

Security agencies must be made accountable for their action

Extra judicial killings a result of institutional casteism

At least five people have died within last one month at the hands of law enforcing and security agencies. No cases were filed and those filed were withdrawn under pressure. Security agencies have always enjoyed immunity in Bangladesh. Killing of civilians by the uniformed branch of the state has been part of the security management culture. This isn't an unfamiliar phenomenon but what is shocking is that we seem to be able to put up with it.

Even as horror still simmers at the example of the last such example, we shouldn't forget that much of Bangladesh remains the same as it was over thirty summers ago. The powerful can kill and get away as easily they could years ago. If anything, we are even less enabled to deal with the use of force by supra state and supra-social entities in the name of security forces, political parties and powerful groups and individuals.

Bangladesh is no stranger to death at the hands of the para-military. Custodial deaths have been recurrent and one can cite cases of disappearances occurring every year; all these caused by the institutionalization of lack of accountability at every level of the state and the government.

For example, very few buy the argument that the defense budget can't be made public let alone discussed but it has never been done so though it has created a major source of the arrangement that legitimizes the entire notion of non-accountability. The BDR as border guardians are let off and the police force exists to protect the government in power can't be expected to be accountable either. The critical chasm between the state and the people is in fact developed and sustained.

When power is abused at levels that set examples, parliament is invalid, street agitations seek to topple governments and budget numbers are off limits for those who pay for it, one must be ready to be outraged by this kind of killings and the lack of justice delivery that follows.

The problem lies in locating the position of the individual citizen in relation to the state. What we have developed is an institutional caste system in which some are more superior to others. Till equality happens, extra judicial killings will also happen. Only by changing that equation can we put an end to it.

Six months reprieve for our workers

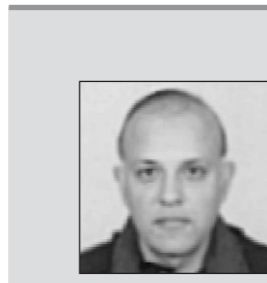
Malaysian gesture must be used well

SEVENTY thousand of our workers would have been on their way home after expiry of their work permits but for a last minute decision by the Malaysian government to give them a second chance. If they can prove their skills in some particular technical field, our workers would be able to continue their employment. It is indeed a very friendly gesture by the Malaysian government and we profusely thank them for it. We think considerable credit is also due to our newly formed Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and its energetic minister in pursuing the Malaysians for this major concession which otherwise would have brought disaster to 70,000 families and their extended dependents.

Malaysia has always been known to have tremendous goodwill for us and that has been amply demonstrated in this case. We also know that Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed is a very good friend of Bangladesh and he has reiterated his intention of helping us on every opportunity that come about. We would like to suggest to our government that no effort be spared to explore every avenue to increase our co-operation with Malaysia, especially in the manpower sector. We must encourage greater Malaysian investment here and take special steps to attract them to our country.

There is however a very serious lesson in this. Why are our workers, after having already some years in a foreign land, still without any technical skill? Obviously they were devoid of any to start with and their Malaysian employers did nothing to change their status. The lesson here is that we should set up special training institutions for workers whom we send abroad. In fact because we send such raw hands, the wages they are able to command is also of the lowest level. With little value addition to their natural skills we can help them to earn far more than they do now, thereby creating greater security for their jobs and increase the possibility of sending more money home. Let us immediately set up training centres for all workers who find opportunities to go abroad. With a little planning and bit of a foresight we can really make a big difference in this sector.

Of discretion and valour



K.A.S. MURSHID

WE need more than brave talk to get us out of the mess that we find ourselves in. We have missed the boat of 'power and influence'; we did not develop our own Bomb; we did not create another 'Taliban' to send to neighbouring countries; and we continue to resist pressures to export energy -- so what reasons can there possibly be for foreigners to be interested in us? There are none and they are not interested. So now we find ourselves in a situation of rapidly declining aid and tough conditionalities from multilateral agencies to add to our woes, reflected in a slow growth in revenue collection and continued failure to stem the tide of corruption and inefficiencies that plague the public sector. (Dear Reader, please note the contrast with Pakistan where the same set of well-known foreigners are falling over each other to lend money to it. I can assure you that the reasons are NOT to be found in the country's macro-economic fundamentals.) This then is the background to the new ADP just announced, generally considered over-ambitious by friendly critics and a political stunt by others.

The question has been rightly

asked, how the Government intends to finance over-ambition? Unfortunately, the array of possibilities is not large: introduce new taxes or bring more people under the tax net; print money, borrow heavily and hope for a miracle. There are other measures that could be considered: get the defaulters to cough up; stop subsidising industries e.g. public sector jute mills (some of which are reportedly more interested in pro-

stakeholder consultations amongst DS readers, for example.

I began by talking about bravery. These are difficult and dangerous times and few people are expected to be brave. You cannot really blame the poor economists who have been accused (apparently by none other than the Finance Minister) of behaving like *mullahs* in a *milad* -- changing their tune to suit the specific occasion! Economists, like most

their risks carefully to minimize the possibility of hostile action, and at the end of the day, they should have had a reliable contingency plan to enable evasive action if/when necessary. So who can they now blame for their predicament but their own short-sightedness?

Grave charges have been leveled and dire consequences threatened: How dare they engage in politics (i.e. campaign against us)?

managing to charm important Presidents (or rather their wives) and hobnobbing with the great and the mighty while our poor ministers can't even get a whisper across in Washington! Well, enough is enough and the time for action has come.

I fear it is somewhat late in the day to ask NGOs to simply disappear from the horizon, although calls for some regulation certainly

that highly political NGOs (funded by e.g. Saudi Arabia and supported by fundamentalist forces) have not been similarly 'charged'. I also note that there has been little attempt at defining what we mean by 'political involvement'. If we speak out against corruption, isn't that a political statement? Isn't advocacy of human rights and campaign for greater accountability of government, a political matter? Is there any NGO worthy of its name that can afford NOT to take a political stand on important national issues? I fully understand the nature of the charge, where we are essentially defining politics in terms of narrow, bipartisan, party-political lines. The word politics in this context is inappropriate. So if the charge is being pro-AL or pro-JP, that is indeed serious. I wonder whether it would be equally serious if the charge is one of being pro-Jamaat or pro-BNP. The simplest solution would be to ban all dissent and have done with it. After all, dear readers, you have overwhelming majority!

A parting comment: The achievement of NGOs (despite some failures) is monumental. If you don't believe me, just go to rural Sindh or Cambodia where rural institutions are almost non-existent and the only access to credit is provided by *mahajans* and traders. The NGOs have changed the face of rural Bangladesh. Let's hope that minor irritants will not cause the NGO-baby to be discarded along with the bath water. Let us try not to lose sight of the big picture.

Dr K A S Murshid is an economist and Research Director, BIDS.

BETWEEN YOURSELF AND ME

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cessing the golden syrup rather than the golden fibre); start reversing the signals from 'negative' to 'positive' so that people feel safe on the streets and those with some surplus, can begin to think of investing.

But of course we understand quite well how difficult these measures are. We certainly cannot upset the denizens of the city, business magnates, powerful labour lords, in short, people who constitute the backbone of our economy and polity. So let us concentrate on what we CAN do although I do not really know what these are. Let us all go on a retreat to brainstorm on this issue -- any chance this might get funded by some foreign agency? We wouldn't mind packaging it appropriately -- we could call it

other people in this dear country of ours, are only human, and cannot be expected to part with discretion at the drop of a pin (or just because there has been a change in government). But perhaps the FM has noticed that there is no dearth of discrete Bengalis these days -- a characteristic that may have been reinforced by the example made of poor Dr. Alamgir. After what's been done to the poor man would any one in his right mind venture to call a spade by its real name?

Now judging by recent press statements it is abundantly clear that NGOs, (or at least some of them) were exceedingly foolhardy. They should have been more careful in assessing their bets (and the prospects of their favourite horses in the race); they should have spread

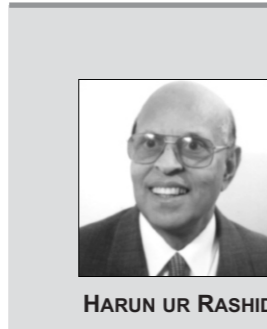
its time to rein them in and make them behave. Only we shall rule over the political arena, with our friends and relatives (and OK, a few *mastans*). The question of granting the privilege to NGOs simply does not arise.

NGOs started with reconstruction (after 1971), went on to micro-credit, spent a lot of time in making us aware of our poverty and misery, of the need for empowerment of our down-trodden women that should have been enough! They have now gone into all manner of commercial activity from printing to universities, from handicrafts to trading, from banking and finance to shop-keeping. Now they even want to invade the hallowed space of the politician. Greedy lot, aren't they? And such smooth operators too --

make sense. It is indeed surprising that for so many years NGOs involved in micro-finance, for example, operated freely and without any regulatory framework up and down the country. Nor is it easily understandable why some NGOs have been allowed to assume monumental proportions of a commercial nature. But what is most difficult to understand is why their profits went untaxed. I have no problem with the fact that they were/are soft-funded -- as long as there is a reasonable certainty that their profits are ploughed back into social programmes. One is however entitled to ask how reasonable is that certainty.

I reserve my utmost unease, however, at the charge of 'political involvement' of some NGOs. I note

The new US-Russia disarmament treaty



HARUN UR RASHID

WHEN Presidents George Bush and Vladimir Putin signed the land-mark arms-reduction Treaty on 24th May in Moscow inside the grandeur of Kremlin Palace, both of them hailed it as a beginning of 'new relationship' between the two former foes of the Cold War era. President Bush said, "The new era will be a period of an enhanced mutual security, economic security and improved relations." The Treaty now will be placed before the US Senate and the Russian Duma (lower house of Parliament) for its ratification.

The possession of deadly nuclear weapons by the two countries had evolved a Cold War theory of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) in which neither the former Soviet Union nor the US could risk a nuclear "first strike" because of the retaliatory nuclear attack it would provoke on its citizens. That era has gone and the two countries are now friends, in particular after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the US. Both condemn terrorism and Russia has allowed US troops in its backyard -- Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The Treaty appears to be a visible symbol of their present improved relationship. It reduces their strategic nuclear warheads from existing 6000 to the ceiling of 1700 to 2200 by December 2012. The decade-long arms accord is no doubt a first step on nuclear disarmament. The three-page Treaty appears to be a win-win situation as it brings benefits to both countries.

Pragmatic Putin's motive is simple. He wants the economy of his country integrated into Western economy and he hopes foreign investment and other aid will flow stimulating the Russian economy,

which is nearly the size of Portugal's, Europe's poorest. Furthermore the Treaty allows him to scrap thousands of ageing nuclear warheads that his cash-strapped government can no longer afford and replace them with smaller number of weapons.

On the other hand, the US gets the minimum number of strategic warheads it says it needs to deploy against a nuclear, biological and chemical attack on the US or its

arms, such as artillery shells and to modernise their nuclear weapons.

Second, the Treaty allows both parties to store as many warheads as they want. It does not require them to destroy warheads as well as bombers, missiles and submarines removed from nuclear service and it permits them to re-arm those systems with stored warheads by withdrawing them from the Treaty with a three-month notice.

Third, the Treaty failed to link

stolen, there are unconfirmed reports that terrorist-groups have been looking for an opportunity to steal or buy such weapons in Russia as thousands of them are reportedly scattered throughout the country.

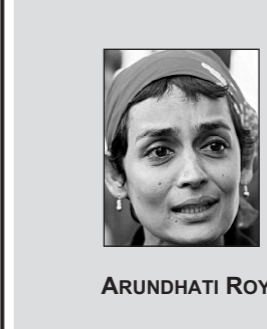
Some prominent centrist and conservative figures in the US have reportedly joined liberal arms-control advocates in arguing that the US should be pushing for greater controls on tactical weapons. But analysts say the Americans were reluctant to push too hard for fear of endangering good relations with Russia. The US needs Russia for war on terrorism, for supply of oil, if necessary (Russia is the world's third-largest oil producer) and for imposing strict control on fuel (plutonium) supplies to Iran for its nuclear reactor.

Although the Cold War ended in 1989, the final seal on the end of the Cold War was put by two events -- one by concluding the Treaty in Moscow and the other by the NATO-Russia Agreement. Russia's new relationship with NATO falls short of full member in the alliance. However, under NATO-Russia agreement, Russian diplomatic delegation has taken up 'permanent residence' at NATO headquarters in Brussels and every month NATO and Russian Ambassadors will meet in a new joint council (known informally as NATO-20) to make decisions on security matters ranging from peace-keeping to counter-terrorism.

President Putin realised that economic power is essential to regain its former superpower status. The Russian President seems to accept the principle 'when you can't beat them, join them' and pursuing this principle he hopes to receive billions of dollars for Russia's cash-strapped defence industries to help build US weapons. Those days of Khrushchev's style of shoe-banging in 1960 against the US are not President Putin's style and he knows that there is no alternative than to co-operate with the West for Russia's quick economic recovery.

Barister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

Under the nuclear shadow



ARUNDHATI ROY

THIS week as diplomats' families and tourists quickly disappeared, journalists from Europe and America arrived in droves. Most of them stay at the Imperial Hotel in Delhi. Many of them call me. Why are you still here, they ask, why haven't you left the city? Isn't nuclear war a real possibility? It is, but where shall I go? If I go away and everything and every one, every friend, every tree, every home, every dog, squirrel and bird that I have known and loved is incinerated, how shall I live on? Who shall I love, and who will love me back? Which society will welcome me and allow me to be the hooligan I am, here, at home?

We've decided we're all staying. We've huddled together, we realize how much we love each other and we think what a shame it would be to die now. Life's normal, only because the macabre has become normal. While we wait for rain, for football, for justice, on TV the old generals and the eager boy anchors talk of first strike and second strike capability, as though they're discussing a family board game. My friends and I discuss Prophecy, the film of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the dead bodies choking the river, the living stripped of their skin and hair, we remember especially the man who just melted into the steps of the building and we imagine ourselves like that, as stains on staircases.

My husband's writing a book about trees. He has a section on

how figs are pollinated, each fig by its own specialized fig wasp. There are nearly 1,000 different species of fig wasps. All the fig wasps will be nuked, and my husband and his book.

A dear friend, who is an activist in the anti-dam movement in the Narmanda Valley, is on indefinite hunger strike. Today (June 2) is the twelfth day of her fast. She and the others fasting with her are weakening quickly. They are protesting because the government is bulldozing schools, felling forests, uprooting hand pumps, forcing people from their villages. What an act of faith and hope. But to a government comfortable with the notion of a wasted world, what's a wasted value?

Terrorists have the power to trigger a nuclear war. Non-violence is treated with contempt. Displacement, dispossession, starvation, poverty, disease, these are all just funny comic strip items now. Meanwhile, emissaries of the coalition against terror come and go preaching restraint. Tony Blair arrives to preach peace -- and on the side, to sell weapons to both India and Pakistan. The last question every visiting journalist always asks me: "Are you writing another book?"

That question mocks me. Another book? Right now when it looks as though all the music, the art, the architecture, the literature, the whole of human civilization means nothing to the monsters who run the world. What kind of book should I write? For now, just for now, for just a while pointlessness is my biggest enemy. That's what nuclear bombs do, whether they're used or not. They violate everything that is humane, they alter the meaning of life.

Why do we tolerate them? Why do we tolerate the men who use nuclear weapons to blackmail the entire human race?

Arundhati Roy of India, the author of the Booker Prize-winning novel *The God of Small Things*, is a leading anti-war and anti-corporate globalization activist. This commentary was first broadcast on Radio 4's *Today* programme in the UK.

OPINION

Prevention of launch disasters

SALAHUDDIN AHMAD

WE would like to thank The Daily Star for organising a roundtable on safety of passengers. I would categorically state that the reason for which launches mainly sink is basic poor stability of the vessels coupled with carrying of cargo on deck instead of cargo holds, and that engine room and cargo hold are not kept watertight when the launch is on passage.

Contrary to popular belief that the launches sink because of overloading of passengers, I would like to state that overloading is a very small culprit. Let us suppose that there are 400 extra passengers in a 120 ft long and 30 ft beam launch. Considering average weight of a passenger with personal luggage to be 75 kg the total

weight of 400 passengers will be only 30 tons. TPI (tons per inch immersion) of the launch is 6.25 tons. Total bodily sinkage of the vessel for the 400 extra passengers will be approximately 5 inches. I am sure that for this 5" extra draft the launch will not sink provided the vessel is built with adequate stability. The reason the overloaded launches sink is that the launches also carry cargo on upper deck, engine rooms are open to atmosphere and cargo holds are not kept watertight during passage.

So if the vessel is built as a stable vessel and watertight integrity of engine room and cargo holds are maintained and no cargo is carried on deck then I can assure you that no launch will sink, even if these launches are overloaded. So following are the four main

reasons for sinking of launches besides initial poor stability.

Carrying of cargo on deck instead of carrying it in cargo holds. ! Most engine rooms are open to weather and not watertight.

There must be written guidelines about the equipment and personnel that a yard must have to obtain approval as a recognised ship building yard. Recognition will be given by a competent government authority only after physical verification of the facilities of the yard...For the long term development of shipping in the country and safety of passengers such institutions as support the growth of the industry must be encouraged to be developed.

! Cargo hold is either not battened down at all or not battened down properly and during passage is not watertight.

! Unauthorized modification of vessel.

I am sure that if measures are taken to address these four points, which is not very difficult to comply

with, then the occurrence of launch disasters will come down drastically and the vessels will not definitely sink the way these are sinking now. These measures have to be taken as these are fundamen-

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tals for stability of vessels.

I would now like to dwell on some of the topics discussed during the meeting specially by professional seagoing personnel who attended the meeting.

Separate Bangladeshi classification society for coastal and inland vessels has to be manned

by professional people and be entrusted with the job of (a) formulation of rules and regulations for construction of cargo vessels, passenger vessels, tankers, fishing trawlers, bulk carriers,

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barges etc, (b) approval of plan and design, (c) supervision during construction, (d) assigning class notation to the vessels, (e) carrying out annual hull and machinery survey and (f) quadrennial special survey of hull and machinery.

Statutory surveys such as load line survey, safety construction

survey etc. should continue to be done by government surveyors as is the normal practice.

The concept of P&I club could be adopted here by the owners of inland vessels but the club will

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have to be an independent organization free from influence and interference of owners of inland vessels or other interests. It should be on the model of existing P&I clubs operating in other parts of the world.

BUET should be provided with a model tank for development of new

design by our own naval architects and also for use by students for learning. This will help in the development of quality naval architects in the country and sound designs based on the local realities.

The largest head of expenditure in the operation of inland vessel is fuel. Vessel with broad beam are more stable but consume lot of fuel. So to have more stability this way, most owners will not exercise this option. Therefore it is suggested that one or two catamaran hull passenger vessel design be kept in the standard designs of vessels so that it will allow stable vessel with plenty of deck space at comparatively low fuel consumption. Many of the utility ferries that are in operation in the country are of catamaran hull design but this design has not been used elsewhere. So this is to be taken up on

an experimental basis.

There must be written guidelines about the equipment and personnel that a yard must have to obtain approval as a recognised ship building yard. Recognition will be given by a competent government authority only after physical verification of the facilities of the yard.

For the long term development of shipping in the country and safety of passengers these institutions mentioned above that support the growth of the industry must be encouraged to be developed.

Salahuddin Ahmad is a former head of Engineering Department, BSC.