

## Rising crime curve

Take the bull by the horn

**D**ESPITE occasional handing out of stern warnings by ministers of the home ministry or by top police officials, criminals continue to wreak havoc on civic life. In the conspicuous absence of decisive crime busting operations, criminals are apparently getting more organised, reckless and innovative every day in carrying out activities that range from petty mugging, kidnapping and looting to gunning down of victims. Only the other day, in broad daylight, extortionists gunned down the father-in-law of a garment exporter who had refused to give them money as per their demand. The manner in which the killing operation was carried out sent chills down the spine of the citizens. A number of other extortion victims have also been shot by the criminals in last one month.

The crime chart clearly shows that the incidence of gangsters demanding large amounts of money over cell phones from established businessmen has reached a new height in the last couple of months. Many godfathers are reportedly running their anti-social activities from hideouts, and their lackeys seem to have become unstoppable, as they often find their way out of prisons through loopholes in the legal system. Very justifiably, the business community is feeling insecure at the moment and their apprehension has been amply voiced by the business leaders, who have expressed their concern at the fate of further investment in the country by entrepreneurs unless drastic steps were taken to improve the situation.

The police officials have admitted to more than once the visible downslide in law and order. But, it needs to be said that mere admission itself would not solve the problem. As the legal and authorised agency to maintain law and order, the police will have to be proactive and more vigilant in pursuing criminals and busting crime networks. Criminality has already gone deep into society with new ideas and methods being applied to hoodwink the people and the police alike.

We believe every police station already has a list of criminals so what is required is updating it with the help of the ward commissioner offices and various detective agencies. Therefore, tracing down strangers in the area should not be any difficult tasks for them. Uprooting the local drug taking spots and criminals involved in selling them could be one way of containing crime. All said and done, crime rate must be brought down if the government wants to succeed with its major development plans.

## WASA's saving grace

Trenchless pipe installation welcome

**D**HAKA Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (DWSA) has earned a notoriety for claiming the largest share of road digging, and as if that was not enough, for supplying undrinkable water that even stinks in a large swathe of the metropolis. These sending livability index of Dhaka life further down, the denizens have had a plenty of reasons to feel hard done by.

At long last, however, appears a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel. DWSA is introducing no-dig technology, albeit on a pilot basis at the moment to replace old water pipes as well as to expand its network. A project has been inaugurated on old Elephant Road and Gulshan Road No.103 to replace the 'open-cut system' of installing water and sewer pipes. Need we say, the traditional method has tormented the citizens to no end, thanks to off-season excavation, potholed roads, puddles of water logging, all contributing to a severe traffic congestion, hazardous public movement and hygienic risk.

Apart from the hardships caused to urban life, chaotic excavation has been at the root of corruption and the poor quality development work rushed through the fag-end of a fiscal year. It is our expectation that inasmuch as the trenchless technique will obviate large scale excavation, it should help reduce corruption considerably. We have to wait and see on that. The new method involving drilling of holes at both ends of a road-stretch, to be installing a pipe, and, in case of replacement, using a sharp cutter internally, has been applied successfully in Kolkata. The question is: why such an obviously useful technique was not introduced in Dhaka earlier on, so as to spare us the proverbial suffering.

Now, the magnitude of the task is summed up by the fact that 3,481 km of water lines will have to be replaced and extended under the project that has just been flagged off with a long way to go, right up to 2,013. Of foremost importance at this stage is the imperative of making the pilot project a success and then replicating it onwards. Nothing should be allowed to come in the way of the project's advancement. While we thank the Asian Development Bank (ADB) profusely for its vital assistance in the project, we wonder why DESA, Titas Gas and T&T should not explore the possibility of averting road digging so as to radically bring down the levels of unpleasant excavation surprises.

## While compassion surprises

Even now, otherwise responsible and erudite politicians are talking irrelevantly and irreverently. The tragedy is that we are forgetting that democracy, with freedom of opinion and opposition, is not the normal way of organising society but is a rare human achievement.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

**T**HE news of Begum Khaleda Zia and a number of prominent BNP leaders condoling the sad demise of Dr. Wazed Mia, husband of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has been of significance. The media has been very appreciative of the comforting gesture of Begum Zia in Sheikh Hasina's hour of distress and personal loss. Some have gone to the extent of commenting that the warmth of sympathy and understanding generated will positively impact the otherwise acrimonious relationship of the two main political parties.

To an outside observer, the above situation may be a bit difficult to comprehend as what has happened is quite obvious and in perfect consonance with normal human behaviour. The cynics, however, say that in Bangladesh the obvious has to be stated and enacted time and again to restore propriety in public life and political discourses.

The sad reality is that, barring honourable exceptions, our politicians of different opinions do not socialise amongst themselves and do not enquire about each other's welfare - some are not even on talking terms. Many such politicians, despite their being related to each other, are not discharging their social responsibilities, which, needless to mention, is setting an unhealthy precedent. On account of such aberrations, the future social scenario may be one in which our leaders in all walks of life will have scant respect for each other.

Interestingly enough, the sizable expatriate community, including diplomats, has often wondered how we, having crafted such an admirably lofty constitution, could be so coarse in political exchanges and behave so immaturely in the social circuit.

There can be no doubt that the inner strength of our people, which has enabled them to be dignified and to hold their heads high despite economic adversity, is the result of our age-old tradition of values pertaining to courtesy and hospitality. Is there a risk of our losing that richness, while failing, at the same time, to shed poverty? Our leaders should ponder, as there is no replacement for a sense of values.

It is perhaps time to develop the spirit of moderation by not pressing a partisan advantage to its bitter end, and understand and respect the other view; and this must be in clear contradiction to the spirit of fanaticism. This is extremely significant because, if the spirit of moderation does not prevail, our society will degenerate into divisions and hatred will replace goodwill. We have to demonstrate how goodness can be made effective.

Cynical observers of the Bangladeshi political scene entertain grave doubts about a real change in the style and substance of advocacy insofar as our dispute resolution scenario is concerned. Their continued pessimism is not without ground as hapless Bangladeshis sadly watched their guardians remain unmoved



Compassion is a virtue.

despite the combined onslaught of logic and reason, law and fact.

Even now, otherwise responsible and erudite politicians are talking irrelevantly and irreverently. The tragedy is that we are forgetting that democracy, with freedom of opinion and opposition, is not the normal way of organising society but is a rare human achievement. In our environment, many citizens may appear un-dimensional but our political leaders have no excuse for being so perilously un-dimensional. They have to act as catalysts. The responsibilities, which, today, lie on their shoulders are far greater than at any earlier time in our history.

We seem to be oblivious that law moves on a

unique plane and that a lawful society reflects man's sense of order and justice. Such a society embodies rules and traditions that have a binding effect and provide the enduring element, the dimension of permanence, in history. We cannot have a government without order and there can be no order without tolerance and decency.

The harmful polarisation of our political existence across the party divide has to stop. The language of reason and moderation needs to be pleasantly conspicuous while our tolerance threshold must be admirably high. These are not a tall ask in a democracy.

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## Bismillah and Rabindranath

The Rabindra birthday celebration was one such occasion. Bismillah translates into "in the name of Allah." It is sometimes easy to be blinded by the obvious, but it is not right to use "in the name of Allah" to begin an encomium for someone who was not a believer in Allah.

MAHFUZUR RAHMAN

**I** believe I was not the only one startled by the education minister of the country beginning his address at a celebration of Rabindranath's hundred and forty-eighth birth anniversary with a solemn Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim. What startled me was a question of propriety. We have often to grapple with the question because what might be perfectly all right in a particular context could be singularly inappropriate in another.

There is the well-known story of a peripatetic village preacher in Bengal whose prepared sermon designed for delivery to

the simple country folk in the sizzling summer month of *jaistha* was delivered on a bitterly cold *magh* evening, with dire consequences for the preacher. The story is often told frivolously. If only the present context were so frivolous.

The incongruity of saying Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim to commemorate Rabindranath's birthday should be obvious enough. In case it is not so apparent to some, let us look it the matter a little more closely. Bismillah is quintessentially Islamic. Its solemnity is attested by the fact that all one hundred and fourteen *suras* in the Koran, excepting one, begin with it. The

fact that many human acts among Muslims begin with it seems to obscure the possibility that it might be singularly inappropriate on some occasions.

The Rabindra birthday celebration was one such occasion. Bismillah translates into "in the name of Allah." It is sometimes easy to be blinded by the obvious, but it is not right to use "in the name of Allah" to begin an encomium for someone who was not a believer in Allah. Rabindranath -- for God's sake! -- was certainly not a believer in Allah, a truth the education minister seemingly forgot. Invoking the name of Allah for someone who did not believe in Allah at all seems utterly out of place.

For his part, the great poet would probably not have liked it either. A Hindu, albeit of a reformed type, he might have resented it. Whether he turned in whatever abode he might be in, we will of course never know. It seems certain, however, that he would much rather not have heard any reference to God at all. In his public speeches he never invoked any.

The constitution! Might the education minister have been driven by the latest BNP onslaught against the government on the proposed nullification of the fifth amendment of the constitution? The allegation, precisely, is that the present government would do away with Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim. Was the education minister perhaps bending backward to say to the people, as the law minister has said explicitly, that the government had no such plan, and make the point by saying Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim at the Rabindra birth celebrations? It is hard to say.

Not so hard to see, however, is the long list of politicians of all shades straining to demonstrate at every opportunity how truly religious they are. It is indeed sad to see a political party that once fought a war to create a secular state, and now in power, pandering to the religious right and the uninformed public.

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## Will Indian election results surprise voters?

In any case, there is expected to be a confusing post-election scene with hardly any party or group likely to claim outright victory. Permutations and combinations are already discernible, even before the announcement of the results, and overtures are also clearly there taking into account the possibilities.

ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

**T**HE results of the five-phase national elections in India will be made known from today. Major players have already begun their exercises, covertly or overtly, to form the new government even though they are publicly maintaining their hitherto known postures about their political opponents. Apart from two main parties, which also lead their respective alliances, others too are not less active since the polls may give a "hung" parliament.

The magic number of 272 seats in the 573-member Lok Sabha is clearly beyond reach of either the Congress or the BJP. Hence, the game for the next government remains wide open, with every likelihood of smaller combines or regional parties playing a pivotal role in the event of a fluid situation.

President Pratibha Patil will be the cynosure of all eyes and the Rastrapati Bhavan the venue of activities relating to the future governance of the world's largest democracy. In the case of clear winner, the president has no difficulty in inviting the particular group to form a new government. But that is unlikely this time.

In the last polls, the incumbent BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was the favourite, but the Congress was the winner. The NDA was so complacent that it advanced the polls by a few months. The decision boomeranged as its "shining India" slogan backfired, with rural India mostly voting for the non-NDA platform.

What is going to happen this time? The BJP-led NDA combine is making a drastic bid to wrest power. Its 81-year-old prime

ministerial hopeful Lal Krishna Advani's chances of adorning the seat of head of government will fade if the party fails.

Unlike the political landscape in the United States or Britain, or even in Pakistan or Bangladesh, it is not necessarily a matter between two major parties or their leaders as to who will form the new government. True, in India, too, two major parties or alliances are there and are at the vanguard of competition, but others do not recede to insignificance. Who had thought that a United Front government would be at the helm in the mid-nineties and that too with a less known H.D. Deve Gowda as the premier?

This time a "third front," comprising the leftists and some regional secular parties, has the chance of influencing the formation of the new government, even though it may not secure many seats. A so-called "fourth front," made up by the erstwhile components of the UPA, may also become important. Some one from the "third front," like Mayawati of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, or a leftist leader from West Bengal or Kerala may find himself in the prime minister's position.

Likewise, Mulayam Singh Yadav of SP, Lalu Prasad Yadav of the Rastriyi Janata Dal of Bihar or Sharad Pawar of the Nationalist Congress of Maharashtra -- who all are disenchanted with the Congress -- harbour ambitions for the high office. Pranab Mukherjee may also come closer than anytime before for premiership should complexity warrant a Congress-led government minus Manmohan Singh.

While it is a general impression that, in the event of a Congress-led government, Dr. Manmohan will be the premier, even



In for a surprise?

though most Congressmen would like to see Rahul Gandhi taking the reins as the scion of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Should Manmohan become premier again, he may also quit it anytime, making way for 38-year-old Rahul.

If the NDA succeeds, Advani is the choice, but hardcore Hindu nationalists are also seeking to project Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, known as rabidly communal, as an alternative.

In any case, there is expected to be a confusing post-election scene with hardly any party or group likely to claim outright victory. Permutations and combinations are already discernible, even before the announcement of the results, and overtures are also clearly there taking into account the possibilities. Sonia Gandhi and

Rahul Gandhi, despite their strong anti-left rhetoric and electoral ties with Trinamul's Mamta Baneerjee, chose not to fly to Kolkata for electioneering. Evidently, this is meant to not further alienate the leftists, who nurture a severe dislike of Manmohan for his pro-American policies.

The BJP is wooing Jayalalitha of Tamil Nadu and some others to make up the losses suffered by the parting of ways by TDP of Andhra Pradesh and Biju Janata Dal of Orissa. Some regional parties, which are not expected to garner many seats, are also seeking to sit up and call the shots in case the result becomes too close a call. The Indian election results promise an interesting scenario.

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