

## CROSS TALK

### Daylight murder in city

#### Criminality calls for firm handling

THE murder of a local Awami League politician and his chauffeur in the capital on Wednesday is once more a grim reminder of the slide in law and order in the country. In these past few days, we have made our views known about the need to contain such spiralling crime if things are not to get any worse. We have pointed to the violent manner of young women being killed as well as the unnatural deaths of some children in recent days. And now that two murders have been committed in broad daylight in the capital, we cannot but serve warning to the authorities that unless serious and drastic steps are taken to halt this on-going spell of criminality, it may become well-nigh impossible for society to come away from the brink.

The irony here is that the crimes have all occurred at a time when Bangladesh is a co-host of the 2011 ICC World Cup Cricket. A thorough security blanket has been thrown around the capital to ensure that nothing happens to disturb the games. Such measures ought normally to have made life easier for citizens. Unfortunately, while we can claim that security regarding cricket is really in place, we cannot quite say that it has had any effect on the lives of citizens. One could even ask if all this attention to security vis-à-vis cricket may not actually have deflected police attention away from carrying out their normal responsibility of making and keeping life secure for citizens.

In the circumstances, we need hardly emphasise the absolute requirement for the authorities to take note of conditions. Pretending that all is well on the law and order front when it is not will do little good for them as well as for citizens. A strong, purposeful drive must now be undertaken to arrest this decline in conditions. It could be argued by some that our police force is often overstretched in performing its duties. There is a point there. Even so, with such other forces as the Rapid Action Battalion and Ansars present on the scene, it ought not to be terribly hard for criminals to be neutralized. Firmness is called for.

### Poor ADP implementation

#### Strong monitoring called-for

THE Annual Development programme (ADP) is still dogged by the perennial syndrome of low implementation rate. In keeping with an ambitious budget this fiscal, the ADP allocation, too, was enhanced by around 36 per cent more than the revised ADP for last fiscal. The expectation was that the ministries will be able to perform better at utilising the development money, given the emphasis the prime minister had repeatedly laid on better implementation of the fund. Unfortunately though, this time, too, the utilisation rate, far from improving, has rather been marked by a poorer show at 33 per cent over the first seven months, which is less than that of the last year's 35 per cent during the corresponding period.

But what is still ailing the ADP implementation regime? The explanation that the ministries and divisions responsible for ADP utilisation have come up with is that it is the strict donors' conditionalities and delay in the bidding process that slowed down the implementation of the projects run by foreign aid. Evidently, this has acted as a drag on the overall rate of ADP utilisation.

But the excuse of restrictive donor conditions aside, the usual bane of bureaucratic sloth, inefficiency and corruption nexus is reigning supreme in the administration of the development projects. From that perspective the attempt to blame it on the development partners sounds convenient.

While some ministries like the local government, education and agriculture have performed better, the very poor records of the power, health, roads, family and welfare and highways divisions have made a very poor show of project implementation. The government should look into matter and go to the root of this anomaly affecting the overall implementation of ADP. It calls for stronger monitoring of project implementation as we all address-

# Waiting is loss of living



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HOW much time do we spend waiting in this country? The answer is anybody's best guess. Taken by a rule of thumb we

spend a significant number of hours waiting, which may add up to one-fourth or one-fifth of a lifetime. In the words of South African playwright Michael Wentworth, we are wasting lots of living in waiting.

He described that waiting in clear terms. We wait in fear and cowardice. We wait in queues and lines. We wait for things to improve and happiness to find us. He went on. We wait for the pain to go away and we wait for the old wounds to heal. We wait for someone who would come and make it all worthwhile for us.

In this country, we too wait for all of those reasons. Commuters spend a good 3-4 hours traveling to work or business in the capital city. But then inter-district trips aren't made in heaven either. A bus ride from Dhaka to Chittagong can take good twelve hours. Train ride can take up to eight hours or longer. People in normal traffic are required to spend hours at traffic signals.

Then there are the queues at bank counters for bill payment, withdrawal and deposits and form-filling or other purposes. Government offices can be time guzzlers without mentioning that it could get multiplied by the number of times one is required to go back for the same job.

Then, of course, people stand long hours in the queue each time they have to take a bus. A limited number of people in Dhaka city wait for hours to buy gas from CNG stations. Patients and their families spend hours waiting at doctors' chambers, diagnostic centers and hospital lobbies.

Every nation has its waiting moments. In 1979 U.S. Energy Secretary James Schlesinger complained that he had to wait 25 minutes in a gas line. The Russians in

former USSR had to wait hours for their loaves of bread, more time for meat supply. In 1984, a study published by Pravda calculated that Soviet citizens wasted 37 billion hours in a year waiting in line to buy food

Britain's top five most "waiting: boring" situations. These situations were: being on hold on a phone call, traffic jam, queuing at supermarkets or shops, waiting for a delivery to arrive, and waiting for service in a bar, res-

Nearly one in five of them were so near boiling point that they just got angry when waiting rather than being able to pass the time calmly. Men were twice as likely to boil over when left to wait than women. The statistics may be little outdated, but not much is likely to have improved if not gotten worse.

Hitting home, the average Dhakaite spends at least three hours in the traffic and loses about nine years of his life in that wait if he lives to be 72. If we throw in other functions for which we go through delays, it should add up to at least another couple of hours altogether in a day. In that case a bigger chunk, almost fifteen years, gets chiseled off that longevity.

Life is different for people living outside Dhaka. They move around more freely, not having to get stuck in traffic or stand in queues and in that sense they get to live longer than us the Dhaka dwellers. They have enough time to enjoy a siesta under the cool shade of a tree or long hours at tea stalls in idle gossips.

Statisticians have estimated that in a lifetime of 70 years, the average person spends at least three years waiting. Perhaps a certain amount of waiting is unavoidable in life as loading of a gun is before firing. It's when time is invested in timing.

But that's not why we spend so much time waiting. We wait in the suspended animation of existential ennui. For us every waiting moment is like a prison term, helplessly locked away in inertia of queues or spasms of congested traffic. Every moment of that waiting is like temporary paralysis. The mind frets and fidgets, the body is fixed.

Life is one long wait from womb to tomb. We come from eternity and we return to it. Waiting is many little dyings we die waiting for one single death.

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DIANE BIGDA

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and other basic necessities.

The Brits spend roughly half a year of their lives, 4,560 hours to be precise, waiting for an ever-increasing number of services. This information was revealed by the Waiting: Boring Report in 2007, which also listed

restaurant and shop. If time and tide wait for none, the Brits are not happy now that they have to wait so much for time.

The same research explained the reason behind this unhappiness. It took its toll on the British nerves.

# Finance minister's theories

M. HAFIZUDDIN KHAN

OUR finance minister has always been found expounding innovative ideas on administration and governance. Of his many such ideas we may mention two here -- one is decentralisation of budget to district level and the latest one is to adopt American Spoils system in our bureaucratic structure.

As finance minister of the "Moha Jote" government his performance does not appear to have earned him any laurels. Of late, some prominent members of his own party have been openly criticising his management of the economy. He has put the small savers who have savings certificates in double jeopardy: reducing rate of interest drastically and simultaneously imposing income tax on the interest accruing on such savings. Thus, his NBR is complacent because it has exceeded the target of tax collection. It has not been explained how much tax has been collected from business and how much from small savers, and what measures are responsible for such success in tax collection.

Advance income tax has been imposed at import level, but it is common knowledge that any levy at import level is bound to affect price, and it does not constitute a direct tax. His acumen as finance minister came under serious question when he reconstituted various Boards of Directors of NCBs with persons having strong political affiliations with the ruling party without considering their suitability and background. The result is that the performance of none of the NCBs has shown any sign of improvement, rather flagrant interference of the

directors in the functioning of the banks has been reported in the media.

Even the BASIC Bank, which has always been progressing, is now under severe pressure. His handling of the share market debacle is also not beyond criticism. It will not be out of place to mention here that his predecessors, late S.A.M.S. Kibria and late Saifur Rahman were not known to have been completely under narrow political and partisan influence while taking decisions on matters affecting the economy.

Leaving aside his financial management we may examine one of his very favourites theories of decentralisation of budget to district level.

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He has already produced two budgets. But we are yet to see any step taken by him towards introducing district budget. He has not yet given any outline of his proposal. The question is whether a district budget is feasible without making a district an administrative unit with devolution of power.

He is a senior member of the cabinet. We do not know if he has ever raised the issue of making a district an autonomous administrative unit in line with the constitutional requirement of Articles 59 and 60. Is it possible to have district budget keeping the present administrative structure as it is? Does it not presuppose devolution of

administrative and financial power to district level with elected representatives forming Zila Parishad before introducing the scheme of district budget?

We are not aware if he has ever raised in the cabinet the necessity of holding Zila Parishad election, we have never heard him saying anything about it although he has frequently professed the idea of reducing the size of the Bangladesh Secretariat to at least half.

There is no doubt that the finance minister is very a very learned person possessing vast experience in administration. He has, of late, proposed introducing American Spoils system in our

under the inherited bureaucratic set up and spent his entire service career as such, but has never expressed his dissatisfaction with the service he belonged to.

Now that he has all on a sudden shown his inclination for a radical change, he has not clearly mentioned where the current system was faulty, necessitating its replacement by spoils system. The American spoils system has grown over a long period of time. It has its own tradition and an officer appointed as such does not show blind allegiance to his political boss.

Moreover, there is the system of Congressional ratification of such appointments, which our political leaders are most unlikely to agree to introduce here. Borrowing a system from outside, with alien political and social culture, and transplanting it in our country with a totally different socio-political environment does not seem to be doable proposition.

What is wrong with our present system? Is it due to absence of a system like the one he has been professing to copy or due to the demolition of the age old and time-tested system by the successive governments of BNP and Awami League by totally politicising the administration? An administration is bound to become inefficient, inert and corrupt if the appointment, posting, transfer and promotions of members of administration are not based on transparent and well-formulated policies and system. Does it exist now? Was this the situation when Mr. Muhith was in service?

The writer is a former Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

February 25

**1921** Tbilisi, capital of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, occupied by Bolshevik Russia.

**1932** Adolf Hitler obtains German citizenship by naturalization, which allows him to run in the 1932 election for Reichspräsident.

**1945** World War II: Turkey declares war on Germany.

**1954** Gamal Abdul Nasser is made premier of Egypt.

**1986** People Power Revolution: President Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines flees; Corazon Aquino becomes first woman president.

**1992** Khojaly massacre: about 613 civilians are killed by Armenian army during conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

**1994** Mosque of Abraham massacre: In the Cave of the Patriarchs in the West Bank city of Hebron, Baruch Goldstein opens fire killing 29 Palestinian worshippers and injuring 125.

**2009** Pikhana BDR massacre. 74 people are killed, including more than 57 army officials, by mutinous members BDR now Bangladesh Border Guards inside BDR headquarters.

### Births

**1943** George Harrison

### Deaths

**2001** Sir Donald Bradman, (b. 1908)