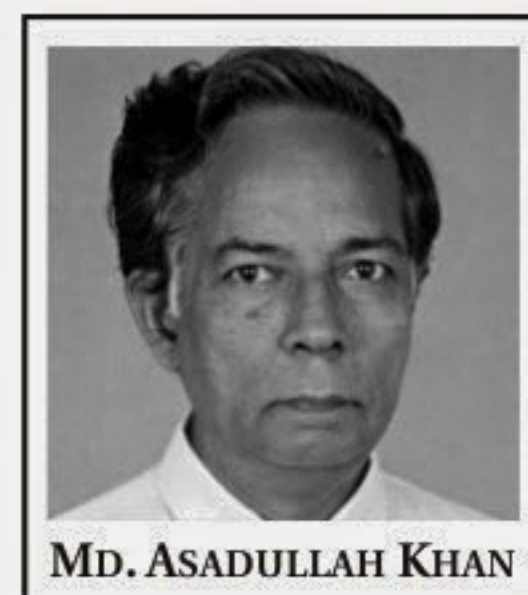


BITTER TRUTH

Drug-fuelled crime



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

ALMOST awash in guns, and plagued by addicts and extortionists, Dhaka and some other big cities of the country are struggling to cope with the wave of

violence. Reports carried by newspapers in recent times about kidnapping, assault and brutal killing of businessmen, political activists and even innocent kids held for ransom by rival groups and addicts who are mostly hired killers have disturbed the citizens.

The recent killing of Fazlul Huq, DCC ward-41 Awami League general secretary, by some hired killers engaged by his political rival has awakened the citizenry to the vicious crimes that are now being committed in and around the city. Dulal, an addict and one of the killers, confessed that he was hired by Kalu, an accomplice of drug peddler Liton, after luring him with two day's heroin and Tk 5,000 for killing Fazlul Huq.

People are horrified at the ineptitude of the law enforcement personnel, the senseless killing of innocent and helpless citizens, and the realisation of how much damage these brutalities were doing to the country.

After a thorough analysis of such violence by the youth, who earn money in exchange of contract killing without having any direct link and animosity with the victims, one is led to believe that the damage starts from the home. Many parents, especially mothers, are not giving enough time to raising their children in a proper way. Some of these parents, who are affluent beyond measure, are given to indulging in drugs and drinks and partying that transgress the limits of traditional social norms and family values, alienating the children from the family and making them disillusioned. When the home life is so unhealthy, how can the kids turn to a life that has moral values?

Many students in universities, colleges and even schools, some of them quite meritorious, are also becoming drug addicts and drug peddlers. But the tragedy is that once they are hooked up, they have to steal money and valuable items from their parents to meet their demand for drug! When their need for money is urgent, they take to

extortion, hijacking and even killing.

A chill ran down our spine when we heard that, being desperate to get money for drugs, an addict attacked his neighbour and tied his hands and legs as he refused to meet his demand for money. Sensing that the neighbour's son had seen this, the monster killed him before stabbing the father fatally.

Till before the clampdown by Rab in November 2007 in the posh areas of the city after the seizure of 1,30,000 yaba tablets, law enforcers took little notice and the citizenry seemed oblivious of the insidious trade looming up in the society. As the crackdown revealed, it is now a blossoming clandestine trade involving mainly the rich and the young.

Yaba has replaced other drugs as the most favoured social lubricant among affluent urban Bangladeshis who largely view this drug as a recreational or good-time high. It has become the aspirational lifestyle accessory -- much like the SUV or LEXUS -- of those with money to dispose-off.

Shockingly, such drugs that till mid-'90s were restricted to only a few have now found entry into the impoverished section of people. Reports have it that drugs, especially yaba tablets, are on sale in at least 1,500 spots in the city. Recently, a physician, who is an addict, was arrested with 500 yaba tablets.

In the latest drive against drugs, Rab arrested 25 drug dealers and addicts along with 1,200 yaba tablets from different locations at Uttara. In an annual conference on crime-related offences, held at the Police Headquarters, it was revealed by the police bureau that in the period ending November, 2010, police recorded 26,000 offences related to drug trafficking, but no information was available as to how many of the offenders were brought to book by the trial courts.

Much to our consternation, rich young kids dominate the scene. As urban affluence spreads, so does the number of drug users. The worrying trend is that the age when the young begin experimenting has dropped to 16 and 17. As one confession made to Rab by the arrestees reveals, there are about several thousand such dealers, and one is led to believe that there may be about several lakh high society people and young kids belonging mostly to the wealthy

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PHOTO: MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/DRIK NEWS



sections hooked to such party drugs.

Cities, towns and even rural areas have witnessed a spurt in drug use, but it is not as alarming as it is in the posh areas in the city. So the demographic has changed vastly. It could be anyone between 16 and 30 with spare cash looking for a stress buster or the instant gratification of the quick high.

Initially, many youngsters start using this drug under peer pressure. Principals and teachers of schools and colleges where these kids are studying point to a fair degree of drug use and their helplessness in arresting the trend because of the wealth and power these users wield.

Yaba's popularity as a party drug has soared because it unleashes sensations like energy, exhilaration, a sense of freedom, supremacy and stress release, other than working as a stimulant for sexual desire. One is led to believe that till now mainly youngsters, including college and university students belonging to high income groups, are involved in such drug dealing and abuse.

But what is worrying is that the abuse is gradually spreading to other strata of the

society in an epidemic form, ruining the backbone of the middle and lower middle class people. The key area of concern involves addicts who refuse to accept that they are hooked and later face serious psychological and physical problems, not to mention financial problems.

It is now almost established that the menace starts from our own houses, in consequence of lack of parental care and attention at the appropriate time. Unhappily, money is often used as a surrogate for affection. The reaction to drug use by their kids is usually denial.

In a bid to finding out the solutions to these problems, we must fulfill our commitments to our own children. The consequences of turning night time revelry into a regular lifestyle can be difficult to handle.

With the adolescents, both male and female, being caught with yaba tablets, viagra and alcohol, and the drug trade extending beyond anybody's knowledge, it was little known that the disease had spread so fast and so far. So sweeping is the extent of its damage to the society

that nothing discussed in the print and electronic media in the past months seemed enough.

We must recall that there was a time when all the basic social forces were marshaled to teach children the values of life. The society has drifted very far from this approach. The erosion of values has put the nation in a quandary. We must try our best to restore the lost values. The sooner we can reach a consensus on what these values are, the quicker will we be able to avert a disaster that confronts our kids.

Government at all levels should step up the battle against drugs, poverty, corruption and social inequity. Far more money should be poured into education and recreational opportunities for the young. Youngsters need more of their parents' time, and they need to know that society cares about them. Above all, affluent parents should take a long hard look in the mirror. The values of today's youth are merely magnified reflections of the values of their elders.

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Tribute to Shah Kibria

MAMUN RASHID

WE see today that brilliant students are no longer inclined towards politics, thus risking the creation of an intellectual void in political leadership. However, through history there have been exceptions to this norm, and possibly such exceptions still exist. One shining paradigm of such an exception was Shah Kibria. He was well groomed, soft speaking yet extremely firm in his commitment towards Bangladesh.

Born in 1931, S.A.M.S. Kibria, a brilliant student from Sylhet, went on to graduate from Dhaka University in Economics. It was then that he actively participated in the language movement, for which he was even arrested. He later obtained further academic degrees from the US and UK.

Many of us are aware of his success stories -- GDP growth rate of 5.83%, low inflation, remarkable growth in exports and investment, great strides in infrastructure and the attainment of self-sufficiency in food production. Socio-economic indicators such as literacy rate and mortality rate also marked significant progress.

This shining beacon of hope was abruptly switched off on the tragic afternoon of January 27, 2005. The painful memories haunt us still. So much could have been done; perhaps this fate could have been avoided altogether. To this day so many questions remain unanswered -- and the true killers are yet to be brought to justice.

In any country, especially in a transition economy like ours, the job of a finance minister is

extremely difficult. Irrespective of involvement, the finance minister seems to be held responsible for everything, including price inflation of commodities, adverse exchange rate fluctuations, absence of adequate food supplies to famine hit regions, accidents occurring due to usage of old aircrafts, and insufficient fund placement for school infrastructure build-up or even volatility in the capital market. He is even blamed if farmers do not receive satisfac-



S.A.M.S. KIBRIA

tory amount of fuel or fertilizer.

We have been hearing for a long time that "the party is greater than an individual; the country is greater than a party." However, ironically, so far all the finance ministers of the elected governments have been criticised for prioritising the country's needs before the party's requirements. They even had to accept responsibility for the failure of public institutions, irrespective of their engagements. As a result, although there has been no dearth of talent, the destiny of finance ministers of Bangladesh is, generally, insipidness.

The finance ministers, in opposition to such scenarios, became aggressive. If the minister has to seek fund endowment from the World Bank, he has to decide on the "level of privatisation" for receiving aid from IME, he has to look after "value of Bangladeshi Taka" and even has to notify the European Union whether allocated funds were properly utilised or were embezzled by corrupt officials or local leaders. He also has to monitor unprofitable organisations and find out why the Anti-Corruption Commission is not competent or why the judiciary is not independent. For such activities the minister has to be aggressive to get things done.

How did the apparently very soft late finance minister Mr. Kibria manage under such extreme circumstances? He had sincerely administered all necessary responsibilities. Only the people who had worked with him can share how he had: 1) managed international trade with a foreign exchange reserve of a little over \$1 billion; 2) prevented hike of oil and gas prices; 3) directed the bureaucracy without raising his voice; 4) avoided giving business tycoons close to the party exclusive benefits; 5) kept Bangladesh's economy shielded from the currency crisis of South-East Asia; 6) become elected as representative of the people without resorting to unfair means and clever tricks; and 7) returned from Pakistan for building up an independent Bangladesh.

I do not know how he managed to do the seemingly impossible -- achieving so much without com-

promising his values -- and probably I shall never know. The nation's brilliant people don't have to be told what they have to accomplish. Their knowledge, talent and sincerity ultimately dictate their path to greatness.

I had the rare opportunity to get close to Mr. Kibria while he was our finance minister, and to share some of his thoughts regarding handling state owned banks, loss making public enterprises, corruption in civil bureaucracy and so on. He was an extremely talented Bengali, a responsible administrator, and a believer in logic, not fascism. He believed in Bangladesh's future. He was a great host too. When I visited his Dhanmondi house he personally looked after me and made sure I was entertained with very good homemade stuff.

Perhaps if he didn't choose that path and didn't have to go to his constituency regularly, he would still be alive. We wouldn't have lost the brilliant, patriotic and sincere S.A.M.S Kibria. His commitment to his goal of creating a better future for us ultimately led to his sad demise. Many of us were grieved by such an incident; fascism had triumphed over logic, rationalism and democracy.

Today, the people and the leaders of this nation have to decide how we can attract more Kibriyas to run the country's affairs and take it to the next trajectory of growth. We remember Mr. Kibria and his contribution to this nation's emergence and progress with honour and reverence.

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Asian business trick



H heard some shocking news about a businessman I know. "Jahan decided not to sing to his account books this time," his wife said. "He chanted a series of verses to his laptop instead."

It's progress I suppose. Business people in Europe and North America never sing to their computers. (In Texas, they shoot the poor things!)

In large patches of Asia, from Singapore to India to Malaysia to Hong Kong's Indian community, these important ancient traditions are preserved.

You've heard of Devali, the festival at which people light hundreds of tiny oil lamps? Well, a less well-known aspect of it is the Prayers to the Account Books, in which blessings are addressed to business ledger books. I am not making this up. "Dear Account Books, inflation is back and I need you guys to be filled with way bigger numbers, hear what I'm saying? Or I may have to spill coffee on you, know what I mean? Amen." (A Hindu reader swears this works.)

For the past year or so, these guys have put PCs or laptops on their altars instead. "In view of rapid computerisation, most traders across the country have changed their accounting system from traditional Bahi-Khata to computer system," Praveen Khandelwal, president of the Confederation of All India Traders, said to the International Asian

News Service. (Bahi-Khata is an ancient hand-written accounting system.) "On the occasion of Devali, the trading community is worshipping their computers," he continued.

Housewife Gauri Sharma told reporters: "Generally we see shopkeepers praying to their account books on Devali, but this is the first time I am seeing puja [blessings] being done to computers."

An American friend saw this as proof that Asians were gullible and superstitious. I found his view outrageous. "You call us gullible, yet you're the ones who believe that the tooth fairy exists, Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, the world will end in 2012, Justin Bieber has talent, etc."

Two days later I saw him praying to his computer! He'd been working for ages on a document, and then tried to save it but got the message: "Not Responding."

Eye closed, he whispered: "Please please PLEASE work."

Anyway, most financial history books say Italian monk Luca Pacioli invented accounting in 1494. Rubbish. Business people in Asia have been doing Bahi-Khata for more than 2000 years. Chinese financial documents stretch back to the dawn of history. "Sell theme park shares as private zoo profits tipped to fall 37 percent due to recent dinosaur extinction."

Now if you'll excuse me, I have a pressing engagement. I know it's not Devali but my HSBC current account is in extremely poor health, possibly close to death. A couple of hymns are urgently required.

I plan to sing Eric Clapton's Let It Grow: "Let it grow, let it grow, let it blossom, let it flow."

But I suspect it's been listening to the Dixie Chicks song: Long Time Gone.

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