

Three custodial deaths in a week

A neutral investigation called for

THE death on Sunday night of Sahibul Islam Saiful brings to three the number in the past week who have died after alleged torture in police custody. On Friday night two criminal suspects succumbed at DMCH to injuries also allegedly received in police custody.

Of course, the police authorities in question have released statements in each of these incidents, claiming that the deaths were due either to injuries suffered prior to the deceased being detained or an unrelated medical condition.

Nevertheless, there remain troubling inconsistencies in the accounts offered by the authorities and one thing that is incontrovertible is that a thorough investigation is called for to get to the bottom of these incidents.

In the Saiful case, there are inconsistencies between the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) press release and the account given by the Gulshan police authorities who are accused of beating Saiful to death. The Gulshan police maintain they rescued Saiful from a mob after he had shot a security guard and that he died from injuries inflicted by the mob. The DMP press release, however, stated that Saiful had been arrested in a raid and mentioned nothing about a mob beating.

There are similar inconsistencies in the other two incidents. Gulshan police claim that Ripon, a suspected mugger, died of diarrhoea after being in their custody, but the inquest report makes no mention of diarrhoea and points out that Ripon's body bore multiple bruises.

Similarly, the post-mortem conducted on alleged robber Sumon suggests that he had been tortured, and found no evidence to back up the official inquest suggestion that Sumon had died from injuries suffered in a jump from the roof of a six-storey building.

Most disquietingly, in the Sumon case is the allegation of the deceased's father that the Khilgaon police station OC had attempted to extort Tk 1 lakh from him and that Sumon was beaten to death upon non-payment of the bribe.

These incidents are very disturbing. When people die in police custody it always raises a rebuttable presumption of official wrong-doing. This is not helped when there are striking inconsistencies in the official stories or the official stories seem untenable.

Law and order is a problem and we don't expect people to have much sympathy for criminals who prey on society. However, the correct way to deal with the problem is through the rule of law and not to mete out primitive justice in a police station.

We shouldn't rush to judgment but we do need an investigation with teeth to make sure that justice is done and that these allegations of police torture and extortion are not swept under the carpet. Basically, the situation demands a neutral investigation to set the records straight.

JS bodies not sitting

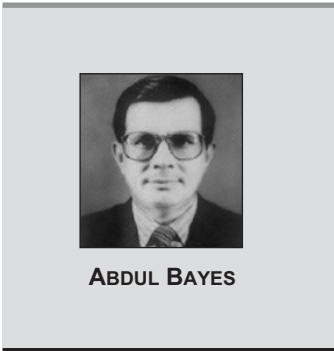
Parliamentary democracy weakened further?

THELV E out of forty parliamentary standing committees have failed to hold any meeting in regulation time thus breaking the rules of procedure of the parliament. In the first place, not all the required parliamentary standing committees have been formed. And now some of the most important committees did not adhere to the regulation to hold at least one meeting in 30 days. They include ministries like foreign affairs, planning, commerce, information, labour, social welfare, civil aviation and tourism, and above all, ministry of law, justice and parliamentary affairs. There is more to it -- committees on foreign, planning, jute and information ministries did not hold a single meeting since their formation last July. The law ministry committee which held as many as seven meetings in just five months did not sit for another meeting reportedly in the wake of the controversial independent anti-corruption commission bill it received for scrutiny.

We are appalled to learn about these non-functioning committees. We have no clues as to why they failed to hold the mandatory meetings. We also don't know what steps the Speaker had taken to have the committees sit, with the powers vested in him to do so. Was the speaker in the dark about it? If so, who was responsible for not bringing the issue up to him? Such indifference is antithetical to norms of parliamentary democracy because these committees are an integral part of such democracy.

This comes on top of a general weakening of the functioning of parliament. Firstly, the sittings generally don't, rather can't, begin on time because of quorum crisis; boycott or walkout by the opposition lawmakers is commonplace and now the apathy towards the standing committees completes the circle. If the political parties of our country really have respect and commitment to the parliamentary democracy, then we hope they will wise up and act accordingly.

Concerns over consensus



ABDUL BAYES

I am personally an admirer of Yujiro Hayami -- the eminent economist from Japan and now the Chairman, FASID Graduate Faculty and Professor, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies. Presumably crossed seventy-five, but still 'not out' from academies. He is an economist with a social face. In fact, Hayami drew my devotion while I was a post graduate student in Australia in the early 1980s. I remember my Master's thesis on Combined Price Support and Fertilizer Subsidy to rice cultivation ran contrary to his Monopoly prescription. Since then, I have taken every opportunity to read his researches and published few white ups on them in this column. Yujiro Hayami has the competence to turn complex issues into simple presentation by giving suitable examples in lucid language.

Shifting paradigm

This time, in *Asian Development Review*, volume 20 No.2 (2003), he wrote on consensus: "From the Washington Consensus to the Post-Washington Consensus: A Perspective on Development Paradigm Change". He starts with

an account of the major changes in the paradigm of international development assistance that the world has witnessed over the decades. For the first three decades after the Second World War, a regime of Import Substitution (IS) strategy backed by strong government support, was proposed as the penacea. In the 1980s, this paradigm gave way to a new paradigm -- Washington Consensus -- that identified mar-

to the poor of social services, such as education and health care, by government and civil society and advocating the initiative ("ownership") of aid-receiving countries."

Thesis and anti-thesis

The Washington Consensus -- describes Yujiro Hayami -- emerged as an anti-thesis to IS strategy by aiming to correct the government failures looming

failures and market failures associated with the two strategies, a sum which varies country by country depending on social tradition and development change. Thus, in contemplating the strengthening of government's role for any developing economy along the guidelines of the post-Washington Consensus, corresponding changes in the respective failures must be assessed very carefully and

sigh of relief. But is that so?

Reeling recipe

Hayami looks at the argument by Ishikawa and Stiglitz who criticised SAP reforms on the ground that in regime of information asymmetries, a reduction in government's role would hurt the low-income developing countries by magnifying market failures. The argument theoretically sounds good but may be refuted on the grounds that in such regime,

BENEATH THE SURFACE

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ket as the universally efficient mechanism of resource allocation and effective motor of economic growth. And we all know, how and to what extent, the International Lending institutions especially, the IMF, encouraged governments to dismantle controls on markets. But that did not last long in the face of falling from the grace of growth. "Scarcely a decade later, in the mid-1990s, the Washington Consensus was replaced by a contrasting paradigm called the post-Washington Consensus. It emphasized the need of different institutions for different economies and recognised cases in which government's market interventions can play a pivotal role. The post-Washington Consensus focussed on poverty reduction, emphasizing the need of delivery

large on the horizon of realising respectable growth and poverty reduction. Likewise, the post-Washington Consensus poised as an anti-thesis to the Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) package aiming to correct failures of liberalised markets, lurking large, by increasing the role of the government. "Such a sequence of paradigm changes resembles the shift from mercantilism to Adam Smith's doctrine of market liberalism, and further to Friedrich List's strategy of infant industry protection. Whether to increase the role of government relative to market or vice versa is an eternal topic in debate over policy choices for development. The net social gain from one strategy (e.g. Smith's) by another (e.g. List's) is the sum of differences in both government

objectively. If the decision is based on ideological perception, it will prove to be devastating. Policy makers must always be aware of the danger of being trapped by a 'consensus' on any kind of 'paradigm'."

While the Washington Consensus found the market as the motor for growth, the post-Washington consensus observed market as maligned, if not a monster itself. The former emphasised economic factors -- narrowly focused on neoclassical economics -- while the latter, leaned more on non-economic factors (social norms and power balance, institutions). Needless to mention, the post-Washington Consensus -- compared to the earlier consensus -- had been hailed as a better source for a

government failures could be more damaging than the market failures.

By identifying poverty reduction as an immediate goal instead of consequence of growth, the post-Washington Consensus advocates that a greater share of public resources be devoted to the delivery of social series to the poor rather than for strengthening the productive capacity of any sort. Though not explicitly stated, it appears that programmes in the post-Washington Consensus context are strongly oriented toward improving the quality of life of the poor through redistribution of social income in their favour.

But the danger of such approach is that it might lead to under-investment in productive capacity of the sectors from which

the poor tend to eke out a living. "Typically, the majority of poor people live mainly on returns to their labour applied to agriculture, small-scale manufacturing and petty trade. If the productivity and profitability of these sectors are not increased, how can poverty reduction be sustainable?"

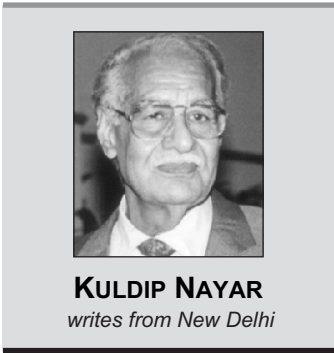
One could cite the examples of wide diffusion of primary education and health care as examples of achievements to that end and admittedly, they are foundations of upgrading skills. But vocational education and training, which are vital for support to agriculture and small-scale manufacturing, are still missing. On the other hand, the critical need of public investment in production oriented infrastructure are not properly recognised. Unfortunately, driven by the doses of both Washington and post-Washington prescriptions, developing countries have been withdrawing resources from agricultural and industrial research, inflicting a further blow to the already fragile research capacity in these countries.

Forthcoming fate

While delivering social services to the poor for improving quality of life could become important, it remains to be seen that provisions of these resources do not jeopardise the availability of resources for creating productive infrastructure for the poor. A disproportionately larger allocation for the former could be counter productive to kill the poverty reduction goal itself.

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Another exercise at OIC



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

THE Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) is not an Islamic bloc. But all Muslim countries -- 59 of them - are its members. Many years ago, an attempt was made to convert it into a bloc. But Egypt, then headed by Jamal Abdul Nasser, thwarted the move. He was the cofounder of the Non-Aligned Movement and was dead against the very concept of blocs. Since then the OIC has been primarily a talking shop.

It meets generally once a year and passes several resolutions, one of them religiously against Israel. The matter ends there. The thread is picked up again from where it was left off. The same exercise is gone over ritualistically.

The OIC may talk big but it lacks cohesion and purpose. Internal contradictions have also weakened it. Members tend to divide themselves into two parts: one, the Arab world and the other, Asian Muslims. The Arab world is the defining people. It has money. Mecca and Medina, the two holy cities of Muslims, are located in Saudi Arabia. The Islam practised reflects conservatism but with benign disposition. It treats the minorities well.

Still the increasing fundamentalism in countries like Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh is beginning to tilt the balance in favour of Asian Muslims. Their approach is aggressive. It appeals to the restive youth which feels increasingly frustrated. The impression is that the Arab ways, although well-oiled, have not been able to get the Muslims even a recognition, much less their "due place" in the world.

Foreign Office issues from time to time. But Islamabad's success is that it had the OIC endorse its stand word by word.

So far the discussion on Kashmir at the OIC has been a formality. The question has been revived whenever Pakistan or some other member on its behalf has pressed for it. For example, Iran did so in 1990. The Egyptian ambassador in London, Mohammad I Shekar, told me -- I was then India's envoy

the OIC should demand the right for self-determination. There is hardly any member-country that follows the democratic system. Pakistan, which reportedly sponsored the resolution, is headed by a President who insists on wearing an achkan over the khaki. Strange, there are no second thoughts on his part or his supporters in the army despite the mounting unrest against the rule of the armed forces.

out its part of obligations: one, to allow the Kashmir on the Pakistan side to join Jammu and Kashmir; two, to let India administer the entire state with a limited armed forces till conditions were favourable for a plebiscite.

Islamabad has not even bothered to fulfil those obligations. Nor has it allowed normalcy to return to the state. The new wave of killings in Kashmir, no doubt a desperate attempt to defeat peo-

hold a plebiscite in the valley. Assuming such an election is held, it will turn the whole place into a communal cauldron. The experience in the past is not a happy one. A plebiscite in the pro-Congress northwestern province soon after the creation of Pakistan was reduced to a battle between the Quran and the Gita.

One section of the Hurriyat, led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the only Kashmiri leader invited to the OIC meeting -- thanks to Pakistan -- has been communalising the atmosphere in the valley, diluting the secular ethos of the Kashmiriyat. Any plebiscite held in the valley will only stoke the fires of parochialism and give the handle to extremists.

With a population of 120 to 130 million Muslims, India cannot risk a plebiscite in the valley. Shaky secular polity can be destroyed in the process. In fact, it was the sectarian thinking on the part of the OIC which made New Delhi quit. India was once its member because of its large Muslim population. But it withdrew when the OIC meeting at Rabat in 1969 asked Indian delegation leader Fakhruddin Ali Amed to abstain from the meeting after Pakistan's then military ruler Yahya Khan threatened to walk out if India attended it. A military ruler had his say over a democratic India's representative.

That was the time when a large scale Hindu-Muslim riots took place in Gujarat. New Delhi condemned the incident vehemently but realised that the OIC was not the place for an objective stand. It has stayed out since.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

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Malaysia represents a milder version of fundamentalism. But it leads the Asian Muslims. That explains why Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad made a furious statement that "a few Jews ruled the world by controlling the world's major powers." Although he withdrew the remark, he showed the grit.

Pakistan, which enjoys a lot of importance for being the only Muslim country to have the bomb, seems to influence the OIC thinking from behind the scenes. The resolution on Kashmir shows Islamabad's clout. There is nothing new in the demand for the right of self-determination to the Kashmiris, a plebiscite or an inquiry into violations of human rights. Even the phrasing of the resolution is no different from the press notes that the Pakistan

to Great Britain _ that Iran had exerted the maximum pressure on the OIC. In fact, Tehran had then cancelled the visit of then Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral to Iran to show its solidarity with Pakistan on Kashmir. Iraq was the only Muslim country which sided with India at that time.

The OIC resolution on Kashmir is not so disconcerting as is the fact that it is one-sided. What seems to have worked is the propaganda that India has jettisoned the Palestine cause and gone over to the Israel side. Only time will tell how effective is the OIC resolution. But it does indicate the failure of New Delhi's Foreign Office and its diplomats posted in Muslim countries. They could not muster even one vote in their favour.

Nonetheless, it is comical that

The response was a meeting of corps commanders at Islamabad the other day to reaffirm that General Pervez Musharraf's election as President through the referendum was final and that there was no need to seek endorsement from the current parliament which had been boycotting it. The meeting also decided that Musharraf was under no obligation to announce the date of his retirement as chief of the army staff. The khaki brand of democracy is the real democracy for the military junta. As regards a plebiscite, it is an old hat. True, at the time of integration of Jammu and Kashmir with

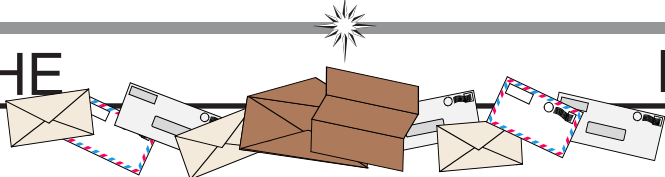
India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru promised to ascertain the wishes of the people in the state once things returned to normalcy. Pakistan was to carry

ple's desire for peace, is a direct result of militants pushed by Pakistan into the valley recently.

Indeed, the wishes of people were determined at last year's election when foreign observers considered it free and fair. Many elections have been bogus but the one in 1977 came in for praise from all. After sweeping the polls at that time, the then chief minister Sheikh Abdullah said that the vote reaffirmed the state's integration with India.

Even otherwise, a plebiscite is not the way out in Kashmir. Over the years, the state has been contaminated by communal elements, both Muslims and Hindus. It has also got divided regionally. The Hindu-majority Jammu, Buddhist-majority Ladakh and the Muslim-majority valley have gone apart. Pakistan's demand is to

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



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"Avoid godfather politics"

The main opposition party of Bangladesh, Awami League recently published the list of 101 godfathers of the ruling alliance government in a press conference. This included names of ruling ministers, state ministers, members of parliament, city mayors, ward commissioners or their relatives. The ruling BNP has already rejected and declared it the delirium of a mad man. At present a general notion has been set in the minds of the common people that all the political leaders, irrespective of the political affiliation, are directly or indirectly connected with criminal activities. Politics became synonymous to crime. Political leaders are sponsoring terrorism for retaining their power. In this circumstances, the publication of the godfathers' list of a party bear an exceptional importance.

But the intention of the publication of the list is very much questionable. It seems to be a plot only to attack the opponent. The opposition party itself has hundreds of such godfathers and it has done nothing to uproot those godfathers from the party rather it is sponsoring and

using them as tools with a view to seize the power to dethrone the ruling government. When in power, they also sponsored terrorism and godfathers.

So publication of godfathers' list of the opponent party only to create political chaos will not bring any good to the country. In order to get rid of this filthy political terrorism what is most important is to strip all the political parties of terrorism and crime connection. But to what extent are the political parties ready to do their parts? Do they have that little intention?

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Entrepreneur and the environment

The present Government has stressed that the rate of domestic savings in the country is extremely low, and also that a large number of borrowers have not cared to pay the interest and the capital obtained from the banks and the financial institutions. If the defaulters were real entrepreneurs such a situation could not have occurred, on such a large scale. A genuine industrialist

wants to run his factories continuously, and for this he has to come to the banks time and again. He is quite happy to earn a profit of ten or fifteen percent, which keeps him in business, and ensures employment to people and revenues to the government.

A pseudo industrialist does not establish a viable and profit making plant. The initial kickbacks are so great, that he has the urge to siphon almost the whole of the borrowed capital. The collateral that the pseudo industrialist provides, proves to be of little value. An industry with a strong foundation cannot be built up when the whole process has been corrupted and politicised. In trade and industry, the economic factors are all that matter, and these should be allowed to play their part by the government. East Asian or the South East Asian economic giants had one thing in common and a clear imperative, that the economy has to be run in the most efficient way and to do this the government, the labour and the industry had to work together. This regulatory machine in Bangladesh is not geared to expedite industrial output or its establishment, but to create bottlenecks at each stage. The

putting up of an industrial unit, in this country for the real entrepreneurs is a nightmare at its worst.

Even the top industrial countries of the world provide subsidies to the agricultural sector and tariff protection for the industrial goods. Our motto for the nascent industries in Bangladesh should be "nurture the baby, protect the child and free the adult". In other words protection has to be for a limited period, so that the inefficient industries may be weeded out.

The growth and consolidation of the industries need a stable political situation. The very running of the factories is dependent on industrial and social peace. If the safety and security of life and property of the citizens are not ensured, there can hardly be any production, or a productive climate, not to speak of domestic investment and direct foreign investment.

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Decentralisation is the cure

Dhaka metropolis can be saved in only one way: decentralise the administrative powers concentrated

in Dhaka, to curb the constant ad hoc flow of lakhs of people who have to travel to the capital every week on business errands, as the divisional and district authorities have no decision-making powers to solve most of the problems on the spot.

The second priority is to encourage suburban living around the main cities, through attractive investment schemes in the private sector for the middle -and lower-middle class housing schemes (now concentrated on the rich clients).

That leads to the third priority, which is fast, frequent, and cheap mass transportation networks round the clock. The corollary leads to the fourth priority: development of inland water transport around Dhaka and elsewhere.

One-stop services will lessen movement and travel volume and time -- indirectly a critical economic factor in day to day transactions. The counter services offered by the government offices is below par, and need to be upgraded through administrative reforms -- do away with the colonial system of the civil service. Why the secretariat should indulge in field-office work, and not remain confined to policy-making?

The issue of the separation of the judiciary from the civil service is a rope around the neck of each regime for so many decades. It is not difficult to write an essay on "the varieties of excuses."

The politicians have so far failed in their basic objectives of public service. No that they cannot do it, but due to private ambitions and secret schemes for self-gain. This is an open secret, threatening the popularity of political regimes. The message from the general public is: be counted, or get lost.

Another default culture is the hibernation of the opposition leaders for five years -- waiting to come back into power! What's wrong in being in the opposition? Power lies in opposing the misuse of power, and it is good public service. Our myopic political culture is delaying the development of the society, not to speak of specific single projects, macro or micro. These styles of governance create huge accumulative system losses, which are not counted officially by the GoB or private think tanks. It is not enough for one minister out of five dozen to talk rationally. What the PM has to say? She may try drafting her own speeches, after collecting the points

to ponder upon.

Abdadd Khan

Dhaka

Power disruption at Maniknagar

When Awami League came to power in 1996, we the people of Maniknagar had to suffer much with the whole country for load-shedding. They used to say that for these sufferings, the previous government was responsible. After that BNP made little development in this sector and even did not renovate the old electric generators of the country. Due to Awami League's priority, this sector gave tremendous service during their last two years and it lasted up-to the last caretaker government.

But alas! when the 2/3rd majority alliance government came to power, electricity again began to laugh like a lover sitting across the river. For last two years of this government electricity began to play like the sun of the autumn season, specially during day time and first half of the nights. I think this is not a lesser achievement of the government than deterioration of law and order situation in the country.

The frequent disappearance of electricity from our area may be for the following reasons besides the normal rationing of power in Dhaka:

1. Existing dilapidated cables cannot carry huge volume of electricity used by large number of users in this thickly populated area.

2. It may be pointed out that one owner here distributes electricity to a number of families (his tenants) through his only one meter.

3. 80% of the houses use single meter and indulge in the above mentioned defalcation and their billed amount does not exceed Tk 500 or 600 only per month. They do it by managing the meter-readers and DESA staff.

These need to be looked into by higher authority to lessen the sufferings of the honest consumers of the area and change the existing old transformers and wires to cater to the present need of the locality. Then we will not be unhappy for normal load-sheddings.

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