

The recent spurt in crime

They are portents of things more sinister

HERE is little question that crime is on the rise in the nation's capital. In these past few weeks, instances of murder have come upon us with a ferocity which boggles the mind. The killing of a middle-aged couple in Gulshan a few days ago by a young man enraged by their refusal to give their daughter in marriage to him is surely a new and macabre dimension to urban criminality. It was at once an act horrendous and unimaginable by its very nature. And before anyone was able to make any sense of the tragic episode comes news of the stabbing of a young woman and her parents in Kalabagan by a classmate of the woman because of his frustration at being rejected by another classmate.

These are portents of something rather more sinister that may be coming into the crime scene. Add to these the reports constantly filtering in from various parts of the country of the many ways in which crime is creating huge complications in the lives of families. Young women, quite a few in number, have been compelled to take their own lives because of the endless harassment they were subjected to by young wayward men. And, of course, there are the tales of school and college-going girls forced to stay home because of the sense of insecurity they feel once they are outside the home. A young woman, unable to accept the advances of a young man, rejects him and then is swiftly killed by him. There are also the incidents of men being found murdered inside shops ostensibly locked from outside. All these instances of crime come at a time when some in the police administration are trying to inform us that crime is under control or in any case is not anything to be unduly worried about. There are some clear truths that must be acknowledged by the administration. Foremost among these is the fact that the law enforcing bodies, notably the police and RAB, must gear up their activities and truly go for a policy of zero tolerance in handling crime. What is certainly disturbing about these crimes is that not only do they occur but that once the crimes are committed the law enforcers find it difficult to nab the killers. That is not the way an efficient crime tackling or crime busting organization works. All too often we have noticed the police getting rather active after a tragedy has taken place, through sealing off the place of occurrence and making a great show of catching a few suspects. And then everything loses steam.

It is imperative at this point that we go for a careful study of the social conditions that have led to a spurt in crimes. More important than that is the requirement for a full, purposeful and ruthless operation against criminals. It does not help that RAB and police personnel are seen moving around in the city and other places as a way of deterring crime. If they cannot keep track of criminals, if they fail to make life safe for citizens, what purpose can they really serve? We expect the law enforcers to produce results, and soon, in the investigations into the recent incidents of crime in Dhaka and elsewhere.

Dealing with child 'offences'

Adopt a sensible new approach

IT is rather surprising that many children land up in jail, when they should not, not because of any lacunae in the relevant laws but because of the ignorance of those who enforce these. The fact was exposed at a national consultation meeting recently on, "Improving Response to Children in Contact with Law," which addressed several issues related to young so-called offenders. Some very good suggestions were made by organisers of the meeting which deserves serious consideration of the law ministry.

The handling of an offence and treatment of the offender require a human touch, more so when it has to do with young people who might have gone astray or wayward for reasons that may not have been entirely in his or her control, or indulged in a petty offence which does not merit a police case. Sending them to jail and putting them through the rigours of the established trial process may be the easy way out for the police but at the end of the day it leaves a long lasting impact on the person from which he or she may never recover. It is even worse when children find themselves in jail for minor offences, quite in contravention to what the Children Act 1974 provides for.

We understand that Children Act 2010 is in the process of being finalised and we take heart from what the Law Minister said at the seminar about the Act being formulated in such a way that no child shall have to go to jail. But updating a law and making it relevant and sensitive to social needs and ground realities is one thing but applying it sensibly is quite another, as the proceedings of the said seminar have revealed.

Apart from the need for law enforcers to be more knowledgeable about relevant laws, what must also be underscored are the several suggestions made in the said seminar concerning the method of handling of young offenders. Apart from introducing a separate desk at police stations there is strong rationale for introducing alternative methods of resolution of offences committed by adolescents including local arbitration, instead of handing the offender over to the police. And there is good logic in involving the local chairman and members to act as probation officers, whose job it should be, along with the elders of the locality, to ensure that the youngsters do not resort to violence or criminal activities in the first place. And last but not the least, the counseling centers should be humanised so that those who leave these at the end of their term are better human beings and not worse.

Dhaka's descent into disaster

Dhaka, the old Moghul capital, has become a modern day disaster. The years of inefficiency and neglect on the part of successive administrations have truly turned this once peaceful, beautiful city into the "second-worst" liveable city in the world.



SYED REZAUL KARIM

DHAKA, the old Moghul capital, has become a modern day disaster. The years of inefficiency and neglect on the part of successive administrations have truly turned this once peaceful, beautiful city into the "second-worst" liveable city in the world. I wonder what the city mayor, gazing at the Dhaka skyline from his imposing office, will make out of this dubious distinction Dhaka has earned.

The city obviously has no father or mother. There are only god-fathers. Here, billboards erected on the nod of the City Corporation kill people, buses without fitness and drivers with fake licenses run over school children and housewives. Here rickshaws overtake cars. Clouds of dust envelope the neighbourhoods in the name

of street cleaning in the early mornings.

Here in Dhaka, heaps of sewage stand in mounds alongside the open drains and remain there forever till the sun dries them, and evaporate into the pungent and pernicious air entering the lungs. Or, they are melted once again into sewage through heavy downpour; the drains swell and flow out like a cesspit.

Here in Dhaka, roads burst like boils spewing sewage on the roads, wafting a filthy smell all around. Here people relieve themselves by the side of busy thoroughfares as the city lacks adequate and clean toilets. Here, roads with moonlike craters bounce the vehicles -- a legacy of their poor construction.

Roads once dug for laying pipes, cables and gas lines remain unrepaired and are not restored to their original condition.

Here construction goes on by blocking or barring roads with bricks and steel heaped on the road. Here workers toil unaware of the hazards of high-rise constructions.

Roads are so clogged with all sorts of vehicles that sometimes emergency services like ambulances and fire fighting vehicles cannot even reach the destinations in time. It is only in Dhaka that the names of some public institutions get changed every time a new government comes to power.

Here in Dhaka, slums swarm like beehives in the midst of the city. The slums expand and wipeout the green and vacant areas. Over the slums, the city council mastans and agents of the political parties rule the roost. Areas are parcelled into few square feet of huts where one has to bend double to enter.

Adults only use them just to sleep, children grow up on the street. Cooking takes place in the open; toilets and bathing by the roadside corner covered by corrugated iron sheets or jute sacks. The steamy smell of dirt, smoke and sweat hang over the slums. The rents paid by the dwellers are quite high on per square feet basis compared to the respectable areas of the city. Slums are necessary for the politicians; they are the street processionists for hire and the vote banks.

Here in Dhaka, residential areas are sliced into commercial zones. Residential areas are infested with small shops and businesses through the benign courtesy of the City Corporation and Rajuk. Loudspeakers blare out speeches or incantations with pious purposes, taxing the hearing power, patience and nerves of the hapless citizens.

The once serene and soothing rivers, Buriganga and Shitalakhya, embracing Dhaka city are clinically dead. The rivers are denuded of aquatic life, due to toxic wastes that were drained into them for decades, and that is not all! The riverbanks and shoals have been grabbed by the greedy, and buildings have come up on the filled rivers. All these happened under the eyes of the successive administrations.

Polythene and plastic objects -- modern day junk -- were thrown indiscriminately into the rivers and drains. Riverbeds rose; water flow decreased and flood waters refused to recede. With heavy downpour in the monsoon, Dhaka turns into a veritable swimming pool, boats ply on the roads, cars float and fish surface on the streets.

Here in Dhaka, food stalls sell food prepared in the open, with least attention to hygiene and cleanliness. Dust from the roads mix with food prepared with questionable edible oils. Once in a while BSTI makes a pre-planned swoop on eateries and makes a show of it on the television. Here, tap water goes under the label of mineral water. Perennial shortage of water drives people to exasperation. People queue with containers for hours to draw water from the street taps.

The problems are further exacerbated by the intermittent "load shedding." Life gets unbearable in the summer heat and humidity. While the affluent neighbourhoods plunge into the din of diesel generators, the poor households hold on to hurricane lamps and palm leaf fans to cool themselves.

Here women workers working in the vibrant garment industry walk mile after mile "before they sleep." Whether in the summer, or in the winter, rainy or dry seasons, the Dhaka mornings show a spectacle of processions of women walking, walking, and walking, their bodies thin and emaciated, their clothes cheap and colourful, and their faces unlit by any promise of the future.

Here in Dhaka, beggars carry children in their laps and on their shoulders, as if it was a psychological trick to extract pity and money from the well-to-do car owners and pedestrians. The maimed and the congenitally impaired display their bodily abnormalities to draw kindness and help. On the streets, the stretched hands of supplication beseech you, and if denied a favour, may sometimes curse you.

Dhaka is teeming with millions. The city cannot provide enough space or services to its citizens, just as its few cemeteries have no space enough for the dead. Dhaka, the old Dhaka, you remain beautiful only in one's nostalgic yesteryears.

"Often I think of the beautiful town,
That is seated by the sea,
Often in thought go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town
And my youth comes back to me."

(My Lost Youth -- Wordsworth)

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Equity in development

Our nirvana lies not in choosing sides but having good relations with all to promote our national interests. Our prime minister's recent visit to China is a reflection of that policy. Bangladesh's economic advancement demands of us equity and justice and that efforts be directed towards regional integration and beyond.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

IF development is defined as a multidimensional process of change from a less desirable to a more socially desirable state, then orthodox and critical alternate perspective of development comes into play (Caroline Thomas and Melvyn Reader-1997). The orthodox view of development encourages the South to replicate more or less Walt Rostow's "Stages of Economic Development" while critical alternate perspective argue for a more holistic approach that would meet the physical, environmental and spiritual needs of human beings.

The orthodox concept inevitably leads to inequality and injustice, one of the reasons being UN adopting development gradation that includes human development index among others to devolve responsibility from the First World (a coinage of the Cold War days) to the less fortunate and weak states.

In the case of Bangladesh, sporadic violence in garment factories, one of the mainstays of the economy, is due to the extreme disparity in income between the rich and that segment of the population that may be defined as "disposable" and destined to live in "planned misery."

As it is, the US assesses Bangladesh as one of the world's poorest and most densely populated countries that has made major strides to improve its economic condition from the ruinous condition left by the kleptocratic centre-right religion-oriented government that ruled Bangladesh in the 2001-2005 period.

Bangladesh's predominantly agricultural economy depends heavily on an erratic monsoon cycle, with periodic flooding and drought. Although improving, infrastructure to support transportation, communications, and power supply is poorly developed. Bangladesh has limited reserves of coal and oil and its industrial base is weak.

The country's main endowments include its vast human resource base, rich agricultural land, relatively abundant water, and substantial reserves of natural gas. On the positive side, it is

believed that Bangladesh has modernised rapidly with a per capita income of \$1,500 (adjusted by purchasing power parity) significantly than India and Pakistan -- both of which are also lower than the world average of \$1,497.

The importance of equity becomes self-evident. The book by Robert Perruchi and Earl Wysong (*The new class society: Goodbye American dream*) portrays a US class system consisting of a "privileged class" composed of a "super-class," "credentialed class managers" and "professionals," representing 20 percent of the population; while the remaining 80 percent are engaged in wage labour, modest self-employment or part-time work.

Perruchi and Wysong speak of the "secession of the successful," combining physical and social separation, increasing number of privately provided services with the ideology of neo-liberalism and free market fundamentalism, separatist social identity and secession mentality. The average employee at Goldman Sachs made \$630,000 in 2007. The credit crunch caused by meltdown may take a while to go away. In the interim period middle and small business would be cagey to borrow (the banks may have more stringent lending conditions) and import less from foreign sources.

This situation has affected the RMG and textile sectors in Bangladesh. If the housing sector, both in Bangladesh and in the Middle East, were to shrink, then direct effect on remittance cannot be avoided. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government so far has not been successful in bringing down the price of goods, except for few essentials, within the purchasing capacity of the common men. The price hike, partly due to rise in international price of rice but mostly due to oligopolistic behaviour of syndicates craving for abnormal profit, has added millions of Bangladeshis to the poor class.

One is given to understand that of late the Bangladesh government appears determined to intervene in the market to destroy syndicates who have stolen from the people massive amounts of money by artificially raising price of commodities. Reduction and eventual eradication of

poverty would be a greater challenge for the government given the fact that 40 percent of the people live below the poverty level.

The Bangladesh government has correctly taken an integrated policy of poverty reduction, solution of unemployment problem, and providing a meaningful life to the people. The Awami League manifesto describes the need for employment generation in the agriculture sector, provision for training and loans for self-employment, sub-contracting system between small and big/medium scale industries successfully achieved in Japan and South Korea, and special training for the labourers going abroad.

Development economists generally concur that the inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI) can play a vital role in the growth dynamics of developing economies and that the inflow of FDI in developing countries can help fill at least three "development gaps" -- first, the "investment gap" by providing capital for domestic investment; second, the "foreign exchange gap" by providing foreign currency through initial investments and subsequent export earnings made possible by the initial investments; and finally, the "tax revenue gap" by generating tax revenues through additional economic activities.

External assistance has played a vital

role in the economic development of Bangladesh, assisting in bridging the internal gap (savings-investment gap) and external gap (export-import gap). The costs, risks and maturity structure related to external debt management analysis are important. With the shrinkage of share of grant aid in the external aid package in recent years, the volume of external borrowings is increasing, which has resulted in a progressive increase of per capita debt obligation.

To spread the fruits of development to all segments of the population intra-regional integration of economies will be necessary. Besides, as, in this age of globalisation, it is neither possible nor desirable for developing countries to act alone. It would be inadvisable for Bangladesh to remain a captive of Indo-Pak political discord for that captivity can only arrest our national growth and regional economic progress.

Our nirvana lies not in choosing sides but having good relations with all to promote our national interests. Our prime minister's recent visit to China is a reflection of that policy. Bangladesh's economic advancement demands of us equity and justice and that efforts be directed towards regional integration and beyond.

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