

## Army crackdown



Guarding against...?

Since the army took to streets, a number of people have died in custody. Aren't the implications of these deaths striking anyone? The army, the government and the newspapers are simply watching these with silence.

Let me run this by you again. The army is detaining suspected criminals, who's only proven crime was to have their names on a list signed off by the PM. A number of these detainees have died while in custody and their bodies are being withheld from their relatives.

Have these people been tortured? We don't even know how they died. If we permit this to go unexplained how are you or I any safer?

No civilised country permits torture. Actually one does and I would like to quote from a commentary by the Northwestern University School of Law, "International law, makes certain prohibitions absolute. One is torture. Under both customary and treaty law, including the U.N. Convention to which a hundred states are parties, torture is never allowed. Not in war, national emergency or to fight terrorism.

Most states violate this commandment in practice, but none deny its validity. All pay it the honor of lip service.

With one possible exception: Israel. The Israeli Supreme Court has upheld what has been official policy for a decade -- the use of "moderate" physical pressure to interrogate Palestinian detainees. And in certain "ticking bomb" cases, the Shin Bet is allowed a "greater flexibility" to use "special measures" when deemed necessary to get information to save lives.

Israel claims that its pressure techniques avert terrorist attacks.

This comes perilously close to arguing that the ends justify the means, that torture is sometimes okay. The U.N. Committee had no choice but to reject that claim. The treaty is clear: No exceptions. No other country claims such a right.

In fairness, Israel did not exactly defend torture. It also argued that its techniques -- such as shaking prisoners - do not quite amount to torture. But forensic evidence indicates that at least one Palestinian was shaken to death. Thousands of similar cases have been reported, and hundreds documented.

Individual morality may be complex and nuanced. But the law

cannot afford to open such doors. If it does, for every angel who enters, a thousand devils will follow."

Once you permit soldiers the right to torture, the downward spiral is hard to control. In the Dirty War of Argentina, suspected communists and terrorists were tortured to death in army schools. Eventually it wasn't just known criminals but innocent people who were also picked up and murdered.

Like any other decent person I also dislike the BNP and AL supported criminals. But I must remind you of a famous quote from Thomas Jefferson, "Those who desire to give up freedom in order to gain security will not have, nor do they deserve, either one."

**Azad Dhaka**

This is in regards to Sumit's letter (October 23) suggesting that I am promoting the behaviour of the police. Of course our police behave badly, but we know how to deal with them.

So far I have been stopped and questioned twice. The first time the soldier acted perfectly, he first greeted me then asked permission to look in the luggage boot of the car. No complaints. The second time on the way to Savar, I was stopped again but this time the soldier did not grant me the curtesy due as a civilian.

I would like to think that the army does care about the manners of its men patrolling the streets. In that light, we should have a hotline number out to call and report any misbehaviour. In my case, I wasn't greeted properly in others it could be much more serious.

**Emile, Dhaka**

## Army deployment--a timely approach

Already lots of letters are pouring in under this heading and I am sure this will continue for sometime to come. Like anything else here also there are two views, some support this mission and some don't. My letter is to them who don't support it.

Please remember the people of this country had given chance to our political parties to run this country for the last 30 years but particularly for the later half both the parties failed miserably especially in the field of law and order. After repeated warning from the party chiefs the concerned politicians and the police force failed to do their duties. I feel the Prime Minister was bound to go for the present action when her back touched the wall.

The learned people who are talking about pure democracy I am sure they know it very well that in a poor country with 70% illiterate people it doesn't work well, where votes are bought with black money and the innocent majority people become the sufferer. In this situation it must be very difficult to run a country to keep both sides happy--the so-called leaders who bought the votes and the innocent public who are the victims of this broken law and order situation. We know very well by now, that the snail slow system and corrupt law of this country also needs overhauling as well as the police force. Army was the last hope and please don't let it fail.

I hail the decision of our PM, though I don't support people dying from "heart attacks" during interrogation.

I have a request to our opposition leader, please stop calling this vintage system of hartal. Does it really work? By its misuse, I feel, the hartal has lost its teeth.

I request our PM not to stop this operation half-heartedly. Let it take sometime. And please find definite ways to find how to sustain the effects of this operation after the army goes back to the barracks.

**Dr. Rashid Hyder**  
Baridhara, Dhaka

Thank you Prime Minister for deploying army to curb crime in Bangladesh. We understand that army will not be there forever to maintain the law and order but in my opinion, they should be there long enough to get all the criminals off the street and make our Bangladesh a nice and safe place to live.

Our PM can be assured that majority of the people in Bangladesh will elect her next time if she cares about their feelings and meet their expectation like-- curbing crime, less pollution or less corruption. Again, thank you PM for your timely step.

**A Ahmed**  
On e-mail

I do appreciate the government initiative to deploy army to curb crimes and the catch the criminals. At such a critical juncture, this decision was indeed timely and correct.

**M. S. Chowdhury**  
Copenhagen, Denmark

Being the citizen of Bangladesh we have to face several questions to the foreigners about the law and order situation of our country. Even if I invite somebody to Bangladesh he is not interested to visit our country only because of insecurity.

For long I have been thinking that the Govt. can use army for the improvement of this burning problem of our country. I became very glad to know that the Govt. has been using army impartially to make the society free from terrorists and culprits. It's a very appreciable step of the 4-party alliance Govt. I hope Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia would continue this drive till our society becomes free from terrorists and culprits.

**Dr. Md Mostafizur Rahman**  
Visiting professor, C-G university, Taiwan

After consecutive two years being termed as the most corrupt nation of the world by the Transparency International (TI), the Bangladeshis

in general are feeling safe and sound amidst patrolling of army and its assistance to the police and BDR for maintaining law and order across the country.

This is a temporary relief! The real task lies ahead with the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), National Security Intelligence (NSI) and Special Branch of the Police (SB) who would conduct surveillance and vigilance activities nation-wide, disseminate wide ranging information and prepare authentic and unbiased reports for the policy planners and decision makers of the government.

**Golam Ashraf, Gulshan, Dhaka**

I don't want to go into deep analysis about army's "Operation Clean Heart" mission. I only know that now I feel safe because all the criminals are on the run. At least when criminals are busy saving their own skin we the common people can have our peace of mind!

**Sohel Hara, Dhaka**

I appreciate the present army drive to uproot the criminals from our society. It's a great initiative.

**Delwar, Queensland, Australia**

## Traffic police and a better working atmosphere

Our traffic police is often blamed for their corruption and their failure to control traffic jams in the city. Let's forget about the fact that the number of vehicles in Dhaka city is way more than its road networks can handle. Just look at the traffic police standing in the middle of the road. I haven't done enough research to find out what his monthly pay is, nor how many hours he stands on the road everyday.

But I have certainly looked at the uniform he wears. During the scorching summer heat, when all of us are in our T-shirts and bright coloured 100% cotton clothes, the traffic officer wears a polyester full-sleeve shirt, high boots, and a helmet (and God knows how much that weighs)! Could one of us wear that outfit and stand in the sun for hours when the temperature is above 30 degrees C?

Our problem is, we are just satisfied to find the fault. We never try to find the root of it and solve the problem there. We cut the bad tree at the top,

leaving the roots to nourish it back again.

We can't afford to equip our force with ultra-modern ammunition and communication devices. But how hard is it to design an environment-friendly dress for those working outdoors for hours? I saw that the police sergeants get a new shipment of modern motorcycles every few years. Can't we get a raincoat for the traffic police working in the rain? And when I talk about raincoats, I don't mean just plastic sheets sewn into a coat. There are many waterproof fabric in the market that are "breathable", which allows body heat to escape into the air, reducing sweat and thus making you comfortable. And they are not very expensive, at least not more expensive than a fleet of brand new motorcycles or a good-for-nothing dog squad.

The boots and the shirts must be changed, too. But above all, we must change those helmets! Only riot-police wear helmets, for safety. When we make our traffic police wear those heavy helmets, we're just following the

British tradition, instead of being realistic.

One expects to enjoy his work only when he's comfortable in the work environment. If the traffic police officer hates every minute that he spends out on the street, he's definitely going to lose interest in his work. He'll never be able to provide optimum service. At the end, the results we get in this case are: worst possible traffic control, and of course, corruption.

**HH, Dhaka**

criminal/guilty, a person must be treated innocent. From human rights perspective as well as our laws, even a criminal/suspected criminal can't be deprived of or denied justice.

So, any death either in police and or army custody is unfortunate, must be ceased immediately. We thus, expect the government to remind the law enforcers/army that they are not beyond the jurisdiction of laws of the land.

Deployment of army to work side by side of other law enforcers to curb crimes and criminals is a right measure at a time in need when the country is almost drowned in lawlessness.

Since the start of the current drive, at least two senior leaders of AL have been captured and many others are in run to avoid arrest. The question is, how many senior coalition government members are arrested or in run?

What about those who were involved in wheat gate scam, tender scam, etc.? Before DCC election, the newspaper reported some 30 suspected criminals participated the election as ward commissioner as coalition government nominees! Among those elected, sadly their opponents already killed four; others are under constant security for their safety. We expect that all DCC ward commissioners suspected of criminal activities be brought to book.

**Karim Abdullah**  
New York, USA

I thought that people in Bangladesh

would be angered by the recent deployment of army personnel to control crime. To my surprise, I see the opinions in *The Daily Star* cheering this move by the government.

Assuming this to be the voices and feelings of the mass, I guess our government can go one step forward to gain more popularity by closing the police department totally and replace it by military police.

After all, we are allocating the highest percentage of our annual budget on defence sector and thus the army could be utilised more. Furthermore, by getting rid of police we can gain manifolds--save a lot of money from salaries, stop the flow of bribe etc.

**Dr. Towhid Salam**  
Los Angeles, California, USA

**Lessons to learn**

In a week time, after calling army to crackdown on criminals, the number of death in army custody has reached to six.

Have these people been tortured? Torture is prohibited both in international and laws of land. Unless a person is proved by a competent court/authority to be

In our political arena, there are several problems that are rarely recognised by our politicians. Some of those could be intolerance, lack of respect, non-practising norms, democracy and words, non-recognising the real problem rather shielding own party members and colleagues, etc. This time, we are waiting to see a real difference.

To curb crimes, the army may continue aiding the civil administration as long as there is a need. But, the government must not put the army in to controversies.

**Md. Shahed Ali**  
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

**Failed BNP**

While many of us are wholeheartedly, and deservedly so, are applauding the unleashing of the army baton upon the crooks and the criminals, I for one believe that this step has unequivocally shown the utter failure of Khaleda Zia to govern the country. I do not understand how on the earth this government spent so much money to celebrate its one-year anniversary! To celebrate what? If the government fails to guarantee our most fundamental

law and order. This army is functioning under the same government, which has shown little ability or concern about managing law and order. It's about intentions. If BNP wanted a clean city administration why did it nominate so many criminals. Akku Chowdhury is a freedom fighter- unfortunately so am I- and I wanted to nab an Al-Badr, would I hire Razaakars to catch them? Wasn't the arrest of MP Pintu a big false show because he is again free and that is mentioned?

Khaleda Zia may argue that political pressures prevent her from taking action and the army will do it but that itself means she can't manage her party and is using the army for political ends. But it's the AL politicians who are being arrested and the political angle is clear. This may be good for the BNP but bad for the party image.

Politicians depend on public support not cadre support. Unfortunately, this system force them to set up homes with criminals and since it's all-pervasive and systemic, unless the system changes, things can't improve. The army can't do anything except provide some painful entertainment for a few days before returning to the barracks.

Putting the military on the road has been tried in Bangladesh and also in many other countries before. Latin America is full of such examples and even the US government thinking that the military could improve the situation spent huge money especially against the drug cartels. It didn't work. However, if you don't wish to learn from past examples, that's something else. All attempts to control a situation by use of force is motivated by misguided altruism. I am too old to care about it.

Some things will certainly improve immediately. And then it will go back to where it was before. This is a pattern that has been studied by scholars everywhere. Military boots are no substitute for good governance.

As for the other letter, I will not respond. To defend Ayub Khan, Yahya and Ershad in an attempt to defend the army operations is too much for my cerebral capacity.

**Masih ul Zubair**  
Dhaka

Akku Chowdhury seems to think that the army is incapable of doing anything wrong but the rest by exclusion in his letter are.

Akku bhai, everyone fought in the war. Not just the army but the police, Ansar, BDR, bureaucrats and loan defaulters as well not to speak of hardened criminals. If carrying a gun was an indication of patriotism, how could the AL leadership bring the country to a point that all parties had to be banned in 1974?

Being a soldier is one thing, being a good citizen is another.

**Hossain Ali**  
Sabujbagh

Please preserve the letter of Mr Ershad because I don't think anyone has ever defended genocide as a

thing that happened to the Jews. By killing so many he fathered Israel. So all people need are genocide to liberate themselves from tyranny. I suggest this strange letter writer read a few books explaining why that Khan's progress was a sham by scholars home and abroad in Pakistan. East Pakistan was cheated most blatantly during this period and it has been recorded and recorded and recorded....

So come out and say that it was a bad thing. Maybe it was because Ayub Khan the great leader handed over power to Yahya and without Yahya's killings there would be no Bangladesh. So maybe Ayub Khan also planned that.

**Rafiqul Alam, Dhaka**

"Miss Photogenic!"

Let me start by saying that labelling someone Photogenic is perhaps the worst kind of compliment one can receive. Basically photogenic means that you look great in photographs/pictures but when confronted up front- your looks leave a

condition of the police and judiciary is such that they would not be able to make significant changes on their own. It is to be expected that the army will be more heavily handed in comparison to what we've seen in the last 12 years, as well as in comparison to the laissez-faire democracy (i.e. chaos) that some sectors of the people may desire.

All countries do not prosper using the exact same system of government and judiciary, and the theoretical 'norms of democracy' simply do not work in some countries. Perhaps, as is the case with Pakistan, it takes the armed forces to maintain law in our cities and villages, and perhaps it takes a harsh military approach to keep our political arena from being consumed by corruption and self-interest. If that should be the case, so be it. The only adjustment I would like to see the government make is to have the army also take just as strong, if not stronger, a stance against those who call 'hartals' and those who support them.

**Muhammad Omar Siddique, New York, USA**

lot to be desired!

The other issue is regarding the letter of Mr. Mohammad Mehroze Jaiil (October 23) on subject. Notwithstanding the religious aspect, beauty pageants do not promote women's rights or emancipate them in any way. If anything, such events (beauty pageants) relegate the status of women to that of flesh and bodily statistics. In addition, the media (*The Daily Star* included) also shamelessly promotes and perpetuates a "standard" of beauty (fair skinned, shapely body) that is beyond the reach of perhaps 99% of the women of this country.

Then there are those (normally the promoters and participants) who will argue that "intellectual" capacity is of paramount importance in events like these. Inane questions like "What would you do if you win the Miss World Crown" which are followed by even more asinine responses like, "I shall use my new found fame to promote the cause of 5 million paraplegic children of sub-Saharan Africa" really stretches your intellectual capacity! Furthermore, as Mr. Jaiil rightfully pointed out, there are clearly better and more effective ways to combat oppression of women than beauty pageants.

**A. Farjad Ahmed**  
Rajshahi House, Dhaka

**Troublesome procedure**

I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to certain procedural difficulties faced by Bangladeshi visitors to the North-Eastern States of India, Assam in particular.

The N. E. States, commonly known as the Seven Sisters, are Arunachal Pradesh (AP), Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram,

good thing. I can't believe somebody actually said the following. This is a historic occasion.

"I agree Gen Yahya Khan had a total failure, but again that failure has inspired more, to give birth of our beloved country Bangladesh. So his failure might be a great defeat for the Pakistanis but not for us."

So Yahya Khan's killing was a good thing because this led to Bangladesh. So Hitler was the best

Fighting crime yes, oppression no

The deployment of army to arrest the deteriorating law and order situation, meaning capturing wanted criminals, has been a popular decision. This shows clearly a sense of desperation. Let's face it, the job of maintaining internal law and order is the job of the police. But why did the police fail to do their job in the first place? Because they were used by the government to intimidate opposition politicians and not the criminals. The police showed a great deal of alacrity in breaking opposition pickets, beating prominent political leaders etc but their performance in capturing criminals was dismal. Now if the government starts using army to suppress political opposition, this would lead to a great tragedy.

Yes, the army did arrest a good number of wanted criminals in the first couple of days. But the news of arrest of political opposition leaders such as Mr. Saber Hossain Chowdhury or Mr. Sheikh Selim etc is very disturbing.

The police force has thus been vilified, demoralised and delegitimised by the present government. Now if the government by using army in a partisan way helps erode the legitimacy of the army that would be a great tragedy. Good governments create good institutions; they must not destroy institutions, especially a patriotic, disciplined organisation such as the army. Bangladesh as we know it will not be the same again, if such erosion is not checked.

**A Concerned Bangladeshi**  
bye-mail

thing that happened to the Jews. By killing so many he fathered Israel. So all people need are genocide to liberate themselves from tyranny. I suggest this strange letter writer read a few books explaining why that Khan's progress was a sham by scholars home and abroad in Pakistan. East Pakistan was cheated most blatantly during this period and it has been recorded and recorded and recorded....

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## Army vs. democratic norms

Considering the degree to which both the judiciary and the police had absolutely failed to even provide modest friction against the escalation of crime in the country, the arrival of the army should be greeted with open arms. If the army can successfully work on bringing some sense of control over the country's dire situation in respect to law and order, I believe it is worth sacrificing that excessive sense of lawless freedom that gave rise to the current social chaos in the first place. I would personally commend the government for taking this courageous step.

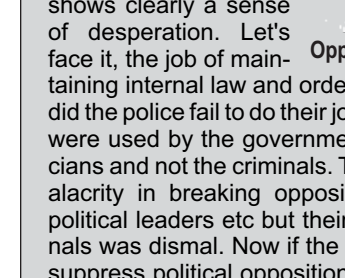
Nonetheless, sharp criticism seems to already be brewing, especially regarding the issue on whether or not the move abides by 'democratic norms'. What needs to be understood is that the current administration was elected by the people with the hope that the BNP lead government would address the lawlessness that the previous government had ignored almost totally. As the entrusted government, is should not be deemed undemocratic if the government should make use of the army, especially when it is already quite apparent that the

condition of the police and judiciary is such that they would not be able to make significant changes on their own. It is to be expected that the army will be more heavily handed in comparison to what we've seen in the last 12 years, as well as in comparison to the laissez-faire democracy (i.e. chaos) that some sectors of the people may desire.

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Democracy?



Oppression is not the answer