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Are we living in a police state?

I was devastated to read in Internet DS about the assault on Shamsul Haq Tunku and other journalists. Of the people attacked, his was the only name I recognised as he always spoke to Eddie Barlow (my late husband) and me wherever we attended matches. Only last summer, when we were at Derbyshire to see the Bangladesh team, he took some lovely pictures of Eddie which I shall treasure after Eddie's death in December last year.

The accompanying photographs with the article showing an old man being hit in the face by a senior policeman and then kicked while on the ground by three policemen are a picture of which Bangladesh should not be proud.

I send my profoundest wishes that they all make a full recovery.

Cally Barlow
On e-mail

The people who are relentlessly working to provide us daily news of home & abroad have been severely attacked & punished for no reason by none other than the police. That is something very hard to imagine! Journalists are regarded as the third pillar of society all over the world & the position they hold is no less important than that of the police. But it is unfortunate indeed that in our country over & over again they have been attacked.

Last Sunday it was police who attacked & injured around 20 journalists of the print & electronic media in front of the international media like ESPN & Star Sports.

So far our country has received applause from the international community for wonderful hospitality & warm behaviour. But this incident has definitely tarnished our previous good image a lot. After the ugly

incident, police issued a press note which was an aberration of truth. We have seen on private TV channels what they did with the journalists & in no way police could deny their misdeeds.

What is required now is unconditional apology from police to the journalists & exemplary punishment to the perpetrators of the crime. If the government fails to ensure these, then this sort of incidents will happen again & again.

Nazmus Saquib
Notre Dame College, Dhaka

After reading the newspapers 'Prothom-alo', 'Ittefaq', 'Jugantor', 'Jonokontha', 'Amardesh', 'Inqilab' etc we were greatly shocked.

We condemn the police action which was barbaric, to say the least.

Mahmudul Hasan Kamal
DUET, Gazipur

The press should stop covering the matches of Bangladesh cricket team. Not only the police, in my view BCB is also guilty of neglecting the journalists. There is also a question why BCB officials were sitting in the stadium while the policemen attacked the journalists.

I salute the decision of the press to stop covering the cricket match between Bangladesh and Australia.

Mubashar Hasan, UK

I have learnt this from my text Book (H.S.C. English 1st)

"In rural Appalachia when two men who are good friends meet, they hit each other on the shoulder. The happier they are to see each other, the harder they hit."

Yes, I am talking about the joke going on in our country that "police are friends of general people". Yes, they are very intimate friend of ours. And here they are following the etiquette of rural Appalachia. As they are very close to us, they are expressing it by beating and

killing the general people and the reporters. As day by day they are becoming closer friends to us, day by day they are becoming more violent to express their supreme friendship.

But at this moment the people of this country think that police is the number one contributor to lawlessness. Now we don't feel safe because of police, as they indiscriminately arrest innocent people for money, as they protect criminals, as they protect dishonest leaders, as they extort money from vehicles, as they protect smugglers. So we see that they are doing nothing for us but harassing us in many ways.

At the moment it will be better for general people if our government abolishes police. Because if they are abolished then we will feel safe, then we will be able to go out, then we will be able to drive on roads, then none will come to us to extort money, then none will kill general people (Example, Kansat), then none will beat the reporters.

So if our government wants to make us secure and wants to make Bangladesh happy, it has to do something about the police.

Tanvir Hussain
Northern College, Dhaka

As a citizen of Bangladesh, I am so shocked at the barbaric action of police that no words are adequate enough to convey my bitter feelings. Is this the outcome of our expenditures for this national institution called 'Police'. I demand the immediate dismissal of all the police members involved in the heinous attack on photo journalists. These people are mentally sick to the highest order and do not have the right to serve the country as members of the police force. They shattered our image globally. The positive image that our cricketers

earned through their hard work is gone. This news has spread all over the world including Australia. Mere dismissal is not enough for these notorious members of police force. They should be given exemplary punishment. Have you seen the facial expression of that Akbar while he was beating an old man with all his might? I think even the most notorious criminal on earth would not have done it. He does not have the minimum



human values. How can these kind of people be members of our police force?

Finally, I demand full restructuring of the police department, so that it can serve the free citizens of a sovereign country. Steps must be taken now. We cannot afford to have this kind of police anymore.

Md. Fazlul Kader
Agargaon, Dhaka

I am really disappointed to see that the journalist society did not protest the light steps taken by the home ministry against the culprits responsible for the Chittagong incident. The state minister for home affairs told us



severely beat up women in Dhaka during hartal. They patronise terrorists & smugglers. And they are barbaric to the journalists & innocent people. I don't understand how they could beat Jahirul Haq, the elderly photojournalist. They brought back the memories of '71 at Kansat.

In any civilised country police are helpful to the people. But here this is totally a daydream. Everyone is reluctant to go to a police station because of the fear of harassment.

Solaiman Palash
East Jurain, Dhaka

In our country only the law enforcing agencies have the right to do anything they like. In very few cases are they punished. And the punishment is too insignificant to mention. This is why they are repeating such misdeeds everywhere. But when they attack the journalists in the presence of their high-ups, it is certainly an unpardonable excess.

Since it was an international

Test match, it will damage the image of the whole nation. So the people responsible for it must not go unpunished.

Habibullah Mizan
International Relations,
University of Dhaka

Alphabetically, each letter of the word 'police' is significant, because all the characteristics of a perfect human are implied in that. Basically, police is to keep public order, prevent and handle various crimes. But according to real perspective in Bangladesh, is there any relevance between the substantial meaning of police and the activities of our policemen? Here the one noteworthy thing is that police are responsible for abuse of power, thanks to their being used politically by successive governments. Recently, by killing the poor farmers at Kansat and beating the photojournalists at Chittagong, our policemen have exposed their real face. Now it is a matter of concern for the conscious people. A question has arisen, are the police

friends of us or enemies? I think such condition could be the result of some basic faults: lack of perfect and effectual training system or the feebleness of administration.

I cannot imagine why the government is so much unconcerned even after noticing this sort of brutality on the part of police. From my point of view, I can say that our police department has to be more accountable to the authorities to increase the level of their efficiency. The government has to ensure a better training system to get skilled policemen. The police department must obey and work according to the dictates of an independent and active administration.

Otherwise, the brutality and incivility of police will cause much harm to the nation.

Roney
BUBT, Mirpur

Kansat tragedy & relevant thoughts

Tragic incidents at Kansat that were triggered by an impatient police authority put the nation into deep shame. It is indeed an outrageous act by our police force that is, in this time of post modernism, acting in a way that reminds us of imperialistic cruelty.

One cannot but wonder how the government holds fast to its cavalier attitudes towards its responsibility that the citizens of the land entrusted upon them with their mandate in the election. And these people who were brutally killed by the police were the part of this land, and they also cast their votes during the election with a fond hope of enjoying equality of some sort.

More tragic is the fact that this turmoil had been looming large for quite a long time. Civil society, media and others kept on informing the government of the dire consequences that it was bracing for but unfortunately the government decided to remain indifferent to all this, as if it were not its duty to take preventive action against such atrocities. And a brutal and tragic incident has taken place that took the innocent lives. Surprisingly and outrageously, no attempt has been made by the government as to its explanation of the failure on its part. No resignation (a practice that seems to be a far/distant dream in this land though), no termination along with severe punishment has taken place yet - God knows if there is any chance at all. This is the land where we've seen monga; people were dying of starva-

tion and we were talking about poverty alleviation here in Dhaka. We have seen Kansat and we are talking of high hopes for the people of this poor land. A strange nation we are turning out to be these days.

One need not talk about the sky-high price spiral of essentials, an all engulfing corruption and the incidents that are in no way humane around us. We people are held captives by the opportunists around us some are making a sad and bad use of our life in the name of religion, some are depriving us in the name of national prosperity and still others are depriving us of our basic rights in the ways that are more than complex and hypocritical, we are not doing anything to resist them.

We strongly urge the government to take stern measures against the wrongdoers.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

"Is 1971 back?" - I just thought it after reading the news of carnage at Kansat perpetrated by police. It was the headline for many days in the newspapers. Meeting up the basic demands of the citizens is the main duty of a government, i.e. elected by the people and run with the tax money paid by the people. No doubt, demanding a smooth power supply is one of the key rights of the people for better living. According to our constitution, it is our right and if we are deprived of this we can raise our voice. But the reality has come in a different way in Kansat. Police



attacked the villagers who were demonstrating in the streets over their right of getting electricity. It is a problem that the government could solve by sitting with the villagers peacefully. But the government did not pay heed to the complaint of the villagers and it took a draconian measure that resulted in the deaths of 20 innocent people.

The tendency of the ruling BNP government to oppose any legal demand of citizens through application of force is quite noticeable. On the statement of the villagers, the

mindless killing by the police at Kansat went beyond the cruelty of Pakistani soldiers during the liberation war (Prothom Alo). In addition to the killing of innocent people, there have also been rampant attacks on their homes and their properties.

It seems the government is trying to turn Bangladesh into a police state.

Golam Rosul Maruf
University of Dhaka

Israel's plan

We know this for sure that as long as Israel exists peace will never be achieved. If there is indeed a terrorist nation it is definitely Israel.

They are controlling the US because there is a strong Jewish lobby in that country. It is the Jews who control the US media. It is the Jews who control the US government. These Jews are using the US for the benefit of Israel. It is definitely Israel who masterminded the plan for occupation of Iraq, The

Zionists are pursuing the US to send their soldiers to invade foreign lands. What is happening with Iran is also the work of these Zionists.

They want to dominate the Middle East. In order to do this, they are using US troops to invade the 'hostile' countries in the region.

Minhaj Ahmed
Uttara, Dhaka

Collision course

It seems to me that the stalemate in dialogue between the government and the opposition, situation at Kansat and Gherao of PM Office are all man-made situations from which all the political parties are trying to gain something for the upcoming election.

Here I find no benefit for the common masses. The collision course that the parties have resorted to will only bring untold miseries to the general people. We hope good sense will prevail before it is too late.

DR Md Mozahedul Islam
On e-mail

Fair election and caretaker govt.

M. Inamul Haque, Director General, Bangladesh Haor & Wetlands Development Board, recently wrote that "Bangladesh had three parliamentary elections under caretaker government in 1991, 1996 & 2001. Those elections are now a model to the whole world, and many people in other countries are demanding such type of elections." He went on to question the fairness of those elections, citing the corrupt, land grabbers, loan defaulters and other criminals taking part in the electoral process.

As one who has travelled through East Asia, Europe and the Americas, I can say that Bangladesh elections are not a

model to the whole world, nor are people demanding such elections. We are the only country that feels its necessity.

Bangladesh has not yet reached a point in its "democracy" where we can trust each other to hold an election fairly. Instead, we distrust each other so much that the government in power - which seems to not understand that in a parliamentary system you can hold elections BEFORE the end of the five years - must step down, an interim government must take over and hold elections, and then hand over the reins of government to the majority party. Bangladesh has not yet reached a point in its "democracy" whereby the ruling party can and will turn over the reins of government to another party as part of the democratic process.

It's hard to believe that people in other countries want such mistrust in their political system as to require a caretaker government. If and when we reach that level in our democracy that we no longer require a caretaker government, we can win and lose and transfer power peacefully and professionally. Only then we will be a model to the whole world.

M.M. Haque, On e-mail

No-confidence vote

A few days before the last general elections in 2001, I asked one of my friends who she would vote for. She mentioned the name of one candidate who was a notorious terrorist during his student life. I said, "Don't you know that he is a terrorist, then why should you vote for him?" She replied, "But the other candidates are even greater terrorists. So I am going to opt for the lesser evil."

This is not the only one case. Considering this aspect, some people refrain from voting. So, we demand a blank space in the ballot paper for "no confidence". If a voter doesn't find any honest candidate to vote for, then he may put his seal on that blank space. These blank votes should be counted and declared. If the number of blank votes is the higher than the votes for other candidates, then there should be re-election in that centre.

Though this is very unfortunate for us but this is the demand of the time. The politicians always seek their own interest. They always try to grab power at any cost. So they

nominate those candidates who can win. What is the procedure? It doesn't matter. No political party sees the interest of the common citizens. So we have to think up something new to make elections meaningful. I would be happy if the readers offer their suggestions on this particular topic.

Md. Mahubur Rahman
Lecturer
Stamford University BD

A positive decision

The Awami high command took a praiseworthy decision that it handed over student leadership to the students themselves.

This is a welcome development that other student organisations should follow.

MAH Nazim
University of Dhaka

AL politics

Now the Awami League has come out with a stunt. They will not sit for reform dialogue with the BNP-coalition if Jamaat is included in the delegation.

Unfortunately, our memory is not so short that we will forget those days in 1994-96 when the AL enforced 173 days of hartal to press home their demand for "Neutral Caretaker Government" for the next election. At that time they had Jamaat as their worthy partner when Mr Nizami used to sit in the "Liaison Committee" with AL stalwarts.

These days when AL enforces hartal, they invariably push forward their female workers to break the barricades and fight the law enforcers. They smash up the windshields of public transports and private cars and throw bricks on the police. The police women are no match for them.

The male activists of the AL take position in a safe corner and deliver raucous speeches, accusing the government of violating human rights.

Iskander Meah
Dhaka