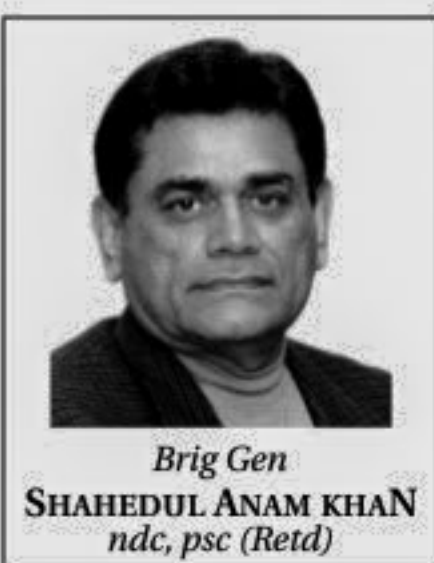


STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

The ailing society



Brig Gen
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OF late there has been very little to feel cheerful about in Bangladesh. If the dismal political scene with its attendant

vitriolics between the two major parties does not pull you down, you can depend on the happenings around you to make you feel absolutely miserable.

The recent happenings in the country have been hogged by news of unnatural deaths, of students preferring to end their lives to escape blackmailing, and of a student of a reputed school in Dhaka violated by her teacher, and of "mobocracy" perpetrated against students alleged to be dacoits, and of women being mercilessly flogged in public with nobody picking up the courage to protest the barbarism, and of a hijacker lynched by a mob and the list goes on and on.

These incidents are the result of the ailment that has been eating into the core of our society for along time, and regrettably, no palpable action seems to have been taken to stem the rot. It is an ailing society, almost moribund, and we all are a part of it, failing to do our bit to put things right. If nothing else we can at least raise our voice. And even that seems to be muted, or at best raised selectively, depending on who is the perpetrator and who is the victim.

It took six weeks for the media to come to know of how a student was repeatedly molested by, of all the people, her teacher. But what one is incensed by is the apparent effort to soft-pedal the matter to save the monster in-the-garb of a teacher. It is as important to ensure that the animal is punished as it is to go into the underlying causes of the issue.

In this regard we would like to know why there were an overwhelming number of male teachers in a female institution. How come these teachers were selected overlooking many that had better academic record? How is that the governing body, which is chaired by the local MP, did not vet the antecedent of the rapist teacher? How

response of some of the champions of women's rights to similar incidents of the past and this one. Are we to understand that reactions are regime and person oriented?

It doesn't speak much of a society when the general public takes up law in their own hands to dispense justice. May one ask, at the risk of sounding

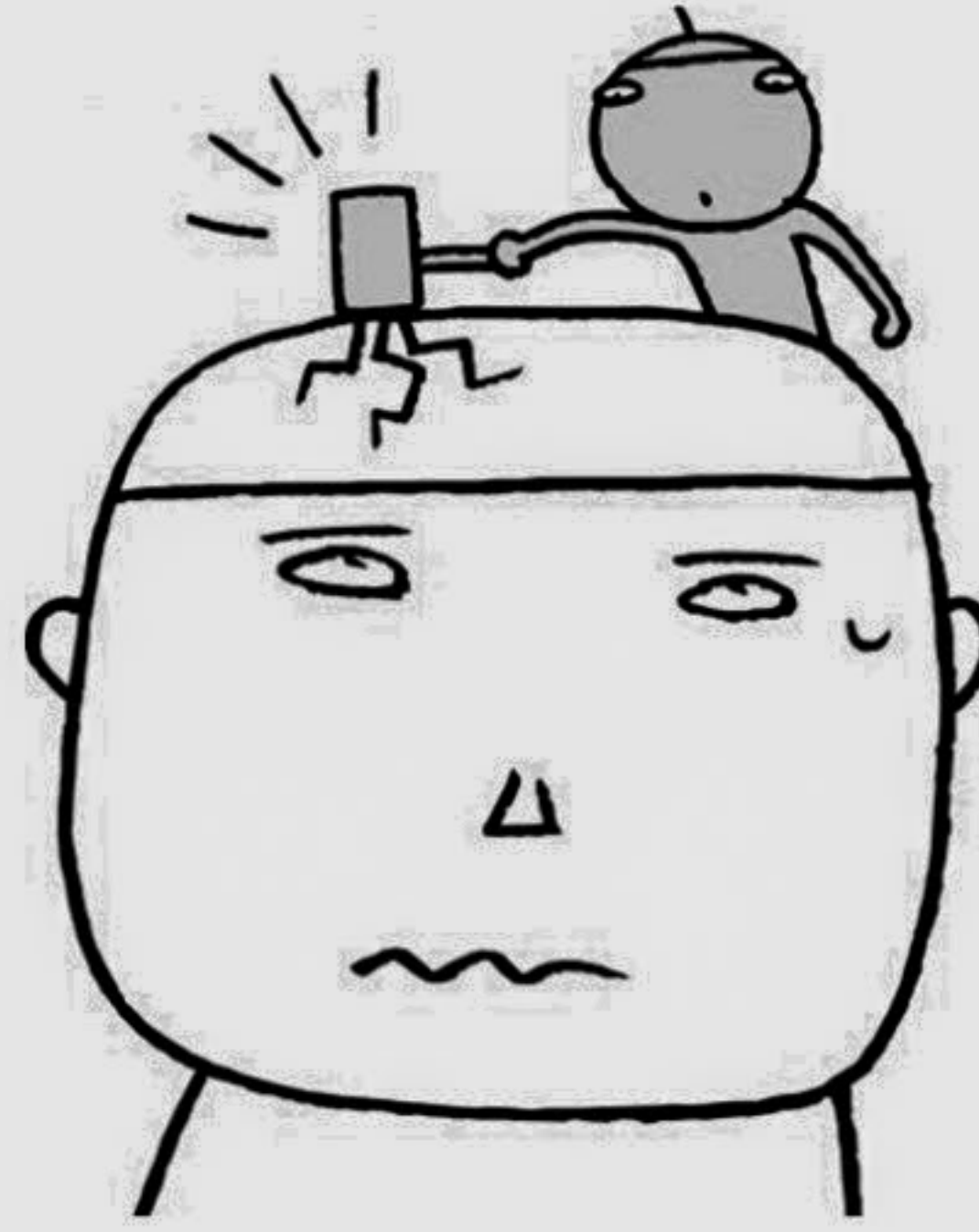
for dacoits, could they have not been handed over to the police, did they have to pay with their lives for others mistake? Or, was it a mistake at all?

There is very little difference between the Amin Bazaar killings and the law of the jungle. And this is not a stray incident as the minister for home would have us believe. It is fairly representative of the state of our society. Reportedly, there have been 70 deaths due to lynching in the first half of this year. And assurance of the minister, that people would not be allowed to take law in their own hands, appears unconvincing. Had that not been so, we should have been able to prevent the 70 deaths. Public behaviour in this case is a reflection of their lack of trust on the process of law and on the system itself.

The death of more than 40 school children on their way back from a football match in an open truck exposes the callous disregard of the state for the safety of its people. And even after assurances from the highest quarters, we continue to see pictures of children being transported in open trucks, of drivers speaking on cell phones while driving, of ramshackle vehicles, with no brake or rear lights at all, plying on the streets. It does not need much intelligence to say how these vehicles manage to get on the street or how the so-called drivers manage to procure driving license. We have adequate laws, but who will ensure the "order"?

We have a situation where bad governance has gone even more awry. If people have lost faith in state machinery, it is because the rule of law has been applied selectively, it is because the agencies have become arms of the government rather than that of the state. And worst of all, there have been double standards in addressing societal issues.

The writer is Editor, Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.



JUNJI WATANABE

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come the coaching centre, where the girl was molested, was running under the nose of the principal, who is equally guilty, of abetment? What is just as infuriating is ascribing ulterior motives to the expression of anger and protest of the students. And it was utterly shameful to compare the

alarmist, are we on the verge of a state of "mobocracy." Six students were beaten to death on suspicion of being robbers. Robbery is a culpable act, but even robbers have right to life. We know why the students were there, and by most accounts they were not dacoits, but even if they were mistaken

Stemming price hike Concerted action called for

UNBRIDLED price hike of essentials ahead of the Ramadan has become a matter of public concern.

Evidently, the High court (HC), being alive to this state of affairs, has ordered the government to constitute mobile courts in the capital and Chittagong to monitor wholesale markets and stem the price hike.

We think it is the normal market mechanism of demand and supply that should operate to keep the prices of commodities within tolerable limits. Presumably, the government lacks necessary information in this respect. So, that is one of the reasons why it has largely failed in facilitating the market forces to play their role as they should.

It must also have to be admitted that given their constraints in terms of manpower and other logistics, the mobile courts alone will not suffice to address the Herculean task lying ahead. The government will also have to mobilise all the mechanisms at its disposal towards keeping tabs on the actual demand and supply situation in the market. That would greatly help to identify the market manipulators who are taking advantage of the present situation.

There are also the vested quarters with strong grip over the market. As they maintain strong links to the corridors of power, the government will have to muster a robust political will to bust the evil nexus in the interest of greater public good.

Apart from this, the state-owned trading body, the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB), should act as a countervailing force against market manipulators. But till date its role leaves much to be desired.

We think, rather than being sporadic, the consultative process with the wholesalers' and retailers' associations should continue on a regular basis. In this connection, the differences of opinion that may arise as well as the operational limitations they face have also to be looked into and duly addressed.

Finally, to get the desired result, the government functionaries must come out of their denial mode, accept facts and take urgent actions to stabilise the essentials market.

Implementation of cabinet decisions

It's impact on people's lives

ACCORDING to a government report, it took 749 decisions, enacted 144 laws in parliament, formulated 24 policies and signed and ratified 57 international treaties and deals in 117 meetings during the last two and a half years. Thirty eight decisions are in the process of implementation while 24 bills are to be made into laws. That is, out of 749 decisions 670 have been implemented. This accounts for 89 percent implementation rate.

We appreciate the volume of implementation of the decisions taken. But people would like to know what positive impact have these decisions made on their lives? Have service deliveries improved radically? Importantly, have things changed in terms of governance?

Admittedly, there has been some improvement in sectors like agriculture, power supply, safety networking and education. Annual Development Plan (ADP) utilisation, which is where the quality public spending is involved, the rate has lagged behind the targets set.

Burning issues of law and order, corruption, price hike of essentials, violence on women still remain largely unattended.

The decisions and rates of implementation are important in themselves. But more important is to have periodic assessment of their outcomes. These evaluations should range from the short through the medium to the long term impact analyses.

We would like to believe that the ministries and directorates have set themselves targets to fulfill on a year to year basis. A segment of the cabinet decisions may be geared to facilitating through policy back-up for imple-

The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

In Israel, a tsunami warning

NOAM CHOMSKY

IN May, in a closed meeting of many of Israel's business leaders, Idan Ofer, a holding-company magnate, warned: "We are quickly turning into South Africa. The economic blow of sanctions will be felt by every family in Israel."

The business leaders' particular concern was the UN General Assembly session this September, where the Palestinian Authority is planning to call for recognition of a Palestinian state.

Dan Gillerman, Israel's former ambassador to the United Nations, warned participants that "the morning after the anticipated announcement of recognition of a Palestinian state, a painful and dramatic process of South Africanisation will begin" -- meaning that Israel would become a pariah state, subject to international sanctions.

In this and subsequent meetings, the oligarchs urged the government to initiate efforts modeled on the Saudi (Arab League) proposals and the unofficial Geneva Accord of 2003, in which high-level Palestinian and Israeli negotiators detailed a two-state settlement that was welcomed by most of the world, dismissed by Israel and ignored by Washington.

In March, Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak warned of the prospective UN action as a "tsunami." The fear is that the world will condemn Israel not only for violating international law but also for carrying out its criminal acts in an occupied state recognised by the UN.

The US and Israel are waging intensive diplomatic campaigns to head off the tsunami. If they fail, recognition of a Palestinian state is likely.

More than 100 states already recognise Palestine. The United Kingdom, France and other European nations have upgraded the Palestine General Delegation to "diplomatic missions and embassies -- a status normally reserved only for states," Victor Kattan

observes in the American Journal of International Law.

Palestine has also been admitted to UN organisations apart from Unesco and the World Health Organization, which have avoided the issue for fear of US defunding -- no idle threat.

In June the US Senate passed a resolution threatening to suspend aid for the Palestine Authority if it persists with its UN initiative. Susan Rice, US ambassador to the UN, warned that there was "no greater threat" to US funding of the UN "than the prospect of Palestinian statehood being endorsed by member states," The (London) Daily Telegraph reports. Israel's new UN Ambassador, Ron

Prosor, informed the Israeli press that UN recognition "would lead to violence and war."

The UN would presumably recognise Palestine in the internationally accepted borders, including the West Bank and Gaza, with the Golan Heights returned to Syria. The heights were annexed by Israel in December 1981, in violation of UN Security Council orders.

In the West Bank, the settlements and acts to support them are clearly in violation of international law, as affirmed by the World Court and the Security Council.

In February 2006, the US and Israel imposed a siege in Gaza after the "wrong side" -- Hamas -- won elections in Palestine, recognised as free and fair. The siege became much harsher in June 2007 after the failure of a US-backed military coup to over-

throw the elected government.

In June 2010, the siege of Gaza was condemned by the International Committee of the Red Cross -- which rarely issues such reports -- as "collective punishment imposed in clear violation" of international humanitarian law. The BBC reported that the ICRC "paints a bleak picture of conditions in Gaza: hospitals short of equipment, power cuts lasting hours each day, drinking water unfit for consumption," and the population of course imprisoned.

The criminal siege extends the US-Israeli policy since 1991 of separating Gaza from the West Bank, thus ensuring that any eventual Palestinian state would be effectively contained within hostile powers -- Israel and the Jordanian dictatorship. The Oslo Accords, signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993, proscribe separating Gaza from the West Bank.

A more immediate threat facing US-Israeli rejectionism is the Freedom Flotilla that seeks to challenge the blockade of Gaza by bringing letters and humanitarian aid. In May 2010, the last such attempt led to an attack by Israeli commandoes in international waters -- a major crime in itself -- in which nine passengers were killed, actions bitterly condemned outside the US.

In Israel, most people convinced themselves that the commandoes were the innocent victims, attacked by passengers, another sign of the self-destructive irrationality sweeping the

society.

Today the US and Israel are vigorously seeking to block the flotilla. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton virtually authorised violence, stating that "Israelis have the right to defend themselves" if flotillas "try to provoke action by entering into Israeli waters" -- that is, the territorial waters of Gaza, as if Gaza belonged to Israel.

Greece agreed to prevent the boats from leaving (that is, those boats not already sabotaged) -- though, unlike Clinton, Greece referred rightly to "the maritime area of Gaza."

In January 2009, Greece had distinguished itself by refusing to permit US arms to be shipped to Israel from Greek ports during the vicious US-Israeli assault in Gaza. No longer an independent country in its current financial duress, Greece evidently cannot risk such unusual integrity.

Asked whether the flotilla is a "provocation," Chris Gunness, the spokesperson for the UN Relief and Works Agency, the major aid agency for Gaza, described the situation as desperate: "If there were no humanitarian crisis, if there weren't a crisis in almost every aspect of life in Gaza there would be no need for the flotilla 95% of all water in Gaza is undrinkable, 40 percent of all disease is water-borne ... 45.2% of the labour force is unemployed, 80% aid dependency, a tripling of the abject poor since the start of the blockade. Let's get rid of this blockade and there would be no need for a flotilla."

Diplomatic initiatives such as the Palestinian state strategy, and nonviolent actions generally, threaten those who hold a virtual monopoly on violence. The U.S. and Israel are trying to sustain indefensible positions: the occupation and its subversion of the overwhelming, long-standing consensus on a diplomatic settlement.

Noam Chomsky's most recent book, with co-author Ilan Pappé, is "Gaza in Crisis." Chomsky is emeritus professor of linguistics and philosophy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

July 21

- 1718**
The Treaty of Passarowitz between the Ottoman Empire, Austria and the Republic of Venice is signed.
- 1774**
Russo-Turkish War, 1768-1774: Russia and the Ottoman Empire sign the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainarji ending the war.
- 1914**
The Crown council of Romania decides the country shall remain neutral in World War I
- 1949**
The United States Senate ratifies the North Atlantic Treaty.
- 1954**
First Indo-China War: The Geneva Conference partitions Vietnam into North Vietnam and South Vietnam.
- 1960**
Sirimavo Bandaranaike is elected Prime Minister of Sri Lanka and becomes the world's first woman prime minister.
- 1969**
Space Race: Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin become the first humans to walk on the Moon, during the Apollo 11 mission (July 20th in North America).
- 1977**
The start of the four day long Libyan-Egyptian War.
- 1995**
Third Taiwan Strait Crisis: The People's Liberation Army begins firing missiles into the waters north of Taiwan.