Palestinian people did not exist, perhaps emboldened by the UNSC resolution of November 1967 recommending "a just settlement of the refugee problem" without specifying the national identity of the refugees.

The refusal to accept the force of Palestinian nationalism was contrary to the resolve of the 22nd Zionist Congress (1946) which proposed the division of Palestine into two states: one Jewish and the other Arab, a proposal adopted by the UNGA (in November 1947) regardless of the flagrant injustice inherent in the plan which would give more than half of the territory to the Jews who made up less than a third of the population and owned only six per cent of the land.

struggle against France and Gamal Abdul Nasser's Pan-Arabism, the Palestinian nationalists of different shades were united in their absolute faith in their return to Palestinian homeland.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian diaspora in different Arab countries could not be absorbed by the host countries, mostly for justifiable reasons, leaving the Palestinians as refugees abroad and reinforcing their belief that Pan-Arabism could be achieved only through the liberation of Palestine and not the other way around.

In late 1950s Yasser Arafat founded Al-Fatah, the largest group in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) which advocated independence from the influence of Arab states, and long duration guerrilla warfare like the Algerian FNL and the Viet Cong with the active support of Arab and liberation movements in Third World countries. Al-Fatah also advocated reunification of their country into a democratic state in which people of all faiths would live on equal footing.

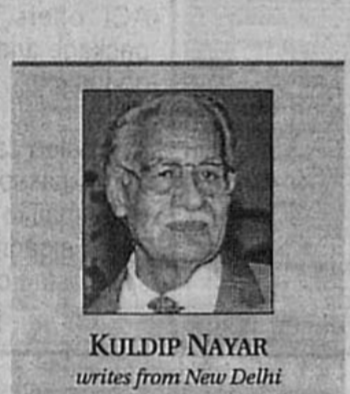
of Yasser Arafat as a terrorist, even his detractors must concede Arafat's contribution to the ideological change of Palestinian nationalism from advocating for a Palestinian state in place of Israel to a Palestinian state alongside Israel. According to Professor Glenn Robinson about seventy percent of the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza want a two state solution and reconciliation with Israel after the creation of a Palestinian state. This is also the official policy of the PLO.

Many western leaders have criticised Yasser Arafat for failing to reach a peace agreement with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and brokered by President Clinton at Camp David in 2000. Clinton in his book *My Life* has given detailed account of the negotiations. He termed Arafat's refusal to clinch the deal "a colossal mistake" and thought that Yasser Arafat "simply couldn't make the final jump from revolutionary to statesman ... Arafat's rejection of my proposal after Barak accepted was an error of historic proportion."

To accurately understand what happened at Camp David and later, they argue, one must keep in mind that Arafat and the Palestinians approached the negotiations with 1948 as the base date. Most Israelis, in contrast, see the conflict as a territorial dispute over land won in the 1967 war. They view actions prior to 1967 such as the exodus of Palestinian refugees as non-negotiable and raising such issues as constituting a challenge to the legitimacy of the existence of the state of Israel. Granting the refugees the right of return would not only threaten the Jewish character of Israel, but may give birth to two majority-Arab states in the disputed land.

On the other hand, the Palestinians consider the refugees' right of return as a core issue. But a survey undertaken last year of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza found that once their right of return was recognised, the vast majority would prefer to live not in Israel, but in the newly created state of Palestine. Arafat's

Left should know what's right



KULDIP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

THERE is no doubt that the Left is not happy with the Congress-led government. It could not have been because of ideological incoherence between the two. They came together to keep the BJP out of power at the centre and they achieved the purpose. Apparently, that should be uppermost in their mind.

But the manner in which the Left carps at the government or makes an issue of every economic step the government contemplates or takes gives the impression that the arrangement faces a perennial danger. The Left too suffers in the process because the ruling United Progress Alliance (UPA), of which it is a member, lessens in stock. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the opposition is banking on the differences to grow.

The coordination committee, constituted under the chairmanship of Congress president Sonia Gandhi, is the forum to discuss the lapses in the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) which they jointly prepared. But the apparatus doesn't seem to be working properly. When a Left leader says publicly that they can also "bite" it only exposes the UPA to ridicule.

In fact, the Left should have

joined the government. It was offered the Deputy Prime Ministership and 10 ministries. By rejecting such an arrangement, the communists committed their second historical mistake. The first one was when the name of Jyoti Basu was proposed for the Prime Ministership before the choice fell on Deve Gowda eight years ago. The communists, with the exception of Basu and comrade Harkishan Singh Surjeet,

Nehru's policies are "responsible for the country's poverty." How far he alone is to blame is a matter of discussion. But if the taste of the pudding is in its eating, India's growth rate till the beginning of the 90s has averaged 3.5 per cent which is the late leading economist Raj Krishna describes as the "Hindu growth rate."

Seeing the prospect of large foreign investment in the country,

its complaint that the Manmohan Singh government does not consult it. Things have improved a bit after the Prime Minister's personal intervention. But there seems to be a lot of backbiting to spoil the atmosphere. Also, the functioning of the cabinet system leaves little room for prior discussion when a decision is taken contrary to a ministry's note. Still, I do not recall any decision which has gone against the basic

head some of their segments of economic development to know how the pace of progress can be accelerated. An ideology that wilts at the touch of a foreigner is dogmatic in character. The yardstick should be the gain which accrues. In that sense, the CPI (M) government at Kolkata is more pragmatic because it is interested in the foreigners' expertise, not their domicile.

I saw Prime Minister Lal Bahadur

democratic methods. Take the campaign against tainted ministers. True, it was a mistake on the part of the Prime Minister to induct Lalo Prasad Yadav and his Rashtriya Janata Dal members into the cabinet. But the Prime Minister was under compulsion and explained the dictates of the coalition dharma. The support of the 23 RJD members was important for the formation of the government because that gave him the crucial numbers for a majority. I think that the communists would help him if they were to prevail upon Yadav to drop at least his tainted party colleagues until the cases against them were cleared.

A few days ago, the NDA paid a compliment to the UPA for ironing out differences through talks. Still more needs to be done. The Left tends to go to the media first and the coordination committee later. On the other hand, the Congress should keep in mind that the globalisation as such does not sell with the Left or, for that matter, with most of the country's population.

Now that the NDA has closed its ranks on Hindutva and allowed the BJP to ventilate its views from its platform, the task of the UPA -- to take the mukut (mask) off the NDA -- will be onerous. The BJP has been told that the NDA members will not object to its preaching communal hatred and frenzy so long as it does this from its own forums. At the NDA pulpit it should look pure, prim, and proper. Ambition can, indeed, make political parties combine even fire with water.

Kuldip Nayyar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Now that the NDA has closed its ranks on Hindutva and allowed the BJP to ventilate its views from its platform, the task of the UPA -- to take the mukut (mask) off the NDA members will not object to its preaching communal hatred and frenzy so long as it does this from its own forums. At the NDA pulpit it should look pure, prim, and proper. Ambition can, indeed, make political parties combine even fire with water.

were against joining any government until they had a majority of their own in the 543-member Lok Sabha. They put forward the same argument this time.

Things have changed since. So much so, Finance Minister P Chidambaram has said publicly that

the Manmohan Singh government wants to open up many sectors. There is also resentment in the Congress that good money is being thrown on bad public sector undertakings. The Left is sensitive on this point. It feels that their closure will throw thousands of workers in the market which is already inundated with the unemployed. The determining factor should be progress. If the losing projects have shown no improvement in the last six months, they should be closed. This point should be hammered out at the coordination committee. On the other hand, the Left should keep in mind that the continuous loss of public sector undertakings might force the exchequer to withhold funds from the social sectors like health and education.

The Left is, however, justified in

structure of the CMP. Too much hair splitting is not desirable. What the Left should ensure is that the decision taken is within the precincts of the CMP.

For example, I did not see any harm in associating foreign experts, whether from the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank, for assessing the gains accrued from the past 50 years of planning. This would have ensured "transparency" as Planning Commission's Deputy Chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia said. Maybe, we do not see the wood for the trees. We need not accept the suggestions by outside experts -- not a single one -- but we should at least know why the 10 Five-year Plans have not broken the back of poverty and unemployment.

The Chinese, on the other hand, have reportedly invited foreigners to

Shastri, with whom I worked as press secretary, proposing a plan holiday for taking stock of the situation. He did not invite outsiders for assessment but halted the plan for one year to find out where the country was going. Perhaps there is something in the allegation that India is a soft state and cannot take hard decisions. Are we afraid that outside assessors may suggest something which we may find difficult to implement?

Ideological differences of the left are understandable. But when they are aired every third day, they make the performance of the Manmohan Singh government look still more ordinary. The Left's disappointment over the non-performance of the government is understandable. But the communists' first task should have been to expose the BJP's anti-

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.

Apology
On the special day of Eid we had no hesitation to extend our Eid Mubarak to the people of Pakistan. To reciprocate our gesture they should urge upon their leaders to acknowledge the misdeeds of their predecessors who committed genocide in Bangladesh in 1971. They owe a rightful apology to Bangladesh. I am not aware of Pakistan's internal feelings or equation on this subject, but what is preventing them from saying "We apologise"? Perhaps we can expect a clarification from them.
A Bangladesh One-mail

Relations with Pakistan
I nearly started believing that Bangladeshis must be the most insensitive nation in the world. We, especially the rulers, seem to have forgotten completely our history and they go head over shoulders to appreciate everything 'Paki' or

anyone from that country. The only reason I can decipher is that none of these opportunist lots were affected during those horrific and dark days when the marauding barbaric Pakistan Army had let loose their reign of terror on the hapless civilians of our poor country. I ask these guys to look at Israel. They still hunt down any Nazi and try and punish him for the crimes committed against them. But what have we done? We gleefully suggest that 'brothers' might have committed some excesses and we should forget that ignoring that there has never been an apology or the huge assets' share has still not been given (it will never be given that even the great Paki lovers also know).

On the point of apology, I still remember when President Musharraf last visited Bangladesh and only expressed sorrow for any excesses that may have been committed on either side (mark the language). And what next? The newspapers of BD came out with bold red banners eulogising

Musharraf for something he never did. They all proclaimed "Pakistan asks for pardon" What a shame! All these are the reasons for where we stand today in the eyes of the world. Does one need to say any more?
Ahmad Kamal
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Alliance and economics
It is indeed painful to see in local dailies news about India's "push-in" bids almost on a routine basis. This seems to be done deliberately to keep the Bangladesh government under pressure. This is a part of the psychological warfare that is being used in many parts of the world by different countries. The only solution to this type of indirect aggression is to form alliance with others. Bangladesh should consider signing defensive "military alliance" with other smaller countries in South Asia. This alliance will act as a "deterrent" and give these smaller nations a tool to effectively defend

their national interest against the 21st century psychological warfare. From economic standpoint too, this alliance will be helpful. A recent IMF report shows India will achieve an annual growth rate somewhere between 7-10%. Whereas in Bangladesh mere 4-5% growth rate is considered an achievement. This disparity is already apparent everywhere. Flooding of Bangladesh market by low quality Indian goods is not a new phenomenon. Despite all the progress and effort spent on SAFTA, it is very unlikely India will ever support the creation of a common currency in South Asia. A parallel could be America sharing a common currency with its economically weak neighbours like Mexico, Cuba or even Canada. This very notion is totally unthinkable despite the fact that America is a signatory to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and will soon sign CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement). EU has successfully used the same reasoning barring Turkey from joining EU.

Hence Bangladesh government should also work for the creation of a common currency among the neighbours. The combined GDP of these nations backed by a common currency will keep them not only competitive but also act as a deterrent from being the dumping ground of below standard Indian goods.
The twentieth century saw the dawn of economic alliances between nations. The momentum is still there. The driving force behind it was definitely economics. Hence Bangladesh should be "proactive" to ensure its own dignified existence and stop complaining and waiting for its big neighbour to act as its saviour.
KWasimuddin
Chicago, IL, US

We want good colleges
There are hundreds of educational institutions that have developed around the world. Most of the colleges and universities consist of scholarly work, quality, proper

behaviour, and sophistication; we need full time teachers, not "fool" time teachers or Deans. Md. Badrul Ahsan wrote an important article "The Losing Battle of Education" where he mentions, "Things have changed, people are avoiding education and heading straight for the money." We were visiting the Dean of a department, and we left after we observed the terrible behaviour of the Dean and the clerk. We agree with Chintito and Shawkat Hussain about the stooge-like behaviour of these so-called departments or universities. We have seen a number of headlines, "Private Universities Are Popping Up Like Tea Stalls." Since October 19, 2004, we saw the headlines "40-45 Universities Way Behind Prerequisites", "Private Universities to Close Down". The truth about private universities were discussed in some very important articles such as "Phoren Bottle..." by Chintito and "North-North-West..." by Shawkat Hussain. Md. Badrul Ahsan also wrote about private universities and he said that

they lack quality education and they are for commercialism. There was a letter (October 18, 2004, Orki), about the large amount of money that students spend on private universities but they may not have relatives to offer them employment. Employment should be based on qualifications and not relatives. A letter from Debasis Paul (October 7, 2004), asked a number of important questions: What kind of education makes a person scholarly? Is our present educational system enough to meet these demands? Are we really satisfied with our existing educational system? How many scholars, scientists, or writers are coming out from our educational system? Why do students read but don't learn, memorise but don't understand? We may observe the following 1) the government and educational organisations should invest in building up education in public colleges and universities (not private) 2) Private universities do not provide proper education and there is a lack of good teachers 3) The teachers are overworked and

they also go from one institution to another 4) Private universities take enormous amounts of money and deprive students and parents of proper education 5) Private universities do not provide proper buildings or proper classrooms for students. They are also overcrowded. 6) Private universities do not meet the standards of a university. They are actually polytechnic institutes. All over the world, a university has a proper campus and educational facilities. Private universities in Bangladesh are just polytechnic institutes without educational value. We must make a better society with better education. No more private universities. Just build public colleges or real educational institutions. We must listen to the truth and important facts that are discussed in the articles by Chintito, Shawkat Hussain, and Md. Badrul Ahsan.
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