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Welcome army

When a situation meanders off from some reasonable norm or mean to an extreme, the only way to counter this is to bring into play an equal but opposite extreme measure, to restore the state to its mean. Obviously, either extreme has unexpected or undesired fallout. I see a lot of crocodile tears being shed over those who died in custody, but I didn't see much of that when so many people were killed by criminals and maslaans. The army crackdown may have its deficiencies, but in the balance it is being welcomed and hailed by the populace. Clearly, this move will be unpalatable to those who have something to hide. But in the greater interest of a nation, let this molehill be a molehill and not be made into a detracting mountain.

K. Kabir, USA

After this incident I do not want to hear anything about how bad the AL is and how BNP is much more tolerant and democratic!

Since the army deployment not one of the listed top terrorists have been nabbed but it seems that not one of the AL leaders would be spared.

This whole army drive is just an eyewash, that will only politicise and demoralise the armed forces.

Shejuti Khan, Dhaka

Regarding Shab-e-Barat

I agree that there is no reference to this night in the Holy Quran. But as a meaning of Shab-e-Barat i.e. night of blessings, it implies on every night as our Nabi (PBUH) and Allah himself encouraged it number of times to pray during the silence of

Jamshed Taher, Banani, Dhaka

"Million taka question"

Desperate situation calls for desperate measures and hence the army deployment. I hope the immediate law and order situation is improved. However, an important question that faces the nation, and dubbed as the "Million taka question", was raised in your columns on October 14. "How can Bangladesh get itself out of this vicious circle (of poverty, corruption and lawlessness)?" I am surprised that your readers have not paid any attention to this important question.

The average person on the street vents his or her anger by blaming the government for failing to act against the rampant corruption and lawlessness. Whereas that is a natural and justified reaction, one

ers himself or herself as an honest citizen, engages in many a daily activity that is either inappropriate, illegal, unpatriotic or unjust. Each of us, in a little or big manner have contributed in getting Bangladesh to the point where the most corrupt nation in the entire world and each of us must feel ashamed!

A change has to happen within each and every one of us, and it will happen only through sincere efforts of individual citizen.

So, this is my humble answer to the "million taka question." A solution from the inside at the grassroots level is a must. I request the intellectuals, social thinkers, philanthropic organisations and people engaged in these fields to very seriously contemplate the importance of this matter and to seriously ponder over my suggestion and see if it is a worthwhile one to pursue.

Didarul Islam Qadir, UK

"pre-emptive" war against proclaimed or perceived adversaries (recall "axis of evil" speech by President Bush). Of course there are few notable exceptions and they need to be applauded for their exceptions if not for their daring to question given wisdom and sermon from the pulpit of Pentagon and the White House. But the overall mood in the dominant press is one of cheerleading.

The bugles of war, meanwhile, blare incessantly and resonate louder still, with use of evangelical fervour. We are already witnessed the most recent sample of "pre-emptive war" and that is the storming of Moscow theatre by Russian Special Forces to "save" the hostages. But these forces managed to kill more hostages than rebels, gassed hundreds more with "undisclosed chemical weapons" who remain in hospital fighting for their lives but unable to get the antidote to the poison they had inhaled. Anyone questioning this conduct let alone threatening Russia? If this is not an encouragement to crimes against humanity, what is?

However, all is not necessarily lost; there are thousands in the US who are out on the streets braving the threat of being branded unpatriotic; there must be millions who are sceptic of war efforts; and surely the hundreds of millions elsewhere can and should shake off sense of "deja vu" that afflicts them, and voice their protest loudly and clearly. They are to be applauded but they have to be persistent even against great odds. It is an obscene irony to see that while the "Millennium Goals" get no money, war threatens consume billions of dollars to rain death and destruction on people who are yet to have the basic human needs met.

Dr. Zakir Husain, Dhaka

Prohibit smoking in public transport

I would like to request the Communication Minister to issue a directive prohibiting smoking in public transports.

Often it is observed that some passengers including some drivers and conductors smoke inside public transports ignoring other passengers' plight.

Time and again, we have tried to attract the attention of the authorities regarding this matter but no constructive step has been taken so far. Would the Communication Minister please look into the matter.

Sultan Talukder, Bilashpur, Gazipur

Once beaten, always shy

Time and again many faces of our so-called prominent leaders holding prestigious chairs or aspiring to occupy soft but powerful cushions have been thoroughly revealed. Many a time they changed their colour stooping down as low as possible only to rise higher when the time is suitable. And yet the ever-forgiving people elected them. Or they simply fell prey to their requests and new promises. Poor countrymen-- always hoping against hopes.

Tanzia Chowdhury, Dhaka

"In the name of fighting crime"

This is in response to S Ahmed's letter (October 28).

A list of criminals has not been produced just by putting in random names as the authority wished. These are the criminals who have been under the surveillance of the intelligence for quite a while, and are well-known criminals who already have many cases filed against them. If the authorities were biased in any possible way in creating the list there wouldn't be any names of BNP activists.

S Ahmed wrote that there have been far more people arrested than bullets seized. Does it really matter? They have not just arrested anyone they wanted to, not that they have some gain from it. The army is arresting either the listed criminals or they would probably arrest someone who carried a weapon. In both ways I am certain that I am safe from being arrested, is all I can say to answer S Ahmed's question. Because S Ahmed so proudly says "I feel very privileged to enjoy the security and safety compared to the residents in Dhaka" as he lives in US. Well it only makes clear that a person living in US can only pity the people of Bangladesh but can't feel the dangers the Bangladeshis have to face in their daily lives because of these terrorists.

That's the probable reason why S Ahmed and many others like him are more concerned about the criminal list and their well being in custody than the crimes they commit.

A Sensible Citizen, Dhaka

Saber Chowdhury's arrest

It did not take too long for the BNP-Jamaat alliance to show the true face of the army drive. First they failed to improve the law and order situation. Then they brought out the army to help restore law and order. But now they are using the army to harass some leaders of the opposition who have no connection to crime or terrorism.

In the name of arresting criminals, they have arrested Saber Hossain Chowdhury! There are a very few politicians in Bangladesh today, who are as well-educated, well-spoken and decent as Saber Hossain Chowdhury. Yet, the army arrested him. If this is not persecution of the opposition, then what is?

Removing Saddam defying international law!

This is in response to the letter by Mr. Mahmood Elahi on Bush and Saddam Hussein's policy. No one disputes that Saddam Hussein is the biggest enemy of the Iraqi people and Iraq. He single-handedly destroyed the country, fought meaningless battles with Iran and Kuwait at a tremendous human and material cost and ruthlessly suppressed opposition to hang on to power. He has built missiles, acquired chemical and biological weapons. He is a big threat to his people and his neighbours, but not to US or UK. But these should not be the excuses now to remove him by force by USA. Mr. Elahi seems to lament on the missed opportunity to remove him by force by US-UK alliance.

The problem is, USA does not have the right to do so unilaterally without UN mandate. Also,

While there is continued bloodshed in Palestine, US could not have picked a worse time to face off with Iraq. Reasons provided by President Bush are really excuses to pounce on Iraq. The weapons existed long time ago. Current allegations of WMD are not proven. Iraq used the chemical weapons under the watchful eyes of the US during Iraq-Iran war. US did not say anything then, rather provided intelligence to offset Iranian

advantage. But now after more than a decade Mr. Bush feels compelled to bring Saddam Hussein to books. That's why the world opinion is against US' current policy towards Iraq. It does not mean that anyone supports Saddam Hussein, but only disapproves US' use force to dislodge Saddam out of power.

On foreign policy, US priority number one should have been to address the Palestine issues without strong bias towards Israel and help settle peace in Palestine, and use its influence to convince Israel to honour and abide by numerous UN resolutions.

Then US can turn to UN to obtain the support to bring Mr. Saddam Hussein to justice. Again it should be pursued in accordance with international law.

M. Faruque, USA



Look or overlook?

the night. Therefore, we should not discourage people to pray during that particular night rather we should encourage them to practice the prayer on other nights as well. Keeping in mind that there is no comparison with Lailatul Qadr, the night of decree.

We also need to think the other related activities that people perform during Shab-e-Barat such as exchange of sweets among relatives, neighbours and distributing to the poor, Fateha for the deceased family members and visiting the graveyards etc.

No doubt these practices have a great impact on both our social, family and religious life and the fruits of these practices at least, for one day, keeps the poor people fed and keep smiles on our neighbour's face which is really rare these days.

has to dig deeper in order to identify the true malaise and in order to find a lasting cure. Therefore, as a first essential step, I suggest that we have to be courageous and honest enough to recognise and criticise our own shortcomings.

A very popular notion among us is that if only we could find a suitable honest leader or government, our problems would be easily solved. Whereas this may only be partially true, I think more is needed. We need to face the ugly and shameful fact that under the pressure of mounting corruption and lawlessness, the values of individuals in our society at large have gradually eroded to the lowest levels in all our history.

Other than the blatant corruption and shameless crimes which is the target of the current crackdown, an average Bangladeshi, who consid-

A brave new world

The UN is on trial, as it is under dire threat too. Either the UN gives the US licence to wage war and change Iraqi regime or the US unilaterally punish Iraq for alleged possession or likely future development of weapons of mass destruction.

The world is a recent witness to the Afghan Campaign by US; the surgical and sanitised precision weapons kill, and kill many civilians. Such deaths have uncharitably been dismissed as unintentional. We however must not be fooled or lulled into acceptance of such wanton conduct of war which have dubious legitimacy in international law and conventions. Departing from its traditions, the western media continues to whip up a public mood for what has come to be called

gross violation of civil rights. How can we let a process continue, which has already taken a number of lives in what one could term as death sentences carried out by the army without any trial? What is this? Instant justice? How do we even know it is some sort of justice (that the dead ones were really capital punishment-worthy) and not mere persecution by the powerful? The executed never had a chance to defend themselves!

It is a shame that a popular government like BNP is letting this go on. There is no shame in admitting a mistake and correcting it. I don't have doubts about their good intentions, but end does not justify means and when it comes to civil rights, there must be no compromise. It's wrong to turn a blind eye to the current brutality of the army in hope that it will help lower crime. Even if it stops crime from happening completely for a few days, deaths of those people in custody can not be justified. I hope the government will at once stop the army from being so ruthless, investigate and publish the reasons for the deaths, prosecute the offenders, and formulate a viable way of fighting street crimes without infringing on people's rights.

A Concerned Citizen, Dallas, USA

"Operation Clean Heart"

During the Operation Clean Heart we are observing some collateral heart damage! Initially we very much endorsed the idea using army to attain law and order in the near total lawless nation. We must try to pursue that goal in a lawful manner.

We are used to read in the newspapers "Hijacker was caught red handed and killed by the angry mob". Now it is like that "criminals and terrorists were caught red handed and killed by the uniformed personnel!"

We can't clean our heart through illegal way. If the government claim to be truly democratic it should be accountable for every death whether he is a criminal or a terrorist. People have lot of expectations from the elected government. Don't let this "Operation Clean Heart" fail. This may be your last chance for fair game.

Dr. M. Islam, USA

I am calling upon my fellow countrymen to raise their voice against deaths in the army custody. Nobody, even an alleged accused deserves torture or death in the hands of the state machinery.

It appears that government is allowing the army to violate human rights openly and trying to justify this wrong by saying that it is carried out against the criminals. The government probably thought that deploy-



ment of army would create a crime free society overnight. But to combat crime, the government has to take a number of steps. It must create a non-partisan Civil Commission to oversee the activities of the law enforcing agencies. On the other hand the government must allow the police to act without any political bias. It should also train the lawyers to defend the rights of the people and not to become an accomplice to any criminal activities. It should also ensure a free and competent judiciary, which is not riddled with corruption. The Human Rights Commis-

sion must be established as early as possible. The electronic media must be made free to create awareness and civil resistance against crime. The government hasn't done any of these.

We all want violence and crime free society but we do not want that through a method, which is inherently wrong. The government should use the manpower and intelligence report of the army to catch the alleged criminals. The accused must not be tortured and must get the help of a lawyer to defend themselves.

"Will our elected government tell us what is happening?"



Restoring law order?

This is one of the worst commentaries you have ever written. And I don't think the government should answer your questions. However, I have a very simple question for you, are you jealous at the improvement of law and order situation?

Jaasim, USA

Upon reading your commentary, I wish to congratulate you and am sending you my letter for publication in your newspaper. Whenever I have spoken at various international conferences, I have always stated my pride in being a citizen of Bangladesh. I have strongly voiced that I come from a nation that has long and glorious history of peoples' movements and struggle for equality and justice, for democracy and freedom and organised resistance against all forms of tyranny and injustice. We have fought and won our independence through our Liberation War. We have struggled against military dictatorships to re-establish democracy.

No doubt, our nascent democratically elected government as with many other older democracies elsewhere in the world, have not always kept their election promises, nor conformed to democratic principles of being accountable to its people. But being an optimist, I have always believed that our people will soon begin to assert their rights and make the governments and political parties accountable to their constituents. That we will succeed in strengthening and empowering local government. This is what many like myself have been working for. This is what our Liberation War was for and this is what our democratic movement was all about.

But the recent events have perturbed me greatly, and a sense of uneasiness prevails upon me to write this letter. The deteriorating law and order situation continues to be a cause of serious concern for all. The recent decision by the government to bring in the army to help in bringing the situation under control has been lauded by both the major political parties and a large majority of people expressing their views through your newspapers. My uneasiness stems from this acceptance by our citizens and our political parties of the role of the army. To me, this acceptance assumes that we are acknowledging the fact that all other existing institutions and machinery have failed and that the only disciplined and working institution within the Government, is the army. We seem to have forgotten our history, which time and again has shown that whenever the army has taken on extra responsibilities beyond their specified role, democracy has been the victim.

Looking at the performance during the ironically named "Operation Clean Heart", eleven people had died in the past eleven days. The feeble excuse that they died due to 'heart failure' did not find much credence, and the army too has given up using this as an excuse. Torture and deaths in custody, whether they be the police or the army is unacceptable. What perturbs me further is that some major criminals have somehow got wind of this operation and are nowhere to be found. This of course does not speak very highly of the army's intelligence unit. Having the opportunity to work in remote areas, I find some of the better known terrorists continuing their activities as in the past. What I also find interesting that while arrests are being made and activists as in the past. What I also find interesting that while arrests are being made and activists of both the major parties are not being spared, so far no arrest of terrorists belonging to Jamaat, Chhatra Shibir or the Islamic Oikyo Jote have been made, despite wide spread knowledge of their activities, particularly in Rajshahi and Chittagong. The recent killing in broad daylight of Mr. Swapan Goswami, a teacher, in the Capital City also raises many questions in our minds as to the effectiveness of 'Operation Clean Heart'. The death of poor peasants in Noakhali and Jhenidah, the fear that drives a poor villager to drown himself in the pond does not speak of high regard for the human

rights perspective vis a vis the army.

I urge upon all citizens, our elected representatives, all political parties and our Government to sit together to tackle this issue. The situation is too grave and big for one institution to tackle alone. Democracy means being able to work together in such situations. We owe this much to those who gave up their lives for these principles and to the future generations. Let us not forget the spirit of our Liberation War.

Khushi Kabir, Co-ordinator, Nijera Kori, Dhaka

I have just finished reading your commentary (October 29). Without going into a critical analysis of your commentary, as a citizen of this country, I feel that whatever is happening is not right. The very fact that no less than the Army Chief has to supervise an operation like this tells me that things are not moving in the right direction. I also saw some of the photographs of people being blindfolded and being taken to some unspecified destinations. I also saw some clients of sex workers being tied down. Looks like the army has been given a mandate what one calls "sky is the limit" Looks like this government has listed these "clients" as "Listed criminals" and thus none other than the army could be trusted to handle it.

Coupled with other stories of beating leading to death and the style of interrogation etc have given rise to many a vexing questions in my mind. Firstly whose operations is this? If it is a joint operation combined with the regular law-enforcing agencies, I have seen nothing to confirm that.

On the other hand, look at the irony of it all. The very police who have failed to contain terrorists and criminals have been given the task of providing the intelligence information leading to the criminals and their hideouts etc!

The government also does not seem to have a clear map of operations once the army is withdrawn. However, I would assume that the new set of rules created are aimed at, as the government says, ensuring speedy trial and disposal of related cases. It is my experience that no set of rules revised or stringent as they may be can ensure its proper application unless the people behind are sincere, committed and mean business. These are difficult times. Let us not create and help the emergence of yet another evil, which may threaten the very foundation of our Democracy, which is already weak and shaky.

Shamsher Chowdhury, Dhaka

I am writing to wholeheartedly endorse the viewpoint articulated by Mr. M. Anam in his article, "Will our elected government tell us what is happening?" (October 29).

The deployment of the military, paramilitary and auxiliary forces for law enforcement ought to have a legal basis. Moreover, due process must be followed in any actions against criminals and alleged criminals. The difference between a civilised society ruled on the law and an autocratic dictatorship is that the former is based on recognition of liberty, equality, and human rights while the latter is ruled by whims of those in power. It is a disgrace to learn that many people have already died in custody under questionable circumstances.

The authorities do have a right to arrest and apprehend criminals. The law and order condition in the country is quite horrific thanks to the supply of illegal arms and ammunitions and the protection provided to the criminals. The poor law and order condition, however, does not permit or provide any pretext for subjecting alleged criminals to degrading punishment, maltreatment, and mysterious deaths while under detention.

Those responsible for human rights violation and abuse of power are themselves criminals at par with gangsters and murders.

Tanweer Akram, USA