

Revenge killing spree taking a dreadful turn



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

than personal grief. It gives an indication of the social disruption arising out of change in life style, lust for power, wealth and influence in the society and last of all widening gap between the haves and the havenots. Dhaka city's Mirpur area has seen a spate of such killings of ward commissioners and businessmen in the last few months. It is not that events of this kind have never happened before. But in a media-driven environment, private distress of such horrific nature is often catapulted into the public arena. While these cases may hardly affect the mightier matters of state, they certainly reflect the brazenness with which powerful people belonging to either politics or business or even law enforcement machinery feel they can use clout to subvert law and justice and buy everything in their favour.

Reports of gruesome murders published in the newspapers in the recent past quoting Police and Human Rights Organisations reinforce our belief about the horrendous crime situation in the country. These sources indicate that in July last 322 murders were committed in the country as against 314 in June. After a thorough analysis of the violent nature of the problem that are often reported in the newspapers, one is led to believe that young men in the age group 16-30 are involved in such grotesque nature of criminal activities and their behaviour is largely influenced by the environment. In the case of Shahidullah murder, the killer group numbering about three and all of them young in age gunned down him with about eight bullets ensuring his death and as his eldest son Prince, a second year HSC student of Dhamondi Ideal College, came out of the mosque to save his

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father, the three shot him in the abdomen wounding him critically.

With extortion, abduction and murder being committed almost every day at different places, the country has turned out to be a killing field. The dastardly killing of a businessman, his wife and their young son at Brahmanbaria early last month in their house at dead of night by some unidentified assailants with no apparent enmity is another pathetic reminder that people are not safe in their houses, too.

political circle by self-seeking politicians and greedy business people, young men, unemployed and in dire need of money, are slipping into crime wave without any pricking of conscience, remorse or consideration of consequences. Astonishingly true, there are about 15 million unemployed youth within 16-25 age group in the country who are profoundly unhappy about the societal conditions and apathy of the government towards creating a situation that helps them rise above the condition they are now living in. These vibrant youth full

common factor is: the present generation is going through one of those plastic moments in history where old known value systems have crumbled and new ones have not formed.

Unfortunately, the pleasures, comfort and luxuries of modern life and acquisition of uncounted wealth by a section of people in the society and the dazzling display of that extravagance has permeated into our lifestyle and the idealism that once illuminated the educated and even rustic rural life has taken a severe knock. Undeniably true,

path. Sadly true, many of these young men are drawn to crime these days for reasons that are our own making. It occurs when even after going through the struggles and securing a university degree and technical qualifications most desirable for a job when he moves from door to door for a job, and lack of opportunity and political connection frustrate him. Soon the tremendous pressure to survive and succeed builds up anger and he goes astray. Sanity blinks and so to say to total evaporation. The result becomes disastrous if in the meantime he has

innocent people continue to suffer in the hands of the authority mandated to protect them.

Unhappily, coupled with these dastardly incidents that are coming up with unfailing regularity, economic situation in the country is perhaps heading towards a chaotic turn, with no apparent signs of a redeeming future for the people at large. Precisely true, most of the countryside where 70/75 per cent of the population lives remains as poor as ever. The lower middle class, farmers, rickshaw pullers, day labourers, weavers and fishermen all belonging to this soil just couldn't share the country's economic growth. Sadly enough, a difficult time seems to be winding down well for all of us. As political impasse lingers, reform measures stall, economic woes mount, more and more people with education or no education try to flee the country with little success. As it appears, the government has failed to deliver on its tall promises. What is needed is probity on the part of our leaders and a tough and consistent enforcement of laws. Such measures would reassure investors from within and without who have been fulminating in the hope that the system of kickback flourishing relentlessly would end.

To be more precise, the benefits of economic growth must be distributed evenly. With a big focus on the modernisation of madrasa education tinged with science bias, the country's school curriculum has to be restructured to create equal employment opportunities for all sections of young population having schooling either in a madrasa or a school. The poor who constitute more than 50 per cent of the country's 140 million people must be provided access

to educational, employment, and business opportunities in a bid to prevent them from going astray. It must be brought home to all of us entrusted with the gigantic task of planning and drawing future strategy of the country that nearly 40 per cent of the country's population is under 25 years old. These cohorts of disgruntled and disillusioned youth folk can be explosive mix blocking the little bit of reform and structural reorganisation that are taking place here and there.

What does it take to commit a violent crime like murdering a person in crowded street full of witnesses and then walk away unpunished? It is simply the ability to manipulate a creaking criminal investigation system. Indeed, as a reputed lawyer in the country says, "Crime today is a low risk, high return business. With more than 90 per cent chance that one will not be convicted, it's no wonder that youngsters don't think twice before committing a crime."

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

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ALMOST awash with guns and plagued by extortions, business and political feuds, the big cities in the country are struggling to cope with a spate of abduction, violence and killing. True, in an ideal world there are some stories we'd love to avoid: those with an excess of blood and gore. Some of us may find watching films based on such themes entertaining and then go away from the TV screen or movie house with the reassurance that it was all fiction. Sadly true, what is on the silver screen is coming closer to our neighbourhood than we would have thought. There is a general sense of alarm across the country aroused by a spurt in crime targeting the politicians, business people and academics resorted to by rival groups. The murder of Mirpur businessman Haji Shahidullah, chairman of the Prince Group of companies on August 12 last on a public thoroughfare in front of the mosque where he performed his Juma prayer has sent shivers down the spine of the citizenry.

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The growing concern in all these cases of bomb blast, extortion, robbery, arson and killing is that youngsters are involved and unexplained questions remain as to why they slipped into such vile trade. In most cases it is about the lifestyle enjoyed by the urban, young and well-heeled people in the country. They are children of globalisation, cable TV and guilt free consumerism. What is now clear is that their lifestyle has produced its share of pressures and unhappiness. It is high time we identified the trends in society and traced the tensions that lie beneath. Understandably, in the country today the cocktail of wealth, power and privilege is a lethal one.

Lured by the fabulous offer of money and assurance of recognition in the

of vigour and work spirit, languishing in poverty are easy prey to wealth and money they are offered to perform the most vile work like killing a person or wipe out a whole family.

Incredible as it may seem but it is true that these killings in different parts of the country were, perhaps orchestrated by self-seeking politicians or business rivals in a large number of cases and in other cases by the extortions targeting the individuals for their inability to yield to their demands. It seems big cities like Dhaka and Chittagong are now perforated societies steeped in hate, greed and ill-gotten money. How could these young men moderately educated in most cases and apparently sensible be killing so dispassionately? The most

the youngsters those born in the late 70s and right through 80s grew up in a world full of scams and corruption. They are not interested to know what happens to others when they want to change their own lifestyles fast. They want ready success, ready money, unbridled life with all the comfort and luxuries and they believe they can use any means to get it. Inspired by the ostentatious living they see next to their door, most youngsters today prowl tirelessly for a better deal that will free them from the restraints and deprivation that their parents faced or face.

Ambitions soar and the image of making it big constantly play on the mind but when failure strikes most can't handle it and take the most dreaded

drifted into drug addiction and drug trade.

There is something sinister in the air around. Hardly the cry and protest to nab the killers of Haji Shahidullah in Mirpur could die down, another gruesome murder of a landlady at Mirpur living in a tin shed measuring about one katha and perpetrated through a hired killer engaged by her tenant Akhtar has sent shivers among the citizenry. The entire nation has been traumatised and feels outraged at the savagery perpetrated one after another mostly on helpless men and women at different parts of the country. What these barbaric acts have made clear is that armed goons and mafias are having their field day right under the nose of the law enforcers while

Banking for beggars!

MAMUN RASHID

BEGGARS, in a word, are the most vulnerable citizens of our country. Today, however, "begging" has become an easy occupation, many find it a lucrative source of income although this is not a desirable one. Also because of increasing rural-urban migration, the number of beggars in the urban areas especially in Dhaka city is going up every day as job-shy people entering into the city. It is said that the capital city of Dhaka is now home to more than 30,000 beggars as also mentioned in a survey report, with some of them being disabled.

This writer also had the same impression, before coming across a presentation on "banking for beggars" at the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce & Industry (MCCI). There is no doubt that it was an impeccable challenge that was first taken in 2002 to support the beggars in the country by Grameen Bank founder Professor Mohammad Yunus. The society cannot progress unless the poorest of the poor -- the beggars, are made productive members of society. However, wife of a legislator once told me -- it is impossible to transform a beggar into an active worker, begging being the easiest job'.

In fact there are different kinds of beggars seen mostly begging near a mosque or a railway station, bus terminals or even at graveyards -- sometimes in a group, sometimes alone with disability. Sometimes there are many circumstantial beggars not the hardened professional ones. Survey reports by many NGOs say there are more than 300,000 circumstantial beggars in rural Bangladesh. In recent times we have also come across many child beggars in the city who often fall prey to many of the professional beggars who would engage them as their wage earners.

Because of their sheer illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, most of the poor people cannot find any other way out to support themselves or their family. Some also finds this an easy way out for maintaining livelihood, without being included in the work force. There are even beggars who are found addicted to drugs and are involved in drug trafficking or other un-social activities. There are also lots of congenital or otherwise handicapped poor people in our society who would beg just for their survival.

We -- a nation as a whole -- got to address this pressing issue "whether it is

an honourable way of living and not live

Furthermore, often many poor people have chosen begging suffering from old age crisis who are left at the mercy of their near relatives or neighbours.

It was a major question cropped up in our mind: can a nation make any progress without transforming this significant number of poor people in to a productive workforce? The society cannot progress unless the poorest of the poor -- the beggars, are made productive members of society. However, wife of a legislator once told me -- it is impossible to transform a beggar into an active worker, begging being the easiest job'.

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Banking for beggars may create a huge impact in addressing poverty. It may be one of the most innovative models to reach the hardcore poor with rehabilitative, financial, educational and social services delivered through a microfinance framework.

really possible to transform Bangladeshi beggars into entrepreneurs' in order to drive out poverty by bringing the poorest to the mainstream business. To answer this question, we must review the whole scenario. If we see the success stories of microcredit it had started with a small number of poor women in very few villages, who took the advantage of micro-loans and gradually became entrepreneurs.

It was a real experience of mine when I have once interviewed a woman at Singair, Manikganj engaged in a cow-tanning project. To my utter surprise I found that the woman stood up with a very courageous answer when asked about conservative social obligations or norms that restrains most of the poor Bangladeshi women from working independently outside home. She had the courage to raise her voice against the society when she was left alone after her husband deserted her. It was the simple micro loan offered by Proshika through which she has survived and supported her family.

We might as well take the signal from many such success stories over the last few decades and how it had an extraordinary effect on the status of women in their families and communities. To some extent, beggars are a minority group who cannot often be compared with the general poor people who would prefer an honourable way of living and not live

at the charity of others. The model of banking for the beggars can help rehabilitate the beggars, create self-employment and a respectable life for the poorest but the question remains whether it is always acceptable to the beggars to choose shunning their current profession. If a professional beggar is earning more than he would be getting

by taking a loan then he might as well continue begging. So is there enough incentive for a beggar to shun begging? Or is their illiteracy and ignorance that is the main obstacle to bring them under the shelter of an institution that may offer them a respectable source of income? Or is it their lack of confidence in their new livelihood or are coerced by

local professional beggar groups to stick to begging?

The banking for beggars with microcredit can very well attempt to rehabilitate the beggars and take them to the next stage of being productive members of the society. It can create an option of respectable life for a beggar through offering interest and collateral free flexible term microcredit, providing basic literacy and peer support to the struggling members, holding discussion programmes to harness information on the challenges to overcome and innovative solutions for creating opportunities.

The current formalised Struggling

Members Programme of Grameen Bank began in July 2002, though the bank's trying to reach the beggars had been going on since its inception. Each of the Grameen Bank staff was also asked to recruit one beggar into the programme.

In 2004 the goal was to reach 25,000 members. The programme has over 38,000 members. The programme has given out US\$350,000 in loans of which US\$150,000 have already been repaid.

The struggling members have collectively saved US\$25,000. The repayment rate is 100 percent. Grameen Bank

absorbs the cost to service the loans to the beggars. It also provides life insurance services at no cost to the beggars. To date, more than 380 members have quit

begging and found an alternative, respectable source of self-employment.

who enrolled in the programme eventually gave up begging and began selling goods in their former beggar routes.

The principle of banking for beggars has a very simple approach.

While providing interest-free, collateral-free microcredit at flexible loan terms as decided by the struggling members on their self-evaluation of repayment ability Providing basic literacy and financial literacy training acquaint them to their loan terms and financial obligations. The programme creates an opportunity and presents an alternative option to begging for its members to help them find a dignified livelihood, send their children to school and graduate into entrepreneurs over.

The beggars can also have an identity of being the respected members of a reputed organisation.

When we can see most of the people in our country are living below the poverty line, this is just a step forward to stand by the poorest and raise awareness to reduce poverty. It has been figured out there will be thousands of more beggars entering into this programme. Thus banking for beggars may create a huge impact in addressing poverty. It may be one of the most innovative models to reach the hardcore poor with rehabilitative, financial, educational and social services delivered through a microfinance framework.

Taking the story of a lady, Sufia Khatun, who was the first beggar member of Grameen Bank. She lived in the village Zobra where Grameen Bank began an action research project. No one else in the village wanted to take Sufia in their group. When time came for group members to propose an income generating activity and apply for their first loan, Sufia requested for only 10 Taka. Other group members thought she was making a mockery out of the system by requesting such a paltry sum. But, Sufia, a beggar, had never handled any money and had no idea how to spend more than ten Taka. Her group members insisted that she take at least 100 Taka, but to no avail. In the end, Professor Yunus mediated and Sufia took 30 Taka as her first loan. She repaid that loan within weeks.

The current Struggling Members

Programme began as a voluntary service on behalf of Grameen Bank employees.

All the employees were requested to

mentor one beggar in their locality and

attempt to inspire the beggar to opt out

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The situation is no doubt complicated

by the presence of Saudi,

Yemeni

and Egyptian

militants who are venting their