

The Daily Star

Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali

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Matter of Governance

WHEN will the government wake up to the tyrannization of business and industry by extortions? The news reports of extortion-related abduction and murder have passed us by. The complaints aired by chamber body leaders from time to time about terror toll hanging as the Sword of Damocles over their heads and incapacitating them in their pursuit of industrial and trade activities have also fallen on deaf ears.

But overwhelming all these comes now to the fore the narrative of systematic coercion and torture suffered by Fazlur Rahman, an industrialist running the Tk 150-crore City Vegetable Oil Mills and three other factories at Rupganj, 20 kms off Narayanganj town. Rahman's story published by our newspaper on Thursday graphically described the storming of his establishment by a group of two dozen miscreants led by Altaf Hossain and Habibur Rahman, both alleged to be local leaders of the ruling party having a 'close contact' with AL MP Maj Gen (retd) K M Shafiqullah. As well as having assaulted five of the industrialist's employees, damaged his equipment and taken some valuables from the factory they are purportedly preventing his workers from going to the police station or the hospital for treatment. The terrorised place is said to be guarded now by a police posse of five only. Rahman has demanded justice saying that if the government did not intervene soon enough he would have to close down his huge industrial establishment. This could reduce edible oil supply to the market by thirty per cent of the total availability. The proximate reason for his industry being attacked by the goons whom, by his own admission, he has been paying toll all the time to survive, was his refusal to give them contract. He did not want to let them in like that; so he thought it safe to offer them goods on credit instead of the contract they were apparently recommended for.

Fazlur Rahman at some grave risk to his life and limb and the industry he runs has volunteered to lay bare his ordeals. He has also told names in a manifestation of personal courage that has become a rarity these days. This also underlines how pushed to the walls he must have felt not to be able to keep his predicament to himself any longer. We thank him for all this and urge the government to bring the culprits to justice.

Beyond that legal action, the government ought to feel obliged to take, it is also imperative for them to realise that **this has been basically a failure of governance, one time too many. That there is a linkage between governance and industrial activity has been amply underscored by the Rupganj incident.** The ruling party has to disassociate itself from elements that use its sign-board to do what they want which often amounts to acts of economic sabotage.

Friday Mailbox

Bulldozing slums : implications

Sir, Better late than never. Late, but why in such a hurry, without any notice whatsoever to the poor slum families (the same style prevailed in Tanbari)? Unless it was a surprise raid to trap the terrorist dens — alleged to be swearing allegiance to the godfathers of the different political parties who wish to exert their influence by hook or by crook. It is easy to disperse the poor families, but the real birds had flown away. Self-defence against whom?

The surrender of armed bandits has been faked, according to a section of the press. Why the newspapers cannot bestow the benefit of the doubt in their editorials? This is one way to express no-confidence.

Is this police blitz just for the unnatural death of one policeman, when there are thousands of political and unattached goondas at large whom the police are able to spot but not arrest; can and do arrest, but they slip out on bail (depends on how they were charged-sheets)? This type of 'moody governance' has to be explained to avoid public misunderstanding.

Is the regime fond of living from crisis to crisis? The preceding successive crises are easy to recapitulate: the public uproar over approval on principle of the transit of Indian goods; the grey MI purchase; the new political pollution in BUET and JU; the official chasing of the sex workers of Tanbari. It is not difficult to go on building unstable pockets if the intention is to create conditions for eventual declaration of an emergency condition constitutionally. However, the investment return is questionable, and might ricochet.

If the intention of these actions are in public interest, then the next targets should be the unlicensed drivers and unregistered vehicles in the metropolis; followed by raids on the pavement hawkers. The land grabbers should be on alert to take evasive action; while the secretaries at staff are licking their wounds.

Well, let us have a crisis in Dhaka. The odds look even.

A Husnain
Dhaka

MPs' telephone bill relief fund

Sir, The publication of the list of names of 'honorable' MPs not paying the telephone bills is an appreciable social responsibility by *The Daily Star*. DS did publish this list once before but it appears that publishing of such list once in a while fails to create any impact on our 'not caring' MPs.

I request to publish this list every week for the next six months with names. With this effort, the DS and the public can try to force some MPs to give in their due bills.

Additionally, I propose the creation of 'MPs Telephone Bill Relief Fund' for those who declare their financial incapability of payments. The conscious public through this fund will organise payment of their bills.

Dr. M. Rafiqul Islam
Dhaka

How Long Will This Eviction Continue?

by Anu Muhammad

THE first phase of 'heroic' operations by thousands of police and BDR appears to have been successful. Different parts of 'criminal' Dhaka now bear vivid signs of their victory: thousands of *jhupris* (shanties), home to thousands of delinquent children, old people and working men and women have been destroyed. Around 50 thousand people, 'saved from being bulldozed' have joined the thousands that are already in the streets. They were forced to come to terms with the grim reality that they don't have the right to live even in a *jhupri*, that they don't have the right to try to live a better life. They have to live under the mercy of thugs moving around with strong 'legal' authority.

The law enforcement in Bangladesh has 'developed' a lot. Its police, BDR have now been modernized appreciably and are very smart-looking indeed. Smartly dressed and driving around in awe-inspiring vehicles, they exude air of supremacy, thanks to the hard-earned foreign currency through the labour of poor, destitute people like garment workers. But unfortunately, the main brunt of their brute force falls not on the thugs, but on the poor and destitute 'scum of the society'.

Anybody who witnessed their 'clean-up' operations in the last few days would agree that our police and BDR members really behave like Royal Bengal tigers.

Their blood-curdling roars turn their victims into meek lambs. They are capable, within minutes, of demolishing *jhupris*, fruits of years of love's labour. They are trained to land efficient flying kicks on children and women and capable of destroying their belongings with maniacal ecstasy. It seemed like they were telling those defeated, ruined garment girl workers they kicked out of their *jhupris*: 'yes, we got training and equipment purchased by the dollars you earned working round the clock for the country. Now, take the rewards.'

The poor working people, specially children, aged ones and women, seem to be perfect targets for practice for these 'law' enforcing agencies where they can display their heroic performances. However, on the flip side of the coin, these very same 'law-enforcers' possess a much kinder, gentler, almost servile personality when they stand in front of godfathers of criminals, powerful and influential killers, rapists, women traffickers, druglords etc, and they behave like pet cats. These small felines usually are given assignments to perform in elections, in

public meetings, in shows of strength, for bringing in foreign 'aid' to be actually consumed by the rich in the end. They know their friends in rural areas who are capable of creating a situation that forces people to migrate.

The whole episode of eviction reflects hypocrisy, contradictions and cruel jokes from the ruling elite. Another joke came from the Prime Minister herself, who, after two days of the demolition spree became kind enough to propose 5 crore taka for rehabilitation programme for those who were scattered all over the sky. The destiny of this money however, is anybody's guess.

At this point, I would like to summarize the hypocritical statements and steps of the authorities in this regard as follows:

The authorities who are in fact creators, protectors, friends and guides of the mastans-criminals, have come out in thousands to bully tens of thousands of helpless people into abandoning their homes, forcing them to live under the sky in the name of eradicating crime! On the other hand, the godfathers are being invited to sumptuous dinners and given honour and protection as VIPs.

Mayor of Dhaka city Mohammad Hanif also supported the eviction programme and expressed his strong determination to get rid of rickshaws, hawkers, and *bastis* to beautify Dhaka city and create a peaceful environment for its citizens. After all, he must be feeling an utter sense of impotence for not being able to address himself to the big issues in hand; issues like severe air pollution, land-grabbing (or lake-grabbing for that matter), deforestation of the Osmann Uddyan etc. So how else can he exercise his power except over poor people?

In fact, nobody can support the cruel existence of the slums where more than 3 million people of Dhaka city live. We all want permanent solution to this slum problem. We want *bastibashis* (human settlement) and not *bastis* (slums). But why has Dhaka become a city of slums? Who are responsible for it? Who need slums and poor people? Who create and recreate them? Public figures like Mohammad Nasim or Mohammad Hanif know the answer well. They know people who have made fortunes at the expense of millions of poor slum-dwellers; who use the poor people in elections, in

out much help, if any at all, from the government. They hardly expect any favour from the government but they certainly don't want any repression. But whatever they do to stay out of harm's way, they become vicious targets of the mastan-police-local ruling party leader-government official clique. Even after giving this clique their dues in both cash and kind, these self-employed people are unable to protect themselves from government cleansing programmes.

According to government statistics, revenue allocation for development and poverty alleviation has increased over 500 per cent during the last 15 years, but the question is what happened as a result of this huge increase? Less than 2 per cent of the poor population could cross the poverty line.

The decrease in the number of poor people in rural areas has gone hand in hand with an increase by the same number in the urban areas. Thus the much-vaunted huge 'success' stories of poverty alleviation in rural areas was actually invented to serve as a cover-up for the exodus of poor and hungry people to the mega city of Dhaka in search of jobs.

Governments always love to inform us that our main strength lies in the garments industry and a major portion of government revenues come from export earnings from this sector. Ironically, the workers who make this possible are always abused and cheated by the people of power -- owners, mastans and police. Eviction from their home and hearth is the latest incident.

The Government and the all powerful civil society on the one hand are full of praise for the microcredit programme but, on the other hand, are very annoyed with those who want to earn their livelihood by investing an amount that is comparable with microcredit. The amount provided by the microcredit programme is not enough to start a shop in any Plaza of the city. The money could help one start a business on the footpath only.

Unable to save state-owned industrial enterprises and create a congenial atmosphere for the development of private sector industry, governments in this country have always advised people to rely on self-employment. In fact, for a long time, people have survived mostly through their own hard labour and creative ideas with-

maters worse, the government has kicked these poor day-labourers out in the streets in the name of cutting crime and beautifying the capital city. Most of these people are in fact, not considered citizens except during election times.

Rehabilitation is really a joke. Only a few days ago, evic-

tion operation was successfully

completed in Tanbari and Nimgoli broths. More than 3000 girls and women who were oppressed phase by phase at different levels were forced out in the streets. They accused mastans and also the police for looting their years' earnings. About 300 of them were forcefully taken to a rehabilitation centre only to be disillusioned and they ran away to revert to prostitution. Without any shame or hesitation, the government is still claiming that they had carried out the eviction to rehabilitate the girls. Rehabilitation in a society where women traffickers, sex-traders, rapists, illegal commission agents, extortions and a corrupt police force has the upper hand, is nothing more than a day-dream.

The eviction of slum-dwellers in Dhaka city has rendered more than 50000 people homeless, putting more than 15000 girls, including infants, into a very vulnerable situation and most of them are undoubtedly going to fall easy prey to sex-traders. Meanwhile, the Government Rehabilitation Programme in support of a larger scale eviction continues.

Slum-dwellers are under attack on the grounds that the slums proliferated illegally on government lands. Now slum-dwellers don't live in slums for free. These *bastibashis* pay rent to *bastimolis*. Question is, why attack these poor slum-dwellers instead of the *dakhalidars* or *illegals* *khaznadaras* or *bastimolis* that really are the ones who broke the law? They are the powerful leaders, mastans of the area. They live in buildings built by the money collected from poor *bastibashis*. These *maliks* will be hardly affected by the government's cleansing programme. It's just a matter of time before they will be planning for another round of illegal activities in the very same lands the poor people were evicted from.

Anybody may ask why has this eviction campaign has become so important for this government? Is it to make the way easy for some powerful gang-leaders to grab khas lands for building supermarkets or apartment complexes? Is it to rearrange *basties* in order to raise the prospects of the coming election and to ensure a monolithic control of the ruling party over the criminal network? Is it to show foreign powers the authority of the present regime? Or is it to hide failures in other areas?

Time will tell what the real motive was behind these cruel evictions. But the question remains where will these lakhs of people, most of whom are women and children, go? Village politics ejected them from their dwellings before. Now they will have to go somewhere. Where? *Mantripara? Sangshad Bhaban?* Police line.....? No?

In that case, doesn't the government realise that these poor people, when pushed to the extreme, might take the law in their own hands in desperation? Wouldn't that lead to anarchy? Will anybody in the government pay heed?

The author teaches Economics at the Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka.

OPINION

Newly Discovered Mass Grave in Dhaka Opens Old Wound of 1971

by Dr. A.H. Jaffor Ullah

IT is a fortuitous finding. As workers dug in Pallabi (Mirpur) to extend the square-footage of a Mosque, they find remains of young adults. It was a mass grave. During the nine-months period in 1971 from late-March to mid-December when our struggle for independence was raging every which way one can look, a large number of shallow mass graves were dug by Pakistani army and thousands of people around the capital city had never heard from their loved ones who simply had vanished in the thin air during the nine-month period in 1971. For them, the news of the discovery of a mass grave is too heartrending. The shattered bones those were found in the mass grave are a grim reminder of what might have happened to their loved ones. Thus, the old wound was opened one more time after all these years.

After a long 28-year silence, a mass grave was accidentally unearthed in Mirpur, which used to be a stronghold of both Pakistani military and their buddies in 1971. With the discovery of shattered human bones and skulls in the newly-found mass grave in this site, more questions are now being asked than the forensic experts can answer with certainty. One thing is very clear though: the victims were all Bangalees and they fell prey to gratuitous killing by the Pakistani army and their right-hand men.

Unfortunately, in spite of such monstrosity, the doctors were found to maintain a callous silence, obviously they are hand in glove with these criminal elements. I, therefore, appeal the Minister for Health, the Director General of BirDEM Hospital, all other relevant authorities and right-thinking people to ensure that such criminal elements receive exemplary punishment to the maximum extent for their indulgence in collective killings of the innocent patients.

Uttam Das
Logistic Shipping Services Ltd.,
Chittagong

Killer medicine!

Sir, I narrate hereunder my nightmarish experience at BirDEM Hospital, Dhaka, recently while attending a patient who was admitted in a very critical stage at the age of 75. The doctors in such critical case of diabetes prescribed insulin injections. Finding no improvement whatsoever even after one week, the attending doctors suspected foul play. Accordingly, one of the injections was sent for laboratory testing. The result revealed contents to be soap water inside the insulin injection ampoule. These injections were purchased from the pharmacy of BirDEM Hospital.

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Uttam Das
Logistic Shipping Services Ltd.,
Chittagong

Abusing departed souls

Sir, Two of our heads of state, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman, were the victims of political assassinations. For losing one's life in such an unnatural way, the general reaction would be similar universally, and human.

But, it appears, the politicians, especially in Bangladesh, (who are also human beings), react in different ways, depending on the political polarisation. It implies that death is not the leveler; at least not in the political arena!

A dead person is not subject to legal judgement in the human court. A death sentence by the court is also a severe kind of punishment; and it is not assassination, and it is respected legally and socially (religiously it is also accepted) otherwise there would be mass movements).

In our country, as Muslims, the dead are criticised by the politicians as a general practice. Is it proper, when we pray "may his soul rest in peace", and then assert it is not hypocrisy?

How to look at this disturbing trend in our society. Nobody might dare to cite even the accepted *fatwa* on this issue, as he would immediately be branded negatively by a section of the politicians or vested interest group.

Deaths and killings leave trails; but political assassinations seem to bug us for generations; as such novel actions take place only in this country and there are no historical precedents. It is time to debate this issue openly and publicly, to get it out of our mind as it becomes a moral issue, with due respect to legal proceedings, which is a different issue altogether.

Confused Citizen
Dhaka

tion than third class platitudes and pointing out the deficiencies in others. Are all Bangladeshis toll and tale collectors?

One example is the illegal allotment of Rajuk plots in favour of party workers which has severely damaged the credibility and image of the regime (see Editor Mahfuz Anam's commentary DS July 16). However, the PM had the sense to cancel it. Why she does not take action against some of her discreditable advisors? That would be in public interest (there are black sheep in every organisation).

Abusive and vicious language are used by the party leaders when it is not necessary. The snubbing tone has to be eliminated — it is very provoking (the Aleagues are proud of themselves, so are the others). There is a popular tendency to pass on the buck at the slightest opportunity. During a change-over, both the liabilities and the assets are taken over; as no

Fortunately, this is not 1970s or even 1980s. As we stand now to greet the new millennium, Bangalees of Bangladesh are recapitulating the bloody events of 1971, and they are now saying: "how in the world Pakistani army got away with the crime they have committed against humanity?"

Of course, there is no easy answer to that. However one thing seems for sure, our leaders from that period must have been myopic not to see that a grievous error was being made because we did not urge the International Tribunal at The Hague asking them to try the Pakistani army officers who violated the civil rights of Bangalees and committed crime against humanity during the nine-month period.

It is comforting to know that quite a few army generals, officers are still alive, and they are passing their golden period in the comfort and company of their loved ones. For example, while Lt. General Gul Hassan lives in Vienna, Austria, Lt. General Tikka Khan could be found somewhere in Punjab. Lt. General "Tiger" Niazi is a vocal retired officer who is always eager to talk about the "fall of Dhaka".

The generals know that their hands were once tainted and smeared with Bangalee bloods. At this time, what is urgently needed is a comprehensive list of all the army officers who were involved in gratuitous killings of Bangalees during the nine-month period. Mind you that not all of them had to be physically present in the killing ground. Lt. General Gul Hassan may say that he did not visit the killing field. But we

have corroborating evidence from Lt. Col. Z.A. Khan's memoir *The Way It Was* in which the author clearly mentioned that Lt. General Gul Hassan visited Chittagong during May-June, 1971 to make sure that sweeping operation and genocide were progressing according to the blueprint made at Rawalpindi/Islamabad.

Amidst new hopes, there's despair as well. We are baffled by the present Bangladesh Administration of Sheikh Hasina is not showing any interest whatsoever in urging the International Tribunal at The Hague, The Netherlands, to bring the rogue retired Pakistani army officers to the court of justice for the commission of the crime of Bengali Genocide.

This is rather mind