

Army vs democratic norms

A desperate situation calls for desperate measure. In that light many people will support the BNP government's decision to deploy army to deal with the hapless law and order situation of the country.

Yes, in the short run the slide to anarchy will be arrested. But this is exactly the same reaction that one can see after the declaration of the martial law.

In the short run, traffic flow would be in a disciplined manner, law and order situation will improve and many people will feel relieved.

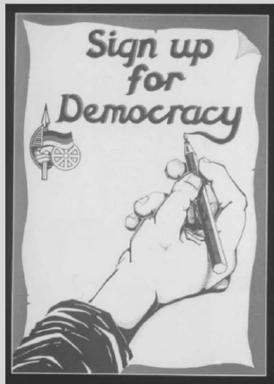
But as normal procedures of civil administration are flouted, democratic values are ignored, and rights of the citizens are suspended, or worse, violated, a much larger problem is created in the long run.

The reports of death under army custody not only tarnish the image of the armed forces, it raises serious questions about the due process of law and the constitutional rights of the citizens. I would wait for the constitutional experts to raise the questions of legality of these actions.

But before getting carried away by the news of arrests of both BNP and AL backed hooligans and gangsters, one should seriously think about the consequences of this precedence as well as the conditions that led to the government's failure to tackle the law order situation through the normal channels of the (civil) law befitting a democratic regime.

The idea that ends justify the means is an idea that may have certain appeal today in Bangladesh, but it is surely inconsistent with the norms of democracy. Criminals must be arrested, tried and punished within the framework of rule of law.

In a democratic government there cannot be any other way.
A Concerned Bangladeshi
New York, USA



We won't mind if the army's on-going operation confines only with the arresting of the criminals. Rather we would applaud this crack down mission on the criminals while our government did offer nothing in this regard.

But it doesn't mean that they are licensed to harass the general people in the name of this drive. Neither are they licensed to torture the arrested ones, be he/she a vicious criminal. Because the fundamental rights are still functioning and only the courts can decide whether he/she is a criminal or not.

I would like to request our army to go after the criminals but to be cautious and courteous so that the general people are not harassed.

Anxious
One e-mail

Firstly, thanks to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for her firm step to improve the law and order situation in the country. The deployment of army earns clear support from peace loving citizen and this is also been noticed by several newspapers. But is the army above law?

We welcome this drive to crack down on criminals. But at the same time the army has to be extra cautious not to harass general citizens or even torture the criminals for this authority lies on the court only.

In 3 day of 'Operation Clean Heart' it produced 4 dead bodies. If the operation continues like this its success would be overshadowed by their human rights violation and the opposition would be able to come up with another issue to criticise the ruling party.

Another citizen
Dhaka

Saber Chowdhury's arrest

The ex-MP and minister Saber Chowdhury's arrest has really stunned me. Never in his life this businessman turned politician has been so controversial as his opponent was. His gentility, sobriety are the qualities to be imitated by the politicians. Whenever he talks he never uses political slang to embarrass his opponents.

While writing this letter there is the news of the arrest of another ex-minister Sheikh Selim. But why? Is it not a crackdown on politics rather than crackdown on terrorism? Another promising AL leader Bahaudin Nasim is already behind the bar. Now Saber and Sheikh Selim are going to face the same fate. People want to know on what ground the army has arrested them.

Kanaluddin Ahmed
Shamoly, Dhaka

Army crackdown

I welcome the army crackdown with necessary reserve. But in spite of all the reservations I may have on this issue, I would be the first to admit that life has gotten better. Of course this is merely an illusion and as soon as the army is off the streets again, things will come back to normal.

I work in Shewrapara and I am quite curious about the absence of any drives by army patrols here. A month or so ago, *The Daily Star* published a front-page article about the gangs working the Agargaon-Shewrapara area. The police never acted on that report but now neither does the army.

We have a road in Shewrapara named Shaeed Shamim Sharani, after a murdered gangster of the same name. The two surviving brothers, especially the younger Shahin, are active in extorting money from the nearby garments factories as well as all the small businesses. They are so far, quite safe. Members of another group, the All Star Cricket Club, are also walking about the streets as if nothing is amiss.

It would be a pity if this Army drive entirely ignores this terrorised neighbourhood.

Sabyasachi, Dhaka

Empowered armed force

The recent deployment of army has created a general sense of relief - both at home and abroad. The Bengali populace has always questioned authority and the army is not immune.

However let me draw your attention to any civil society. An "armed force" - be it police or army, plays a strong role in maintaining law and order. I draw your attention to the US civil system - a criminal is confronted with empowered "armed personnel". Confront first and ask questions later. It is high time we as a nation learnt to live with authority. Without it you face total anarchy - which is the case in Bangladesh.

I hope the deployment of the "armed forces" is not a temporary phenomenon. I would welcome the indoctrination of the "new" police force into the Bangladesh Military Academy. After all, that institution is our national treasure and could be used to provide training and efficiency to an age old dilapidated "useless force" - the Police.

Bakhtiar Hafeez
USA

"Operation Clean Heart"

This is in response to the most respectful senior citizen Mr. Mas-ul-Zubair since a letter of mine 'cheering' the Army deployment was 'sickening' to him. My apologies to the respected senior citizen who has seen many regimes and 'claims'

going by history 'the situation will not change'.

The gentlemen has his democratic right to his views but me with my 'puny soul of the middle-class' will still be optimistic about our honourable army to discharge their duties to bring under control the 'law and order' situation which has become unbearable for us, the ordinary citizens. My 'puny soul' who has had the opportunity to fight in the Liberation War in 1971 and seen the emergence of Democracy in 1991 believes today's army and those young officers commanding it will be determined to serve the cause of the people above their personnel or any political motivation. For the love of the country, they are still few who believes in that, we could together fight the 'law and order' down slide but instead of doing anything constructive all we have done is complain. The state of affair has become such that we look towards the army to 'assist' the Government to help in civil affairs.

This in no way means the army has taken over the Governance because of failure by the civilians in Good Governance as claimed by many. Many has also raised the question 'What Next', well it is us the responsible citizens who must decide what is next so that the army doesn't have to come out and do 'the dirty work' every time its messed up by our disinterest. This country is ours as much as those in politics, those in government, the opposition, the army, those in bureaucracy, police and so forth. We all must work together to build a better tomorrow.

Akku Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

This is a reference to Mr/Ms. Emile's letter on 'Operation Clean Heart'.

Mr/Ms. Emile showed her deep interest to file complaints against the army. Are our police officers more well behaved than the army? Indeed they are more rude. So why didn't Mr/Ms Emile write anything against them?

Army is a military organisation trained to fight against foreign powers and insurgents. It is not trained like the police department to fight against the criminals. Unfortunately Bangladesh Police Department failed to their duty. That is why army has been called. Does Mr/Ms Emile have any better idea?
Sumit, Great Britain

This is in reference to the letters 'Operation Clean Heart' (October 21).

Mr Masih-ul-Zubair, I am also a senior citizen who has lived through the regimes of Ayub Khan and so on. But I'd like to differ with some of your comments.

You have written, 'I am sad to report that each time such operations have failed'. What is the authenticity of this report? Are you really a senior citizen of this country? Then how can you forget about the massive development work that took place in establishing industries, educational institutions, road-network etc in the then East Pakistan during the regime of Gen Ayub Khan? I agree Gen Yahya Khan had been a total failure, but again that failure has inspired more, to give birth to our beloved country Bangladesh. So his failure might be a great defeat for the Pakistanis but not for us.

After General Zia and Hussein Md Ershad more than 10 years of democratic regimes have passed, but what happened ultimately? The law and order situation has deteriorated alarmingly. So if the army is deployed to curb criminal activities why does it bother you? As peace loving citizens we are happy with what army is doing. I can sleep at night with peace (but these army boys are not sleeping for me), I am relieved from the tension of my child's security and nobody comes to me for toll collection.

Now Mr. Aman Haque, in the 1st paragraph of your letter you have written, "How did the army investigate or determine who is a criminal? What is the police doing then?" Again in the 3rd paragraph you have written, "The criminals in our country are so transparent that we do not have to be a police to find them out." So if it is too transparent for anyone to find the criminals then wouldn't it be more easy for the army which has different intelligence agencies at various levels who are working all around the country. Moreover in this operation along with the army the police are also there to identify the listed criminals.

Mr Haque has also proposed to send the army to the border area to fight BSF. Please be informed that as per the international rules, army of any country cannot go within five miles of the border area of the neighbouring country unless there is a war declared.

Sayed, Dhaka

Tax issue

I am a bit concerned about the sincerity of the government to collect income tax. For many years it

this any more. These criminals should be punished and the process should start now.

Will this government please come forward and punish these corrupt officials?
A Concerned Citizen
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Nuclear incentive

Power and threat of force have influenced the conduct of international relations throughout history with very few exceptions perhaps. Acquisition of power is a strong determinant - if not the key factor in how states conduct their relationship with others. Unfortunately though the "law of the jungle" when might gives you the right is getting more pronounced. Let me explain. Iraq is "suspected" of trying to develop nuclear capability; there is no hard evidence of its having done so. That mere suspicion by a queer logic of things is working against Iraq. Suspicion but no evidence, hypothesis without fact are pronounced as "gathering danger" that must be pre-empted by punishing military strikes on Iraq. We have heard "astute" statesmen give

Miss Photogenic!

The recent media coverage of Lux sponsored Miss Photogenic 2002 (Dhaka, Sylhet etc.), makes one wonder-- is this really in our culture/religion or is it just another 'import' from the West or our neighbouring country (through the courtesy of cable TV, of course). No offence to our modern open minded elite class, who feel such display of female beauty is OK, and use it as a tool to express women rights, equality and freedom! Of all circles, being educated they should know better, these activities of body and beauty display, is in fact doing more damage to the women status, than good. One wonders, how does female facial appearance, body statistics, revealing outfits (swimming costumes etc., although not used in our competitions yet) helps to establish their causes? Surely there has to be a better way, to make our female force, felt in the society.



Bare beauty?

The saddest part, is any individual or group voicing critics to these female beauty contest activities, are either labelled as "fundamentalist" or "back dated". I do not agree to this. I am sure, there are many like me, who come from an average middle-class family, who values both our religious and cultural heritage, but do not endorse such beauty

contests. Hence I earnestly request the sponsors and media not to promote or encourage such beauty contests, because whether one likes it or not, Bangladesh is predominately a Muslim nation and 'Islam' totally forbids female display activities.
Mohammad Mehroz Jalil
Dhaka Cantonment

has been noticed that no government is sincere to bring the citizen under a meaningful tax net. About 100 fresh devoted university graduates could be given the task to find out the real owners' name of all the apartments, houses, car in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna division. I am sure the result will befool every citizen because the high government officials, police, army, politicians, customs and tax peoples' name will be at the top of the list as they amassed huge public money in the last 30 years without any valid income source.

A sincere government should punish all these corrupt officials and seize their properties. At the same time the government should reward the real tax payers by giving preferences to all their residential plot, privileged citizen card etc.

A dozen of my relations are/were secretaries, high police and customs officials and I have seen that over the years they amassed huge amount of black money. They have houses/plots in all the posh areas in Dhaka and Chittagong and their children are studying in USA/UK. They have siphoned off huge amount of money out of the country.

As a patriotic citizen, I can't bear

ominous warning that "inaction is no option". That is all very good. Yet, notice first of all, the sudden disclosure that North Korea indeed has a few nuclear bombs. What is the response by the "international community" and specifically by the "hyper power"-the USA? Diplomatic option and no use of force. Incentives but no punishment.

Then again, post Bali bombing, the "international community" is putting severe pressure and showing impatience with Indonesia to crack down even harder and catch the culprits. Yet, using a similar judgement, the failure to find the serial sniper killer by the immensely mighty intelligence and security apparatus of the US, should have drawn equal flak from the "international community" which sadly but truly is being converted into a convenient whip to lash those who are weaker and put on the defensive thanks (no thanks) to the unending chorus of blame by the global media. So what is the lesson?

It is better, safer and perhaps more honourable to first acquire "weapons of mass destruction" and throw in a nuclear bomb or two in your arsenal if you wish to be treated with restraint and some respect.

To use power to frighten the innocent and punish the weak is weakness itself. America loves to fight so-called moral wars. Only recently it is giving signs of single-minded imperialist conquest - an enterprise that is pursued with military vigour with little else.

Where then is the bottom line? Current international order gives a strong incentive to get "there" namely get weapons of terror before the hyper power "gets" you first, with willing partners or alone if it must. Surely, this can be a prescription of global anarchy with global terror added to the concoction.
DR. Zakir Husain
Dhaka

Arterial grafting in coronary bypass surgeries

The news broadcast on October 12th evening in Channel-i carried a report on open-heart surgery being conducted at the Heart Foundation of Bangladesh. A Kolkata based cardiac surgeon was said helping the Bangladeshi team to conduct the surgeries and it was claimed in the programme that what he is doing is rarely conducted elsewhere. In reality, what he is doing is he is using the radial artery of the arm and the mammary arteries of the heart and it was reported in the news that this is/was rarely conducted in the subcontinent or elsewhere and if at all done, this is a very costly procedure. It was mentioned that the price becomes as high as 4 lakh in India while it is 8 lakh in Thailand, 16 lakh in Singapore and so on.

I differ on both counts. This procedure, i.e. transplantation of radial and mammary arteries is now a normal procedure throughout the world. In younger patients, traditionally less than 55 years of age, veins from the legs are rarely chosen. In almost all these patients, the arteries will be selected. This is the norm, which has developed over the last ten years. As regards cost, in Thailand it will be around 3-5 lakh and 6-10 lakh in Singapore, depending on the services and hospital chosen.

Speaking from personal experience, in India, if you go to Bangalore and visit the hospital run by Dr Devi Shetty, and need a bypass for five blockages, you can get it done for as low as one-lakh ten thousand rupees. This includes the cost of angiogram with a copied CD, medicines and the entire hospital stay of ten days. If you are willing to pay one lakh forty thousand, then the services are extended to include one attendant in a semi-private (i.e. to be shared with another patient) air-conditioned room. The attendant will also get free food and lodging during the entire period of stay. Talking of nursing care, cleanliness, and humane behaviour is a dream for us. At least I do not see this developing in our country in the next few

operating attitude of the big neighbour lack of which so long kept this region what it has been so far as mutual benefits of trade and commerce is concerned. In conclusion of the subject editorial it was mentioned that similar use of the port facilities of Bangladesh on the part of the seven eastern states of India may also soon be a possibility thereby providing scope of immense balance of trade for Bangladesh and great saving of freight and time for goods and passengers movements for the eastern states of India.

SAARC ideas were never given a chance simply because political situations between the major partners always played the decisive role where economic considerations were of no consequence at all. If only our leaders of the region could take lesson from EU, NAFTA or ASEAN instead of the deadly nuclear race where most of the citizens live beyond sub-human level, we surely could expect ray of light through the tunnel! Leadership of this region in 21st century should not be so indifferent to the benefits of so many millions and millions of their people when rest of the world forge ahead with co-operation amongst neighbours to achieve miracles of economic progress and developments forgetting centuries of feuds and conflicts.

Let us all hope that sanity and good sense will ultimately prevail as indicated for the desired co-operation and the SAARC spirit in the long run be a reality like the EU.
Z. Rahman
Surrey, England

"Fuel-less electricity generator"

Mr. Afzal Hossain's letter (October 20) shocked me profoundly. All the allegations made by him regarding scientist Huda are absolute lies! I happen to know scientist Huda very well, and I wonder why and with what objective people like Mr. Hossain want to spread baseless falsehoods about him. I've come across a few other letters too in the same strain.

For the information of the readers, I F I A (a member of Standing Advisory Committee of the European Patent office SACEPO in Munich, Germany) has offered scientist Huda its free membership, the first Bangladeshi to be bestowed with this honour.

I would request *The Daily Star* to confine matters about fuel-less electricity to science only, and not waste space and time with meaningless nonsense! Scientist Huda at the moment is extremely busy trying for international patent with the hope of keeping the nation's prestige and economy high. But still, if there are queries, I would request *The Daily Star* to compile those and send a reporter to scientist Huda. He would be only too glad to answer all these queries.

Atiq Helal
Mirpur 2, Dhaka

I hope the debate over fuel-less electricity is coming to an end. It has generated considerable interest in Bangladesh and among the Bangladeshi community overseas. The inventor Mr. Nazmul Huda should now explain the principle of operation of his generator. He should realise that if he has designed a "Perpetual Machine", which won't work. Prof. K. Rahman has succinctly pointed out the limitations of such a machine.

It is becoming of an HSC or an undergraduate student of a mofussil college to "invent" a machine that would alter human destiny on the planet earth. Such claims do not merit scrutiny, and usually they pass away unnoticed. People take it seriously when qualified persons who know their job, such as Mr. Huda, claims to invent something. Several years ago a professor "discovered" a process for the recovery of hydrogen gas from water-hyacinth. It created a hubbub among the scientific and technological community. Hydrogen has many industrial and commercial uses. The professor kept mum, never explaining what he actually did. People's interest gradually declined, and the professor's claim looked fictitious.

Finally, Prof. M. M. Rahman has inquired (October 21) with reference to my letter (October 16) about other reasons for the low efficiency of heat engines. The primary reason, as I stated in my letter, is the kinetic theory of gases. Another "contributor" to low efficiency is mechanical friction that includes friction. Heat engines are small gadgets. Hence friction loss in a heat engine is not as large as it is in the flow of a fluid through a pipeline. About two-thirds of heat energy in a heat engine is thus dissipated to surrounding.

Engineer Mahfuzur Rahman
Dhaka

Now Mahindra and Mahindra?

This letter is in regards to a recent report in your daily on Rangs Motors being appointed as the sole distributor of Mahindra and Mahindra of India.

Mr Commerce Minister, please do something about this one way trade traffic with India! I don't understand why do Bangladesh allow India free access to its market when India will not even allow Bangladeshi batteries in their market!

Bangladesh should learn to demand all trade concessions that it

rightfully deserves before even a single more Indian company is allowed to penetrate our market. Ideally, Bangladesh government should listen to the local business community and slash almost all, but critical imports from India.

Readers, what do you think happened to India when they banned import of even Coke and Pepsi? They came out with Thumbs Up. Trust me, Bangladesh will not perish if we halt Indian colonisation of our economy.

AA
California, USA

Regarding

Deployment of army: A positive step indeed



Law and order matters the most

In your pages I have scathingly criticised the current administration for its failings. I do not regret doing so for one moment. Hence it is only intellectually honest to give credit where it is due.

The government's decision to call the armed forces to crackdown on criminal elements is worthy of the highest level of commendation. The brutal level-handness of the operation is at once novel, praiseworthy, and courageous. Rarely, if ever, in our history have we heard law enforcement personnel arresting ruling party leaders, let alone raiding the houses of sitting ministers, in the execution of their duties.

Unfortunately, again as expected, the professional opposition (this time joined by sullen ruling party men) is making a hue and cry about persecution, human rights, revenge etc. This is the time for the Opposition and the Government to once and for all eradicate criminals from political patronage with the heavy hand of an uncorrupted army. We may not have that chance again.

I hope and pray that the Prime Minister will let the armed forces complete their operation without hindrance from BNP's ministers or Awami League's politicians.

ES
Missouri, USA

It is highly pleasing to see the army helping the civil administration to combat crime in Bangladesh. It was a timely move by the government as the common people were losing their faith in the police force. I strongly recommend the government to keep the army on the streets as long as possible to get hold of all the criminals.

I also do not think the police force can be modernised overnight. Therefore, the Army should stay to maintain law and order as long as the police force does not become competent enough to combat crimes.

If there was anything missing in Bangladesh in the last few months, it was the guarantee of natural death. As already reported in some dailies, there have been dramatic improvements in the overall law and order situation throughout the country. I hope the situation will not be changed in near future.

Muktadir Shahid Hossain
University of Tokyo, Japan

Shab-e-barat

While searching the meaning and the significance of the night of Shab-e-barat I found some important explanation and this clarified why Arabs don't celebrate this night. While surfing the Internet I found noticeable information, which indicates that there is no reason to observe this night as we do it in this sub-continent.

According to Islamic Voice "There is nothing in Qur'an about the night of 15th Shaban. There is a narration in Tirmidhi, which is considered as Za'eef (weak) according to Imam Tirmidhi." (<http://www.islamicvoice.com/december98/dialogue.htm>) For better explanation I would like to quote from Pakistan Link (<http://www.pakistanlink.com/religion/99/11-19.html>)

"The month of Sha'ban is the eighth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The fifteenth night of this month is known as *Laylatu Bara'ah* or *Laylatun Nisfe min Sha'ban* in the Arab world. In India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Afghanistan, etc., it is known as Shab-e-barat. Some people believe that in Surah al-Dukhan (44:3-4) there is a reference to this night as Allah says, "We sent it (the Qur'an) down during a blessed night. We are truly warners. In that night is made distinct every affair of wisdom" But the night referred to here cannot be a Sha'ban night, because it is said here clearly that the Qur'an was revealed in this night. We know from the Surah al-Qadr (97) that the Qur'an was revealed in the night of Qadr and we also know from the Qur'an (Al-Baqarah 2:185) that the Qur'an was revealed in the month of Ramadan, so it is obvious that the night of the revelation of the Qur'an was in Ramadan, not Sha'ban, and that it was Laylatul Qadr not Shab-e-barat (or the Sha'ban night). Some people also say that in the 2nd year of Hijrah, the direction of Qiblah was changed from Jerusalem to Ka'bah (Makkah) on the 15th day of Sha'ban. This report is also not confirmed by authentic Ahadith. According to most of the scholars of Tafsir, the Qur'an has not mentioned

anything about the Sha'ban night. There are some Ahadith that speak about the Middle of Sha'ban and its night. However, the scholars of Hadith say that most of the Ahadith concerning this night are not sound. They are weak (da'if) according to the criteria of the Muhaddithin."

Would the religious scholars of our country please explain why do we observe Shab-e-barat?

Shumon Alam
Houston-TX, USA

Why such coverage?
As an ardent and regular reader of *The Daily Star*, I always boast of its unparalleled quality of coverage and its editing and arrangement of

news and photos on the basis of priority. But unfortunately, nowadays, *The Daily Star* authority has paused a question mark in my long fostered believe and devotion. Extraneous editing of some recent issues got me think the matter-to where the editors are leading us? Which matters are they focusing on? In this connection, I would like to enunciate two explicit references.

On October 5, 2002 a five (5) inches x 4 columns photograph of the artists of Chhayanaat was placed at the top in the front page subsiding any other national and international news. I thoroughly checked the paper, but nowhere found any news regarding this grandeur photo. It was neither the anniversary programme of the organisation, nor pertinent to any other mentionable issue. Significance of placing this sort of irrelevant and unimportant photo so highly is beyond my comprehension. I believe that any discerning eye paused a question mark here. Place of such a photograph may be, at best, in the Culture Page.

The other one is October 13, 2002. The coverage of Lux Ananda Dhara was earmarked 6 column x 6 inches in the last page. I am doubtful, even the photo of Shekh Hasina or Khaleda Zia was published so gigantic after their land slide victory in 1996 and 2001 respectively in general election as Kulsom Sikder's (Lux photogenic). There is an elaborate controversy and schism about hosting such events- is it, at all congenial to our vernacular Bangali culture and long fostered religious beliefs, or is it a part of monstrous activities of multinational companies to vilify our cultural heritage and delude our young generation in the guise of sumptuous and dazzling western like fashion shows? Keeping this argument aside, I would like to ask the editor and the readers, does the Lux Ananda Dhara deserve so much emphasis and should be so highlighted in an esteemed daily like *The Daily Star*?
Mizanur Rahman, Hathkola, Dhaka