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Nine people dead!

So far nine people have died in custody since the countrywide crackdown on criminals began on October 17. And still we hail the deployment of army!

We have become so self-centred that nothing matters to us as long as we remain safe and secured in our cocoon.

But do we realise that tomorrow the death toll may reach to ten and the latest victim might be me?

Sarwar Khan, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Nine people have died in army custody and all of 'heart attack'! Before the army took to streets, did we have any idea that we have so many heart patients?

Can the government blame us if we have doubts regarding these deaths? To be more specific would we be committing any crime if we assume that these people were tortured to death? But nobody seems to be asking this relevant question. Why? Are we scared or don't bother about this unless the victims are ourselves or our dear ones?

Sonia Chowdhury, Banani, Dhaka

So there are some people having "heart attacks" for the greater glory of the nation. As one writer almost said, so what? Another, more of a humanist, said, sorry, but inevitable. After all the army is calling the surgical mission, "Operation Clean Heart".

KA, USA

Staying neutral!

I commend your newspapers' motto to stay neutral regarding army deployment. But by staying too soft on the government's use of the military you maybe committing mistakes that you may appreciate later. You are still calling for the use of it with objectivity where all signs are the opposite. You are not even questioning the ramification of using military on future democratic institutions.

Shafi Khan USA

Saber Chowdhury's arrest

Saber Hossain Chowdhury's humiliating arrest at the Zia International Airport immediately before he was due to board a plane is indeed a black chapter in the annals of our dirty politics.

According to a report published in your esteemed daily of 23rd instant, when asked by Mr. Saber Chowdhury, the army told him that he was being arrested at the directive of the higher authority. Apparently, there were no specific charges against Mr. Chowdhury and he had been arrested on purely political grounds.

Now the question is, who is that "higher authority" under whose directive Mr. Saber Chowdhury was arrested? As at present, the only person who is empowered to issue orders to the army is the Prime Minister herself. Did she, in fact, issue any such directive? If so, would she please let the public know, in order to allay public misgivings, under what charges Mr. Saber Chowdhury had been arrested?

If not, in the interest of good governance, would she issue immediate orders for initiating criminal proceedings against the person within her cabinet or outside who had issued the alleged directive? Such a course of action on her part will go a long way in enhancing her own good image as well as in bringing public confidence in the army's activities.

This also raises the question why despite many tall talks before the last general election the present government has not yet repealed the various black laws, which violate the fundamental rights of people.

A Senior Citizen Dhaka

"Failed BNP"

This is in response to Masih-Ul Zubair's letter "Failed BNP" (October 25).

I want you to ask yourself would you get any response from the police without bribing? Would you get an electricity connection or a phone by simply applying? The answer is "NO".

Once I invited some foreign people to start an international company in our country, they eventually decided to leave this country as they found bribing prevails everywhere. Later I found out that they started their business in UAE.

As bribing is prevalent in our country, price of commodity is high, life style is expensive. We need to ensure better environment for living and business. So far all the political parties have failed to ensure these. Now if someone takes the initiative to restore law and order in the society, shouldn't we encourage them?

I appreciate wholeheartedly the present army drive by the BNP. And this drive must go on till we feel secured and our economy reaches a positive height.

Imran Khan Gulshan, Dhaka

Army crackdown and BNP interference

If Prime Minister Khaleda Zia allows BNP interference in the ongoing

"Unilateral US strike will be disastrous"

I did not read the editorial but read the letter from Mr Mahmood Elahi. I could not help writing a few lines about this.

I remember 1991. The US led the UN force to drive Saddam Hussein and his invading army from Kuwait. Before the war, I along with the most of the people in Bangladesh thought Saddam has a lot of bombs. After the war we knew he had only one bomb: 'Bomb of Words'.

No country has the right to invade another country only because it has superior armpower. The US did the right thing in all respect that time. But the critics say that the US followed that course of action, as Kuwait was very important for the US because of its oil reserve. If India invaded Bhutan, everyone doubts that the US along with the international community would follow the same track.

What are the reasons to invade Iraq now? As Bush Jr. said, i) Saddam did not submit to UN resolutions, ii) Saddam has arms of mass destruction, iii) Saddam is an autocratic ruler and hence harmful for his countrymen.

What about Israel that does not even care about the UN? What about all other countries without democracy? What about North Korea, who admitted about their atomic program? Most of the countries in the third world will make it to this list. So the US should invade all these countries to get rid of their present regimes! That would definitely start World War III. That's why it would be disastrous if the US attack Iraq without UN's consent.

As for Bush Jr.'s popularity, I think Mr Mahmood Elahi has mistaken in this going. Bush Sr. had a strong support for his expedition. It was the economic downturn after the Gulf War that caused his popularity to go down. Bush Jr. does not have that much public support for his proposed invasion of Iraq if the UN does not back the US.

Mashiul Huq, Dhaka

This is a response to Mr. Mahmood Elahi's letter (October 26).

It seems Mr. Mahmood wants the U.S.A to attack Iraq without any delay. To him, ousting Saddam means liberation of Iraq. Just



Do or die!

a few days back, Saddam Hussein won 100% vote from the Iraqi people and will now be the President for the next seven years. Ousting a President elected by the very Iraqi people doesn't imply liberating them. Only the Iraqi people have the right to oust Saddam Hussein's government, not the U.S.A.

U.S.A is very keen to dismantle Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction. But shouldn't U.S.A first dismantle its own nuclear arsenal and other weapon of mass destruction? Shouldn't U.S.A stop turning Israel into a military superpower?

Also if U.S.A wants to attack Iraq on the pretext of flouting of UN resolutions, then Israel should be attacked first for not complying with many U.N resolutions ever since its birth.

Sameer Ahmed Khan Mojlish Dhanmondi, Dhaka

army drive against law and order downslide in the country, her party will most likely lose in the next general elections. The Awami League lost because they could not improve the law and order situation and BNP will follow suit, if they give shelter to terrorists.

It has been noted in certain sections of the press that arrested BNP men are being freed under pressure from the BNP. The PM can either give in to the demands of the terrorists or give in to silent majority - the citizens of this country. Please be advised that the letter gets to vote in the elections and will ultimately decide on the next government in approximately four years time.

Acitizen USA

should have been taken much earlier!

Ashiqur Rahman, Australia

Why thank BNP?

Our governments (both BNP and AL in their respective terms) used *mastanism*, corruption and hartal to advance their own agendas. They deliberately let the law and order situation go down the drain and as a result, we had some mind-boggling rate of murders in our country. They deliberately let innocent people get killed and now they brought the army to clean up their mess! It is "unbelievable" to see people thanking those politicians especially Khaleda Zia. What for? I am not implying that we shouldn't be grateful if someone helps us. But it is far

soon we would all be back to square one! As soon as the general election approaches, we will all be banging our heads on the wall and will be writing these horror stories all over again!

Don't believe me? Wait and see (I just hope they prove me wrong)! **Azad Miah, Oldham, UK**

Parallel policy

While living in USA, I cannot help seeing some parallel between President George Bush's approach to problem solving and that of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government's.

It is amply documented for people who care to read or have the ability to reason to see that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was

war initiative against Iraq.

In the same way, a large number of people in Bangladesh (majority of the letter writers to DS) support the government's use of army to "fight crime" without asking simple questions such as: who created and patronised criminal elements so much so that some of them were given public (political) offices by the same government? What is the relevance of "blocking motorcade" (?) of the then Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia to the collapse of the law and order situation in the first one year of BNP rule?

Just because Mr. Bush was elected (?) President in a democratically contested election does not give him the mandate to do anything he likes, similarly Khaleda Zia's electoral mandate does not allow her to use army to arrest and intimidate her political opponents. In both the cases, the consequences would hurt the national interests in the long run.

A Concerned Bangladeshi New York, USA

About the army

I, like many other Bangladeshi citizens, am very glad to know about the Prime Minister's decision to deploy army to fight crimes and the criminals. From the various source of media we're informed that they're acting fair and justly.

But my question is about the longevity of this sort of tool for fighting corruption. Scaring bad people will only make them hide but they will not give up crimes. So I request the Prime Minister to think about some other ways to prevent crimes.

Dr. Basmah M. Jasar Dhaka

Foreign artists in local gatherings

Nowadays, we observe a new trend of foreign artists performing in shows in public and in private gatherings in Bangladesh. It seems that we have no artists in our country who can perform in such shows. I don't mean that there will be no exchange of cultural activities between friendly countries where famous artists or groups perform in various programs.

But the invasion of foreign culture, in many occasions cross the limits of decency and turn to vulgarity as we see on the cable TV. It is not difficult to understand the consequence of its influence on our younger generation. Besides I don't find

any justification to spend our valuable foreign currency on these show-biz people. May I inquire whether we can afford to spend our hard-earned money on foreign singers or dancers? Are these artists paid and their money remitted with official permission? If yes, how can our government allow such drainage of our valuable foreign currency? And if these payments are made without the government's permission, what action our government planning to take to stop this hundi business?

KIAhmed Dhaka

Consequences of war

The military outcome of a US and British invasion of Iraq is a foregone conclusion. I will successfully depose or kill Saddam and place a new administration in its place with a minimal loss of US troops. This new administration will be friendly to the US and Britain, the embargoes will be lifted and the two allies will win lucrative concessions. What is not so clear is the consequences of the war in the long term. Will Iraq descend into anarchy? Will the Kurds establish an independent homeland. Will the Turkish Kurds, the ones that are called terrorists, join in the struggle for independence? Will the US backed administration be able to control the oil fields? Will they be able to maintain order?

And the biggest question, will these groups exact a price on civilians what they had failed to do to the US and British military? While the US military may not pay much of a price for its invasion, past experience of the US and other countries have shown that such an action would breed resentment for the Americans and Britons that would come back in the form of attacks on the most vulnerable of US and British "interests", i.e. its citizens. What will compound the resentment felt towards the two nations is the hypocrisy in their policies towards Iraq and Israel. The resentment is already being heard on the streets all over the world. Israel should have learnt by now, but didn't, that since they cannot be defeated militarily by the Palestinians and negotiations are going nowhere while they are being boulded out of land and home to build more and more settlements and occupy more and more lands, they see attacks on civilians as their only recourse.

While the US and British media have been on a cheerleading campaign in support of war, they have failed to ask whether a war is in the interests of Joe Public in their respective countries or merely in the interests of the Oil-Military oligopolies.

Saif Ahmed Dhaka

Thought provoking issues

It was really encouraging to read about the statements made by our Finance Minister about consultancy overload in projects approved by LGED.

Lately, the influx has come to the point where nationals from neighbouring countries are given preference over Bangladeshis. But are Bangladeshis having same qualifications, experience and expertise finding same category of employment abroad? Very rarely if at all. Does this mean that Bangladeshis do not meet the international standards set for such positions? Then it should become a high priority concern for the government if senior level professionals of this country are not found to be eligible in the international job market.

The recent trend of foreign national employment has discouraged the future generations to stay back as they do not see any future for them in the country. Some of them try to migrate in the hope of possibilities that their expertise would find proper channels for realisation and enable to pursue self-growth. Under the circumstance it is surprising for young

students from Bangladesh to decide early in their life not to ever come back!

Then there is another group of Bangladeshis who had left the country as students and are now qualified and experienced professionals. Equipped with their well-earned degrees from world recognised institutions, professional work experience and expertise many of them want to come back to their roots and establish themselves in the country of their origin. A lot of them take the bold step of coming back but leave again completely disillusioned within a very short span of time. The support that they need from the government and the corporate sector is not there. Why this disparity?

The *Daily Star* has always taken up such issues at the national level, I would invite them to open a forum on the subject. And create awareness about the brain-drain and providing better opportunities. We the educated and enlightened Bangladeshis cannot submit to the second class citizen status both in the country of adoption and own motherland.

A positive thinker On e-mail

The steps taken by our Finance

engaging foreign consultants to presume or propose pragmatic solutions to our systems. Involvement of consultants is not only predominant in LGED but also under LGRD. By and large most of the rural development programs on poverty reduction are quite luxuriously maintaining facilities like the multinational companies. Newly mushroomed NGOs fostered under the funding of donors are totally dependent on foreign consultants who take away a lion's share as a service fee; the local management is equally exploiting this opportunity. In return the local management convince the donors as to how crucial the services of consultants are and that the support for another few years is extremely vital (proving their own incapability). Since the local management and the consultants are either side of the coin, arrangements of foreign trips, extensive use of luxurious cars, and foreign visas and immigration for their children are subsidiary perks. This is a kind of unwritten agreement with the donor's watchdog and the local management, which I am sure, the Finance Minister is fully aware of. It is amazing how the donors are ignorant about such pilferage when they are accountable for every penny spent.

In the name of fighting crime!



The custodians of law?

As a resident of the US, I feel very privileged to enjoy the security and safety compared to the residents of Dhaka. As my family resides in Dhaka, I've always had a grave concern for the deteriorating law and order situation. And as a soon-to-be resident of Dhaka, that concern is turning into dread. I was, therefore, pleased to learn that the government finally acknowledged the situation. However, from what I read, in the Bangladeshi and foreign press, it concerns me greatly that this army drive can be described as completely arbitrary and heavy-handed.

The operation, it seems, is a clinical approach to crime. A list of criminals is produced, and the army goes out and tries to arrest them. My concern is that nobody seems to be asking or answering the all-important question in such a situation. "Who produced the list?" A closed approach in the creation of such a list automatically lends itself to abuse. A letter writer wrote, "If I am not a terrorist then I will definitely not carry a weapon, so I should not feel harassed if the army searches me". However there were far more people arrested than bullets seized, let alone weapons. If the army arrests that writer, what recourse does he have?

Has the crackdown been effective? There is no way to tell until after the operation has ceased. It's natural to expect criminals to lie low for a while, but what happens after is yet to be seen. In addition the arrests don't seem to conform to the list and seem rather arbitrary. Going into houses and arresting the servants and drivers, and raiding a textile mill and seizing weapons without ever checking to see whether the weapons were licensed, seem to me like a blatant disregard for peoples' rights. We cannot afford to abandon our civil and human rights in the name of fighting crime.

SAhmed, USA

Minister to make the economy of Bangladesh self-sustained is indeed courageous and deserves appreciation. While going through the newspapers, I surely foresee that our government's policy of involving foreign consultants on marginal issues has become a trend primarily to remain dependent and undermine the country's own resources.

It is ironic that when our qualified Bangladeshi citizens are serving outside the country with dignity and have proven their worth, we are

unleashed a "holy" war with unprecedented zeal and fervour, inflicting punishing assault on proclaimed terrorists stereotyping many as "Islamist"; they have relied on suspicion rather on proof; have pressed charges using an extra judicial conduct. These champions led notably by the USA are prodding and pressuring other governments to do the same on their behalf.

The same vigour is not seen to apply to the "Christian Coalition" who are harboured in their own neighbourhood. Are these self-styled champions of freedom and justice any less fundamentalist than the so-called "Islamists" whom they vow to eliminate?

Are we at some proverbial crossroad of history and human civilisation? How much more aberration and corrosion of people's inalienable right to secure and shape their lives will it take before realisation dawns upon the world leaders that the war on terror is not war on human rights- individual or collective rights; the war on terror will not be won on the debris of destroyed edifice of human rights and struggle for self-determination- especially of the weaker and less endowed people. It has taken hard and long struggle by the international community after the devastating world war to establish and enshrine. These better not be trifled with or trampled over. The right to self-defence by the mighty and the arrogant cannot be the monopoly of the few over the obligation to all others.

Dr. Zakir Husain Dhaka

These are confusing times

So the theatre siege by the Chechen separatists is finally over. The news of siege was indeed a grim one but not totally a surprise.

When all space for dialogue and negotiations are systematically denied, rebels with a cause are driven to desperate acts. A time comes when there is hardly anything left any more to lose; the current "war on terror" unfortunately provided for extreme assault on dissent and struggle for autonomy and self-determination, events that only few years ago were the hallmark of global freedom and emancipation from colonial and semi-colonial rule.

In a queer twist of history, confusing to many who are steeped in freedom struggle (India, Indonesia, South Africa, Algeria to name a few), what was yesterday a legitimate struggle for freedom and rule of law has become today a terrorist act. Indeed atrocities provoke even grimmer and crueller acts, call it revenge or retaliation. Only difference is when States do it there is a cloak of automatic legitimacy that the rebels do not necessarily enjoy, not any more anyway. Chechnya wished to be a breakaway republic just as the Central Asian Republics did and succeeded in becoming independent. But not the Republic of Chechnya. Not only that, the Chechens were subjected to systematic and culpable violations of human rights documented by many independent observers and agencies for years. That continues unabated and unaccounted for. In fact, there is now an added cloak of legitimacy and even encouragement - all under the invented regime of fight against global terror. Few powerful States and Governments have



Hostage to troubled times!