

The count is 36 now!

When will these 'unexplained' deaths end?

AS of December 17, thirty-six people have died following army arrest as part of the joint forces' country-wide anti-crime operation launched three months ago. Let's take a close look at the list of casualties to find out why they were picked up and what kind of social background they came from in an attempt to establish a pattern of the extraordinary phenomenon taking place in the name of rule of law. The breakdown indeed makes a revealing study of the rather sweeping nature of arrests made, which one would have thought, warranted that much more precaution to be taken to avert fatalities of the kind which unfortunately occurred with an impenitent, even ferocious regularity.

Of the total number of dead, ten had some links with gangsterism, mugging and petty crimes including felony as reflected in their criminal records. Four were picked up in land related disputes; six belong to assorted categories of daily wage-earner, tailor, signboard, shop-owner, movie director, policeman and multimillionaire businessman. Some others also died in the politician and tender businessman categories but who had no specific cases against them as such, at least not those in public knowledge. Their number is not known. Five of the dead are learnt to have been completely innocent of any involvement in a crime or offence.

From a reading of the list of casualties therefore it appears that except for ten persons among the dead who could be linked to specifically recorded offences, the others were seemingly either peripherally involved or innocent.

Who is responsible for these deaths? Who should be held accountable and answerable for the serious breach of rule of law which is anachronistic to the constitutional principles?

As law minister Moudud Ahmed told the BBC world service the other day "under no circumstances" should custodial deaths be accepted, or shall we add, should these be condoned.

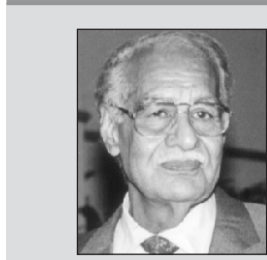
But the fact is these have occurred not once, twice, but in spates over the last three months. And, what is supremely ironic and terribly unsettling as far as the most vital element in any administration -- the chain of authority -- goes, even the instructions from highest seat of power fell on deaf ears down the line. Only a few days into the crackdown when reports of first deaths in custody started appearing in the newspapers Prime Minister Khaleda Zia gave directives to all concerned to be on guard against harassing innocent people. The Chief of Army Staff issued similar instructions to the troops quite a few times over. But more than harassment deaths have been reported at regular intervals over the last three months. We don't know if lack of compliance with those directives from the top was gone into or pursued at some length. Even if it were, the result spoke otherwise.

Tragically, despite the public outcry against and strongly sourced media reports on the deaths the latter continued to occur. Even three months down the line, quite a few casualties have been reported after the holidays. The worst part of it is that in spite of the questions and concerns being repeatedly aired by the public and the media reportage and comment on the fatalities, the government made no attempt to explain what was really going on. Initially, out of over-enthusiasm, some might have committed a flaw or two but three months on, with the deaths after arrest reported as before, we have to say this is an unassailable indictment on aberrant behaviour in the case of an otherwise initially well-received operation against an extremely exacerbated law and order scenario.

The total figure of arrests so far stands at 8980. Of them 2013 have had criminal records with a question mark however dangling on the remainder 6967 as to the ground on which they were arrested. The unbridled abuse of section 54 under which people were picked up on suspicion, held in detention for questioning, put on remand for further interrogation and sent to jail under SPA without the charges being made known to the detained at the crucial phases, remained something of a sore-thumb.

Does it not all entitle the public to ask the following question: What kind of a democratic governance is this?

Pyrrhic victory



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

IT is a Babri masjid-like tragedy. The BJP's decisive victory in Gujarat may not have demolished any structure of our composite culture. But it has shaken the foundations of the constitution, which enunciates India's commitment to secularism in its preamble. That the ruling BJP did it intentionally to win at the polls shows it in poor light because, as the head of the coalition government, it is incumbent on it to defend the basic structure on which the Union stands.

Is Gujarat a laboratory? Only the time will tell. But there is no mistaking that the Sangh parivar threw down the gauntlet in the name of Hindutva and won 126 seats in the 182-member assembly. Chief Minister Narendra Modi's plank was special: anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan and he made the two slogans synonymous. He furrowed the plough of hatred deep and reaped a rich harvest of bigotry. He did best in the area where he had planned and executed ethnic cleansing, a swing of 18 per cent of

vote in central Gujarat and 11 per cent in the north. One explanation given is that secularism or Mahatma Gandhi has never appealed to the Gujaratis. This was particularly true in those parts of the state, where people had no qualm of conscience to vote en bloc for Modi even 10 months after their complicity in the riots. Modi's warning not to support the Congress lest its win should be considered Pakistan's victory worked but only the other way

embarrassed over the manner in which the international community has reacted initially to the BJP's victory. deputy Prime Minister LK Advani has been quick in saying that it is not a victory for Hindutva. Mere words will carry no conviction because as many as 17 diplomats from different countries were themselves present to see the low level to which the parivar took the electioneering. In any case, why should the BJP feel shy because it is bound to

India did not become a Hindu state because such a thing did not fit into the pluralism which the country had reflected for centuries. After freedom, the Sangh parivar suddenly became active to raise the demand for a Hindu raj. But people followed Mahatma Gandhi, who even at the height of post-partition riots, said: Hindus and Muslims are my two eyes. In fact, his values, which were consecrated by his assassination at the hands of a

India where fascination with Hindu identity has become more attractive than the Indian ethos. Still the battle to defeat the Hindutva forces will be tough and long. The Sangh parivar has permeated into every part of our activity and the elements believing in pluralistic and democratic values have taken secular ideas for granted. Whether the Congress is the right party to lead the fight is not yet clear. It played soft Hindu line in

maintenance and the unlocking of the Babri Masjid were the two main factors to build Hindu chauvinism. Advani's rath yatra only consolidated it. The clean sweep of the BJP at three by-elections in Rajasthan indicates that the state may be the party's next target or Maharashtra with its tried and tested ally, the Shiv Sena. The Sangh parivar may also be thinking about early general elections. In may go wrong in its calculations. The BJP's win in Gujarat had very much to do with the ethnic cleansing. The police and authorities came in handy. This is not possible in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh or even Maharashtra where the Congress is in power. Bihar, with all the taint of crime and corruption, continues to be Laloo Prasad Yadav's preserve.

What the BJP leadership has to reckon with seriously is the emergence of Modi and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which was in charge of the polls in Gujarat. They will want to cash in on the "image" they have built of not stopping at anything for achieving their ends. The ageing party leadership may not be willing to go all the way yet. Muslims, however worried, feel differently. A Naroda resident, Peer Mohammad Allah Bakhsh, who received wounds during the riots, says boldly: "This is our home, our country and we want to live here, work here and earn our livelihood here. Where will we go?" He represents the nation's resolve, not Modi's pyrrhic victory.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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round. His win has pleased Islamabad. It feels that the two-nation theory on which Pakistan was founded has been vindicated once again. In any case, since the days of the BJP-led government at Delhi, Pakistan has been saying that secularism in India is another name for the Hinduraj.

The Sangh parivar does not hide its ambition to establish a Hindu raj in India. Its anti-Muslim propaganda in Gujarat was open and blatant. But, apparently, New Delhi is

duplicate the same formula in other states? One point it should, however, keep in mind: riding the wave of hate in a particular state is one thing but converting the entire country to Hindu chauvinism is another. What is sought to be done is against the ethos of our independence struggle in which people from different communities participated and sacrificed all. The Sangh parivar was never in the picture. But the saga of national movement is India's proud heritage. Independent

fanatic Hindu, gave us respite for nearly 40 years from the Hindutva zealots. They came to be hated so much that they would not get even a two-digit figure in parliament. Mrs Indira Gandhi's emergency gave them relevance because they were among the few to defy it under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narain. After the victory in Gujarat, the BJP may begin to nourish grandiose ideas. But I do not think that the party has any substantial strength beyond the middle class in northern

Gujarat. Secularism is not a matter of politics. It is a commitment. Either you have it or you don't. There is no halfway house. Modi or Tagodid did not flinch for a second from tearing apart our secular fabric to combine religion with politics and the state. But the party whose president says how anybody can dare criticise Indira Gandhi has little room for ideas or introspection. In fact, if one were to look back one would find that the amendment to the constitution after the Shah Bano case for

Diplomacy: Nuclear style?



DILARA CHOUDHURY

PYONGYANG has done it again. Its recent statement that it would restart work at three abandoned nuclear power plants that could produce fuel for atomic bombs has once again created serious challenges for Washington and its North East Asian allies. Pyongyang's announcement has been a kind of tit-for-tat response to Washington's decision, which came at the heels of the U.S.-backed interception of a North Korean ship carrying about 15 Scud missiles to Yemen, to suspend the oil delivery to North Korea under the 1994 agreement that had frozen North Korea's nuclear power plants. North Korea's reactions were somewhat expected but Washington and its allies, however, were not quite prepared for such harsh response even from world's most unpredictable state. As mentioned earlier, Pyongyang's announcement understandably sent shockwaves, especially to its estranged neighbour like South Korea with whom it is technically still at war, and Japan, which is allegedly within North Korea's No Dong missile range. South Korea is so upset that its government termed it as a looming "crisis on the Korean peninsula."

Obviously, there are reasons to be alarmed. However, a close look and analysis of North Korea's dealings of international relations reveal a pattern that can be termed as its "nuclear style" diplomacy. Threats through the potential use of nuclear weapons or nuclear related intimidation are at the core of such unique style of diplomacy. Its rationale may be illogical but then possession of nuclear weapons or threats of their use by Nuclear Weapons States (NWSs) are equally illogical despite the various doctrines about its utility and use as propagated by the

NWSs ever since nuclear arsenal were introduced to the mankind.

During the cold war era -- by developing deterrence theory -- a handful of NWSs argued that they were needed to maintain peace, and they were so forceful that the voices of the peace activists were successfully throttled and muted. Though they acknowledged that these weapons were not to be used but their value as political currencies were always upheld, and at the same time, they made sure that their possession remained tightly within the NWSs only. The world, by and

lier, can be used as bargaining chips and have diplomatic gains.

It all began soon after the end of the cold war when Pyongyang was left out in the cold and nowhere to turn to. It was the most isolated country in the world with a brutal Stalinist regime of Kim Jong Il. The country was in dire need of everything -- food, investment, electricity and so on and so forth. It needed to open up to the outside world. But the regime, instead of moving towards peace, reconciliation and opening (that would have meant the end of Jong's iron fist rule), charted a path

return, agreed to shut down its smaller nuclear power generating plant and stop construction of the other two and allowing UN weapon inspectors to watch its 8,000 spent fuel.

There have been other episodes as well. In 1998 the country was hit by severe food shortage causing widespread famine and starvation. The West was acutely apprehensive about its future actions. In the midst of such circumstances the launching of No Dong missile with range to hit Japan prompted international community -- besides the

most recent open and provocative declaration that it was going to restart work on those closed nuclear power generating plants. One can, from the actions and behaviour of North Korea, assume that all these statements and admissions with regard to its nuclear ambitions and capability and export of missile technology are seemingly well calculated and meant to get the attention of Washington and international community as offers of negotiations and attempts to engage Washington to resume oil shipment, sign a non-aggression

President Kim's Sunshine policy. Pyongyang is well aware of the scenario. It knows that despite Washington's suspicion of North Korea having enough plutonium to make one or two bombs and its flagrant violation of missile technology regime, the sticks cannot be that stiff. Even if the sticks were used carrots, as evidenced during 1993 crisis and the No Dong missile incident of 1998, would follow them. It is fully aware that Washington is more than knowledgeable about the catastrophic consequences of disarming North Korea given the military scenario of the Korean Peninsula as well as the unpredictability of Pyongyang's behaviour.

Washington is no position to deal Pyongyang in a manner it is attempting to deal with Iraq. North Korea feels that its threatening gambit intended to force Washington to negotiate worked before as evidenced during 1993 and 1998 crisis. Both times they opened the negotiating channels that resulted in 1994 agreement and huge food shipment for its starving people in 1998. This time around -- its October admission of having a secret nuclear programme (which, however, was later denied), Scud missile incident and the recent statement to restart the work of the nuclear power generating plants are reminiscent of North Korea's earlier diplomacy of engaging Washington and its allies through its "nuclear" style diplomacy. So far they have remained only threats as it has neither asked the UN inspectors to leave the country nor asked them to unseal the canister of 8000 spent plutonium. It would now wait for Washington's response and then take the next step. Whether this time around its "nuclear" diplomacy would work or not is a matter of speculation. It can go either way. An irritated Washington may act in harsher manner or given the situation in Iraq and regional compulsions decide to soft paddle the whole issue (Washington has already declared that it has no intention to invade North Korea and destroy its nuclear facilities). It is, however, indeed ominous, whatever may be the outcome of this new twist of the use of nuclear weapons, for those of us who want to live in peace.

Dilara Choudhury is Professor, Govt and Politics, Jahangirnagar University.

PANORAMA

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large, however reluctantly, accepted the logic of deterrence theory and thereby the utility of nuclear weapons. This was perhaps the age of nuclear innocence as only a handful of people really understood that nuclear weapons were evil and it is always dangerous to have them around.

Since then, we have come a long way. The attempts to nuclearise have come to its age. Its technological know-how is no more restricted to the privileged few. And despite various UN sponsored nuclear restraint regimes attempts are being made by a number of countries to have nuclear weapons. Along with that spread there is now a new twist in how these dangerous weapons of mass destruction, with potentials to wipe out the mankind, can be used besides being dangled as political currencies. Now both so-called pariah states and non-state actors are finding their own rationale to use these dangerous weapons of mass destruction to get their own way i.e. their so-called attempts to protect their broadly defined national security. However, North Korea perhaps is the only state that has discovered that the whole issues of nuclearisation, as mentioned ear-

lier, can be used as bargaining chips and have diplomatic gains. It all began soon after the end of the cold war when Pyongyang was left out in the cold and nowhere to turn to. It was the most isolated country in the world with a brutal Stalinist regime of Kim Jong Il. The country was in dire need of everything -- food, investment, electricity and so on and so forth. It needed to open up to the outside world. But the regime, instead of moving towards peace, reconciliation and opening (that would have meant the end of Jong's iron fist rule), charted a path

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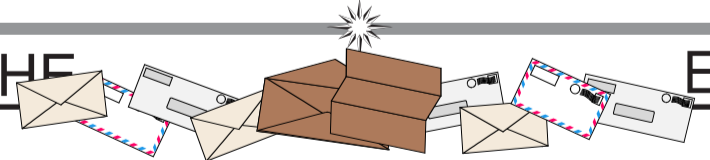
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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Notice
The readers are requested to send their comments on the series of bomb blasts in Bangladesh starting from the Udichi meet at Jessore, Ramna Batamul to the recent Mymensingh Cinema Hall incident and other similar incidents.

The readers may focus on the efforts of the authorities to bring the culprits to justice, the accusation and counter accusation from amongst the political parties regarding the incidents and the consequent effect on the general people about the carnage. -- Editor

Indian propaganda against Bangladesh

Isn't it a ridiculous misfortune for us to be accused of repression against minorities by a country that has had one of the worst ethnic conflicts of the year in one of its Western States?

Does the likes of Advani and George Fernandes forget while making their irresponsible remarks what happened in Gujarat? Do they fail to notice how good the Reinhard Heydrich of Gujarat, Mr. Narendra Modi have done in the state polls. To make matters worse we have a Leader of the Opposition saying

that there are pro-Talibans in the ruling ranks. If Jammah-e-Islam as a party qualifies to be Pro-Taliban than we have had Taliban affiliates in our government for the last 20 odd years, from 15 years before the Taliban swept to power in Kabul in 1996. There should be a limit to irresponsible chatter.

The fact that Islam is an international religion naturally mean that whenever we have an increased interest in spiritual matters, these will be linked to international terrorist organisations like Al-Qaeda. Yes we have Pan Islamism movements spreading their wings in our country recently but these are far more

peaceful in their intents and methods than say the VHP and RSS in India. The statistics (so far) would agree with me. There may or may not be pro-Talibans in our ruling circles, but make no mistake it's the ideological brethren of the Nazis who are ruling India at the moment, and they came to power through popular vote.

It is the fate of smaller nations bordering a big one to suffer a bit. The Chinese view the Vietnamese as insolent. The Mexicans have suffered long for their country's proximity to the US. But even by these standards what we are getting from messers Advani and Fernandes is a bit too much given their country's human rights record. Shaqer Rasheed, Dhaka

Foreign Ministry and the foreign media

Foreign office of a country is essentially responsible for the communication with the international world. Somehow, our foreign offices seem

to spectacularly fail in this respect. This started with the story in 'The Far Eastern Economic Review'. The response from the Foreign office was far from adequate. This story was reprinted in a French newspaper after translation.

Then comes the report in the Time. Recently, the European Parliament passed the horrible resolution about the Operation Clean Heart. Our foreign office now knows everything -- who lobbied for the resolution, who recruited the lobbyists etc. Our FM had meetings with the European ambassadors to explain the Govt's position. What were his foreign office staff in Brussels doing before the resolution was passed? Does the Foreign Minister have any idea how much these failures are causing Bangladeshis expatriates outside Bangladesh? M. Mashuiul Huq, Norconsult Telematics, Qatar

Death penalty

The Article 302 of our Penal Code

has the provision to impose death penalty over an individual. I ask my compatriots, is it not a cruel and unusual form of punishment? What do we accomplish by sentencing someone to death?

Granted, it is only applicable to persons convicted for committing murder, yet the society is willing to sanction another murder in revenge. Are we not guilty of committing the same crime, as did the convict? What is the moral justification for such hypocrisy? We are resorting to medieval tradition of eye-for-an-eye. Is it fitting to call ourselves civilised after this? I would like to hear from other readers about this. It is an issue regarding the moral position of our society. Yahya, USA

"Population problem"

Thank you for the letter 'Population Problem' (December 4) by Mr. Kamrul Syed, Kansas, U.S.A. Population problem is the core

issue which is very closely associated with other issues like unemployment and law and order situation. In this nation too many people are causing impediment for healthy human growth and its progress! Mr. Syed wrote explicitly for the policymaker to enact law for controlling our population.

Those of us who have the reasons to travel within the cities, towns and villages must have observed that these days there is no dearth of human crowd whether in urban or rural area! The following three measures can be taken to keep our population within limit:

Firstly, only citizens who have reached the adulthood and are employed or have means of earnings would be allowed by the Kazi (marriage registrar) of the locality, to get married and issue two security print certificates to the newly wedded couple.

Secondly, the management of the community and civic centres, hospitals and clinics while holding wedding ceremonies and delivery of babies respectively, should first

check the customers' and patients' marriage certificates issued by the Government through Kazi.

Thirdly, the law enforcing bodies and agencies should remain vigilant and act in case of violation of the norms and rules of wedlock and child birth, and anybody breaking any of the aforesaid measures should be arrested and produced before the Hon'ble Court of Justice for dealing as per law of the land. Golam Ashraf, Gulshan, Dhaka

The peace and the peace-visions

First we had that vision from Uncle Sam and now another vision from the "man of peace" Sharon. On 5th December, BBC reported about a peace vision outlined by Sharon. Of course, it came with the usual "demands" by the Israeli terrorists; as if the Palestinians are living on Sharon's land or they are eating his food!

It seems to me that everyone on this planet has some sort of "vision" for the poor Muslim losers, apart from Muslims themselves! Pakistan is busy deciding who is the most powerful in the country. Iran can't decide if it wants to reform or not. Kuwait is busy buying Gas Masks from the US (just in case) and Turkey is bending over backward to get entry into EU. Egypt and Jordan don't know which side to take. Bahrain, Qatar, UAE are busy modernising their countries with everything "made in USA"! Saudi is busy defending its image and keeping its relationship with their "friend" USA. Bangladeshi politicians are busy erasing each other from history (what their corrupt brains can't grasp is that, if they don't stop this comedy, there will be no Bangladesh or any history left). Iraq is busy saving its neck.

You see, when we look at the Muslim world the picture we get is very gloomy. There is no future or any vision of peace coming from the Muslim world. What we have is total chaos and it is unlikely to improve any time soon! Azad Miah, Oldham, UK