

Police brutality and the need for an independent judiciary



Empower police?

It was quite disturbing to see the photographs of two senior opposition politicians being beaten up by the police (January 10).

Was the photograph of the five alleged highway robbers beaten to death by villagers in Keraniganj published in the same edition of your paper any less disturbing? It wasn't. But aren't the police there to protect us instead of behaving like the lynch mob or an I being naive? As your commentary on 11th January 2002 pointed out, only a few months ago one of BNP's own leaders was literally given a bloody head during a demonstration followed by a police attack when the Awami League was in power.

As much as I oppose hartals, broken promises and have a great distaste for lies especially from senior politicians, I see no excuse for this kind of police brutality. The ruling BNP must take

lessons from its predecessors instead of taking revenge if this childish cycle of violence is to end and we are to get down to the more serious task of nation building.

Hartals are not only an irritating and sad element of today's Bangladeshi politics, but they are also a major national embarrassment especially in recent times when we seem to be hosting a lot of important high profile foreign dignitaries. Far more painful is the fact that these embarrassments directly translate into lost productivity and hence lost revenue earnings, lost exports and lost foreign investments, not to mention they bring the whole country to a standstill. The bottom line is it hurts our economy and therefore our future. Beating people up for it will not make it any brighter nor fix the problem. On the contrary this sorry incidence has only helped fuel the political tension and given the opposition a legitimate excuse for grievance when there wasn't any before. Where is the logic in stooping to the level of a party like the Awami League that has not been mature enough to deal with its October debacle, not shown respect for people's mandate for change but instead foolishly resorted to publicly chastising the single most respected person in Bangladesh our ex-President, Mr. Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed? This police brutality was totally uncalled for!

So I take this opportunity to remind Mr. Moudud Ahmed, the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs, of his party's pre-election pledge to separate the judiciary from the executive. Like any good enterprise needs a good accounting system, so does a country need a system of check and balance. This is the only way we are ever going to stop this degenerative process of absolute power leading to absolute corruption of whoever happens to be in government and that too at the expense of our hard earned democratic rights.

Shabbir A. Bashar
San Jose, California, USA

A simple truth

I guess now-a-days when people get confused over certain religious issues, they follow a simple rule 'not to follow the rule at all'. Take for example the 'purdah' issue. Allah has told us clearly in the Quran about the importance of practising 'purdah'. But how many of us follow it? We also know that there is no compulsion in religion. But unfortunately some of us translate it wrongly. 'Compulsion' refers to forcing someone to follow the rule. Just like the Taliban did to their people. But why do most of us confuse the word 'compulsion' by saying that it means that it does not matter if we break the rules. Don't we know that breaking the rules earns us God's wrath? We should be doing 'purdah' seriously, instead of saying that, it's our choice. Sure it is but not doing 'purdah' is sinful. I also hope we learn to differentiate between 'human rights' and 'religion'. There is no greater advocate of human rights than God himself.

Flora Momin
Mohammedpur, Dhaka

Highway deaths

Close to a hundred people have been reported killed in major accidents on the highways of Bangladesh over the last few weeks, only Allah knows how many smaller ones have gone unreported and unaccounted for.

I don't know how many people would agree with me, but my observation tells me that other than a few obligatory words of condolence and sympathy towards the families of the dead or injured, the government has not taken any constructive step to address the escalating number of accidents on our highways.

I shall long for the day when the government would realise that addressing this growing menace is as important as filing graft cases against the officials of the previous government, at least to the people who have lost close family member(s) in such gruesome accidents.

Anwar Babar
Dallas, Texas, USA

What about BTTB's 216,000 digital lines project case?

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption on 9th January filed a case accusing the former Minister for Post & Telecom (MOPT) Mohammad Nasim for the losses to the national exchequer by signing of an unfavourable telecommunication contract with a multinational company. Mr. Nasim was already granted an interim bail earlier in another corruption case.

I have noted with great surprise that a case of corruption in MOPT is slowly passed up by the present government or Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC). The case was about signing of a widely discussed controversial contract between BTTB and a Chinese company to

install 216,000 digital telephone lines all over Bangladesh.

According to various national newspaper reports published in October to December last year, the project has been reviewed by the BAC and large magnitude of irregularities, misappropriations and forgery regarding placing of work order and cost of materials in project Bill of Quantity (BOQ) has been exposed. It was reported that Mr. Nasim single-handedly implicated the whole process.

It is to be mentioned here that the Dainik Dinkal published a series of review reports about the irregularities of 216,000 digital lines project of BTTB last year, when BNP was in the opposition. The unwillingness to graft this case against the former minister may be the present government's policy to be in the safe side with China or may be the relevant department is on good tablet from the contractor's local agents.

The government's policy to be in the safe side with any foreign country is not an issue of debate but does the interest of our country is served with such a costly controversial project and what about the present government's commitment of transparency in all sectors?

I still hope that the present government would go ahead with publishing a white paper on all the corruption cases and filed cases to ensure future rectification and sincerity in all government sectors.

Farzana Malek
Indira Road, Dhaka

The Khatib is against Islam?

A lot has been said about the Khatib's remarks. Some people are even supporting his arguments on the basis of the glorious book of Allah the Holy Qur'an. Just because someone says that it is from the Qur'an doesn't make it so. Allah says, "O you who believe, if a wicked person brings any news to you, you shall first investigate, lest you commit injustice towards some people, out of ignorance, then become sorry and remorseful for what you have done." [49:6]

I would like to cite one example of how our so called religious leaders (and Osama-bin-Laden supporters) are misleading and inciting millions to intolerance and hatred. In one of his famous *khutba* Osama said, "slay [enemies] wherever you find them!" (4: 89). It is very frustrating to see even the educated people didn't bother to check the relevance and context of the verse before jumping into the fire.

Because if they did they would surely read that in the very next verse Allah says: "Thus, if they let you be, and do not make war on you, and offer you peace, Allah does not allow you to harm them" (4: 90). Obviously, here Allah is talking self-defense not pre-planned murder.

Allah also says: "Those who believe and those who are the Jews and the Christians and the Sabians-

- whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good works-- they have their reward with Allah, and no fear shall come on them nor shall they grieve." (5:72)

Such a religion can by no standards termed intolerant. Indeed, Islam is a faith that is based on persuasion rather than compulsion.

Thus, in Islam, peace is the rule rather than an exception. It permits war only in case of aggression, "but if the enemy inclines towards peace, you should also incline towards peace, and trust in Allah" (8:61).

Therefore, I urge our readers,

This precisely is Atal Bihari Vajpayee's methodology.

Having thundered in Parliament that the movement for the construction of the temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya was the reflection of 'national sentiment', he retracted from Kumarokom.

Having equated 'Hindu' with the 'Nation', undermining in one stroke the secular foundations of modern India and striking fear amongst the religious minorities, he proceeded to 'assure' the country of his 'secular' credentials.

Praises were then sung by the

Leave him alone



Thorn in throat?

thorn in your throat. But to us, the 130 million people of Bangladesh he is an oasis.

Iqbal Ahmed
Dhaka

Teach them a lesson

I was not surprised at all when I heard that Awami League and its intellectuals called our honourable ex-President Shahabuddin Ahmed a traitor, betrayer and so on.

BNP and its intellectuals would title him same way, if they had lost in the election. Because if one party is the head of a coin, the later is the tail of the same coin.

Mr Shahabuddin was a justice. So, he knows the laws very well. However, if I were you Mr. Shahabuddin Ahmed, I would file a lawsuit against those politicians.

Mahmudul Khan
Toronto, Canada

before spreading intolerance in the name of Allah and the Qur'an, please carefully read it and don't use fragment of a verse to spite hatred just for the sake of it.

Mahmud Zaman
California, USA

Vajpayee, a true disciple of Machiavelli

A Machiavellian dictum suggests that one good way to consolidate one's rule is to do the following: first frighten the population with the worst that is possible under your rule, then proceed not to let that materialise.

The population then will heave a sigh of relief and sing praises to your 'capabilities' and 'statesmanship'!

gullible. Following the December 13 attack on Parliament, the PM thundered of a war to the finish. The saffron brigade went to town whipping up war hysteria. The VHP/RSS leaders went to the extent of urging a nuclear war to wipe out Pakistan!

Then PM on the New Year's day strikes a tone of restraint and talks of a diplomatic offensive.

Praises are once again being sung of his 'moderation'.

Machiavelli must be proud to have such asincere disciple, so many centuries later.

Ravi Krishna
Bahrain

India can learn from Canada

India can learn from Canada's first Prime Minister as to how to deal with the Kashmiri separatists.

With India and Pakistan on a war-footing on separatist terrorist activities in Kashmir, India may learn from how Canada's first Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald resolved the separatist threat that arose from Nova Scotia immediately after the proclamation of the Canadian Confederation in 1867.

Although the union of Canadian provinces was proclaimed on July 1, 1867, it remained extremely unpopular in the Atlantic provinces. Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island refused to join, and Nova Scotia, after joining sought to secede.

Most Nova Scotians resented the loss of their sovereignty and independence and in September 1867, there were elections for the provincial and federal legislatures in which anti-Confederation factions won sweeping victories. In the contest for the provincial legislature, 36 of the 38 seats were won by separatists called Repealers. Similarly, nearly all of the Nova Scotians elected to go to Ottawa were also dedicated to the dissolution of the union. Eighteen out of 19 Nova Scotia Members of Parliament were Repealers.

When the anti-Confederation legislature of Nova Scotia met in January 1868, the provincial government presented no budget or program. Led by Martin Wilkins, the Attorney General, the government presented resolutions to repeal the Constitutional Act. Wilkins argued that the fundamental law of Nova Scotia derived from a compact between the crown and the people; therefore, the province could not be confederated without their consent, for instance by plebiscite (which apparently many Kashmiris want).

Fearing immediate dissolution of the Confederation, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald sprang into action. But he did not dispatch federal troops, as U.S. President Abraham Lincoln did a few years ago to stop the southern states from seceding, to stop Nova Scotia from leaving. He rushed to the provincial capital, Halifax, and met the Repealers trying to divert them from separatism to the cause of "better terms" within Canada. He also launched a series of newspaper articles to persuade Nova Scotians on the same lines.

By January 1869, most leaders of the Nova Scotia repeal movement were, in Macdonald's words, "about to take the shilling and enlist." The enlistment bounty included tariff adjustments, and additional \$800,000 per year federal subsidy for the province. For Nova Scotia leader Joseph Howe, there was a position in the cabinet.

Wilkins continued to grumble in the Assembly that the terms were not nearly adequate and came close to joining the Repealer minority who advocated annexation of Nova Scotia to the United States as a last resort. In the end, however, Wilkins also took his shilling, but as Macdonald himself admitted, "Nova Scotia would "consider itself for some time, a conscript rather than a volunteer" to the Confederation.

Canada survived its first threat of secession because of the adroit actions of the Prime Minister. Sir John A. Macdonald offered the Nova Scotia's separatist leaders a "better deal" within Canada, which they could not refuse. Similarly, India can offer Kashmiri nationalists a "better deal" within India, which may be acceptable to them. One way would be to grant Kashmir autonomy within India while allowing Kashmiri Muslims some links with their Muslim compatriots in Pakistan.

Mahmood Elahi
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Ram Temple or BJPs' political temple?

A massive mobilisation drive has been launched by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a sister organisation of ruling BJP, to acquire Babri Mosque land to facilitate the construction of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya.

With the prospect of an Indo-Pak war fading, especially in the wake of the mounting pressure by the international community to ease the stand-off along the border, the BJP is looking for an equally emotive issue as an election card.

Only an emotive campaign could keep the BJP afloat, as the UP government, headed by the BJP, has performed dismally. The Ram Temple card therefore, is being seen as a desperate gambit to revive its sinking electoral fortunes.

Interior Home Minister L. K. Advani, and also the in-charge of BJP UP election campaign, is the man behind this mobilisation. He had already tainted his record by being the prime-instigator of the Ayodhya movement, and stands charged with the crime of destroying the Babri Mosque. India cannot afford to have men charged with such criminal offences continue representing the so-called secular country.

The President of India should move forward and halt Sangh Parivar's plans for building Ram Temple on a communally disputed land. The planned Ram Temple, if built, will be a 'monument of national shame' on the map of India.

Salman Khan
Dammam, Saudi Arabia

Beware Al!

The first wave of public reaction against Awami League's criticism of Former President Shabuddin

Ahmed's unfairness in the election 2002 only indicates people's disgust towards the AL leaders. It appears that Sheikh Hasina is only making the party's future more and more miserable. She had not learnt anything even after the crash in the October general elections.

What a sad prologue for the defeated political party!

Abd
Dhaka

The endangered time

To understand the present political dynamics of Bangladesh, we need to analyse the politics of the late '70s and '80s. First comes the Liberation War of 1971 and its aftermath has become the predominant concern for the intellectuals of Bangladesh.

There was an overwhelming quest to discover the resisting Bengali self in art, literature and history. There was an attempt to revive and re-flow the consciousness of resistance of freedom-loving Bengalis of East Bengal and now Bangladesh. The efforts are manifested in placement of the spirit of resistance in contemporary Bangladesh. The intellectuals have rediscovered in Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, "the best of all Bengalis" (Ghosh B 304, my translation Ghosh, Bishwajit: "Bangladesher Pochish Bochorer Natya Shahityer Dhara." Theatre 20.3-4 (1997): 284-315.), the symbol of Bengali Nationalism.

The euphoria of freedom was short-lived. The killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and four other front-ranking Awami League leaders put the Bangladesh political scenario back to the days of Pakistani type martial law. In the post-1975 Bangladesh, the military generals, Ziaur Rahman and Ershad reintroduced the politics of religions practised in Pakistan of 1947 to 1971. The state principles of Secularism, Socialism, Democracy, and Nationalism introduced by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were reversed to the Military-religious formula of running corrupt reactionary governments with the socio-economic policies conducive to the rise of a business group who exploited the freedom guaranteed by the regimes.

Along with political rationalisation of Military autocracy by revival of politics with religion, these regimes gave licence to communalism of Bengali national culture.

There was a media projection of distortion of the history of Liberation War. There was superimposed history, which wanted to deny the liberation of Bangladesh as a culmination of self-determination of Bengalis from 1947. The struggle that manifested in 1952s Language Movement was the indication of Bengali discontentment and to separate East Bengal from a fictitious religion based nationalism. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his Awami League became the two inseparable names in the realisation of Bangladesh. The media under Zia's regime wanted to distort this history. Is the present government main beneficiary of this process? Is Bangladesh undergoing this process?

Khairul Chowdhury
New South Wales, Australia

Bangladeshi cars

It is very pleasing to learn that the government has taken some bold initiatives in reducing air pollution. The ban on polybags and the exchange programmes by Nitol for the two stroke engines deserve applaud. However the statement about producing a local car based on Tata technology is worrisome.

Everyone knows when it comes to automobile technology India is not best known for its expertise. Just compare their trucks and buses to ones made in Korea, Japan or China. When the world has come to a point where everyone is quality conscious, it does not make sense to incorporate Indian automobile technology, which is far underdeveloped.

High rise buildings and earthquakes



Highway to heaven?

Just a few days ago there was an earthquake, which shook the whole city. People fear there may be another one coming up, which might be disastrous, given the mushroom growth of high-rise buildings throughout the city.

In Dhaka high-rise buildings have grown like mushrooms, but adequate measures for earthquakes are not regarded. There are enormous defects in the buildings but the builders don't seem to be much worried about it. There is hardly any assurance for proper water and sanitation for the high-rise buildings, needless to say there is not enough electricity for the lifts to work properly. Those who are involved in real estate business probably do not realise that human beings are going to reside in these buildings. We need to ensure that high-rise buildings are constructed with enough emergency outlets and solid foundation so that risk of any accident can be minimised.

Arjumand Wohra
Dhaka

Aid in Bangladesh



The horse that laughs last

Over the years I have noticed that there is a myth about the role of aid in Bangladesh. Many people hold the opinion that the US is the biggest donor of aid. Just for the records according to IMF the amount of disbursed aid in 1996/97 by US was \$32 million, which is ten times less than the amount Japan disbursed the same year and one third of what the Scandinavian countries gave. As for the size of the economy California is larger than the economy of the three Scandinavian countries combined. Going through the numbers, in recent years on an average the US gets the fourth highest donor spot but to put things into perspective their donation is equal to what expatriate Bahrainese Bangladeshis sent the same year.

The good thing about expatriate income is that it comes without any strings and used (sadly mostly consumed) by the focus group. And as for aid after serving the interest of all parties involved the focus group only gets about ten per cent of it. An interesting fact is that somehow we end up paying back this aid.

For the records Bangladesh paid 21 times what the US gave (\$624 million) as Debt Service-- six hundred and twenty million dollars. With that money I wonder how many bridges we could have been built. This should be an amazing figure to some, "What! Bangladesh paying the First World?"

All those years while we bragged on receiving those aid packages, in reality our children were being inflicted with this burden of debt. Let us not loose sight where we are.

Hasib
Atlanta, USA

opened than countries such as Korea, who are manufacturing quality cars at prices proportional to Indian cars. Tata trucks and buses are the cause of pollution in this country along with inability to check them appropriately. Just compare the smoke coming out of a ten-year-old Japanese or Korean truck with an Indian one.

Indian automobile manufacturers such as Maruti and Tata work in collaboration with companies such as Suzuki and Mercedes. That is why their industry although behind has made leaps and bounds. Bangladesh should look at the global picture, if Bangladesh produces a quality item at a competitive price then not only can it satisfy local needs but can even export to neighbouring countries or anywhere.

Ten years ago the Korean automobile industry was laughed at but now the West takes their cars seriously. The lesson from these countries is this-- if you are going to produce something, compete with the best not the next best.

Countries such as Nepal, Myanmar and even India may be interested in importing Bangladeshi vehicles if they are of a high quality standard.

The price of a Bangladeshi car sounds ludicrously high at Tk 4,85, 000. That's approximately \$8000 give or take. For that amount in Europe one could purchase cars such as Fiat, Renault, Peugeot, etc at the lower end. I won't even bother mentioning prices of Korean cars. So how does Nitol justify manufac-

turing a Bangladeshi vehicle with Indian technology, at prices that compare to international brands?

Rushed Haque
UK

Seeking clarification

The word 'apparel', used in your widely circulated daily on 14 January under the caption 'US team assures help for free access of RMG', drew my attention. When I looked up the word in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of current English (5th edition) I found that the word is out of use.

Why did you use an obsolete and old fashioned word? Couldn't you use another word instead?

Harun-or-Rashid
Rajshahi University

BTV news

On January11, Pakistan defeated Bangladesh cricket team by an innings and 178 runs. Abdur Razzak scored highest runs and was selected Man of the Match. Unfortunately BTV's news at eight o'clock showed Danish Kaneria as the Man of the Match who took nine wickets in the two innings. BTV broadcast the match live from the stadium then why made such a careless mistake?

MARS Sohel
Dhaka

Rangpur division only a dream?

In a meeting held in Rangpur the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared that Rangpur division comprising Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Panchagar, Thakurgaon and Dinajpur would start functioning soon. The ex-minister Md Anisul Haque Chowdhury and ex-general Mr Mostafizur Rahman also told the people of Rangpur that the new division would soon come into being. Now after the October election it was expected that the present Prime Minister would formally inaugurate the Divisional Headquarters.

The necessity of establishing Rangpur division was felt a long ago. People from eight different districts (placed in extremely remote areas) found it very tiring to go to Rajshahi regularly for day to day work. Rajshahi division comprising 16 districts cannot function properly. It is essential to decentralise the function of Rajshahi division. It is not a political demand rather an essential requirement of the administration.

Mahbulul Haque Chowdhury
Dhaka

Streamlining the city traffic

I am very pleased to read an article in *The Daily Star* that describes drastic moves planned by the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Traffic Police to streamline the city traffic.

Planned incentive to traffic policemen was long overdue. Policing is a risky job and the city policemen should be adequately compensated. Unfortunately, a section of the Dhaka city traffic police force are giving a bad name to their department by indulging in corrupt practices. The Deputy Commissioner should zero in on this problem.

Forty per cent of the money realised as fines for traffic offences to be given to the policemen is a great idea, but the corrupt policeman may opt to take bribe equal to this forty per cent and not report such violations. A progressive ratio instead will serve better. For example, for catching the first 50 traffic violators, thirty per cent may be offered as incentive; for the next 50, forty per cent; and for 150 or above, fifty per cent may be offered as incentive. Special bonus plans may be introduced also and given to the top performer in the department.

Adequate laws and rules on the conduct of the policemen also need revision. The public should be made aware of such laws for protection. In the name of collecting incentives, the innocent should not be harassed. A city police department ombudsman or complaints cell in the Home Ministry will be useful to address



Traffic jams, jellied people

public concerns related to police misconduct and harassment.

AA
California, USA