

## Another death in custody

### A scar on rule of law

THE killing of listed criminal Pichchi Hannan purportedly in a firefight between a joint Rab and Detective Branch team and members of Hannan's gang in the early hours of Friday morning, cannot but raise some questions in the public mind.

Hannan had been taken into custody after being wounded in a gunfight with a Rab team on June 25 and had reportedly tipped off the Rab team as to where to find members of his criminal gang. Police sources state that no sooner had the 20-man law enforcement team reached the criminals' meeting spot that they came under fire from gang members.

The exact details of the shootout and the circumstances of his killing remain unclear. It is also unclear as to whether he was hit only in the front or also in the back, and whether or not he was shot at point blank range.

The very first question that begs an answer is: how could someone in custody die in cross-fire at all? The second is that whether Hannan was killed by accident or not, he being in Rab custody at the time of his death, it's the custodian that must take responsibility for his safety and for his fate.

This was the sixth death in Rab custody since the elite squad resumed operations two months ago, and the nature of the deaths together with the fact that some had clear political overtones necessitate that the killings be fully investigated without delay.

While on remand, Hannan is said to have implicated important political leaders as his mentors, which suggests that there are many who stood to gain from his silencing. In addition, there can be no doubt that he was a potentially vast repository of information for law enforcement officials, and that it should have been imperative, from a law and order perspective, to see him alive to face trial.

It is too soon to say whether Hannan's killing was an accident, or not. But it is fair to say that a disservice has been done to the rule of law by his life being cut short without subjecting him to the due process of law.

## Diarrhoea situation

### The risk factors must be eliminated quickly

THE diarrhoea situation has turned critical in the flood affected areas. The number of patients is rising at an alarming rate and about 9,800 new patients, mostly children, sought treatment in hospitals in the last few days.

The situation could not be kept under control due to a number of factors. First, there is an acute crisis of drinking water in the affected areas. This has created an opportunity for the unscrupulous elements to thrive on the miseries of people. They are selling contaminated water in bottles along with spurious saline packets. Pure water has become so scarce that a small bottle is selling at Tk 25. That is not something that poor, flood-stricken people can afford. The authorities concerned have apparently failed to check the activities of the dishonest traders banking on the sufferings of people. But there is no way to check the spread of water-borne diseases until supply of pure water is ensured.

Then the hospitals appear to have been caught unawares by the sudden rush of diarrhoea patients. Some of the hospitals are trying to cope with the situation through accommodating patients well beyond their capacity. But patients cannot get the service they need under such circumstances.

Obviously, the best thing we can do is to prevent diarrhoea. And the only way to achieve that goal is make sure that people don't drink polluted water. Some organisations have come forward with their water purification plants to help the affected people. However, the need of the hour is to mobilise all our resources to stand up to the challenge. All the water purification plants at the disposal of government and non-government agencies must be pressed into service for the affected areas as a matter of top priority.

The government must also look into the reports that the medical teams working in the affected areas have been facing shortage of medicines and ORS. It is a matter of great regret that diarrhoea has already claimed at least 56 lives and thousands of patients have been admitted to hospital. A comprehensive action plan must be in place to ensure a steady supply of pure water, ORS and medicines.

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

FLOODWATER will eventually recede. Marooned people will eventually go back home or what used to be their home. But what will not change in the foreseeable future is the fragility of the Bangladesh economy and our inability to effectively come to the rescue of those affected. UN did not wait for approach from the government to call for international help for the flood victims. Why is it that Bangladesh, experienced with periodic flood every few years, is caught unprepared and seen as unable to meet the looming humanitarian disaster? Despite UN appeal and the sympathy of the developed countries, one has to be cognisant of donor fatigue, and also of the demands from other humanitarian disasters competing for the attention and the resources of the rich and powerful.

Economic loss from Bangladesh floods is always colossal. Social cost in the form of social disharmony, intra-country migration from flood devastated areas to seemingly dry land devoid of economic opportunities, sharp decline in law and order situation, etc are incalculable. Though the world has mercifully passed the stage of naïveté shown by Mary Antoinette who advised the revolting Parisians to eat cake if they did not have bread, the insularity of the governing class from the miseries of the suffering people, perhaps, has not vanished. Even after several decades of our independence, Bangladeshi privileged class appears to be wedded to Scottish philosopher Robert Owen's First Principles that included the notion that it is necessary for a large portion of mankind to exist in ignorance and poverty to secure for the remaining part a life of affluence and leisure. We also seem to ignore George Bernard Shaw's observation that poverty is the greatest of evils and worst of crimes, compared to which all other crimes are virtues and all other dishonour chivalrous.

When Western political thinkers

speak of personal security without which "the life of man (is) solitary, poor, nasty and brutish," they are more concerned with the physical danger posed by violent men from within and without than with the existential inequalities in a given society caused not only by opportunities denied to citizens perceived to be "non-loyalists" but also by plunder of state resources by the very people who were appointed guardians. Thomas Hobbes seemed to

Melaku Ayalew (of Disaster Management and Food Security, Addis Ababa) the availability of food at the global level would have been one basis for food security in the proper sense of the concept which is the "access by all people at all time to enough food for an active and healthy life" (World Bank definition). Unfortunately, in the real world, surplus food (say in the US or Canada) cannot be accessed by the food deficit countries as their economies cannot

this shock. The loss of standing crops, decimation of infra-structural facilities, reduction in export earning coupled with reduced project assistance due to alleged corruption and inefficiency are expected to reduce the projected growth rate of the economy in the current fiscal year. Additionally, the inevitable import of food grains by both the private and the public sectors will drain foreign exchange and put stress on the country's balance of payment situation.

**Bangladesh, sometimes described as a "landscape of disaster" with a "catalogue of woes," has an urgent need to put its governance back on track to relieve millions of honest and hard working people from being stigmatised as non-performers. So far as the flood is concerned, it provides a golden opportunity to the authorities to prove their commitment to help the people now threatened with death, disease, and deprivation.**

assess, writes Robert Jackson (of Boston University), that a state which failed to furnish the general conditions of personal security would collapse and cease to exist, giving way to a state of nature, could not foresee the emergence of a Society of States and international instruments that would guarantee the continuance of failed governments.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by UNGA in 1948 specifically refers to the right to food adequate for the health and well being of a person. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) that expands upon the rights and freedom enshrined in the Universal Declaration also specifically refers to the right of adequate food and freedom from hunger. To the marooned millions and the starving thousands of socially marginalised people, enumeration of such rights does not carry any meaning, and it would seem to them to be reflective of intellectual madness, should any one try to inform them of the existence of such rights. But had these Declaration and Covenant been adhered to by all nations, o b s e r v e s

generate the foreign exchange needed to purchase food from the world. In the case of Bangladesh, neither a disaster nor a near-famine situation has been declared. According to government estimates, up to thirty million people will need food aid for the next five months.

Douglas Carson Coutts, the resident UN coordinator estimates that Bangladesh will need at least a year to recover from the flood inflicted effects on her economy. Grave food insecurity and acute unemployment are likely to follow once the floodwater recedes. Ten percent funds from the on-going ADP is reported to be diverted to post-flood rehabilitation of thousands of kilometers of destroyed roads and railway tracks, thousands of meters of bridges and culverts, and thousands of schools and homesteads affected by the flood. Government functionaries claim that with adequate foreign assistance Bangladesh should be able to weather the crisis. One hopes that such optimism is well-founded. But if the preliminary estimate of loss from flood amounts to Tk 30,000 crore then it is not readily understood how the economy will be able to absorb

The nature of governance is inextricably linked with the pace of economic development in the post-flood period. As it is, Bangladesh has been accused of excessive corruption by Transparency International, as the most unsafe Asian country for journalists by the International Association of Journalists, and for laxity in checking trafficking of women and children across the border by the US State Department. Besides, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the US State Department have repeatedly raised pointed fingers at Bangladesh for human rights violations relating to minorities and deaths in the custody of state agents. Image of Bangladesh as a tolerant Muslim country is now being questioned by some quarters as aberrant acts by groups of Islamic fundamentalists have gone unpunished; vigilante murderous actions of Bangla Bhai, dubbed a common criminal by the US ambassador in Bangladesh, has been allowed to vanish from the radar screen of the public mind; numerous judicial inquiry reports into sensational criminal cases remain under wraps; cases relating to arms smuggling after fifteen minutes fame have remained unre-

solved. If good governance demands transparency, participation, responsiveness, accountability, and the rule of law, then Bangladeshi authorities may find it difficult to measure up. In the post-9/11 era when global scrutiny is focused on slightest infraction of good governance lest the festering wound incubate contagion of deprivation and socio-economic exclusion leading to the birth of al-Qaedaist replicants, establishment of good

governance in Bangladesh is of utmost urgency. Dictation of state policy guided by selfish and parochial party interest may be satisfying temporarily, but Machiavellian machinations directed at the destruction of democratic institutions will ultimately lead to their collapse. Supreme Court Bar Association is insistent on judicial reforms, independence of the judiciary from the executive remains an unfinished business, the Parliament is generally known to be dysfunctional, politicisation of the bureaucracy has reportedly caused considerable frustration among government officials, including law enforcement agencies, and as already mentioned, the fourth estate -- the press -- is under threat of being muzzled. This forensic interrogation of the nature and style of governance is not to criticise for the sake of criticism only, but because good governance is necessary to fight the grim triad of poverty, ignorance, and disease, and in the immediate term would help Bangladesh to successfully meet the devastating effects of the on-going flood.

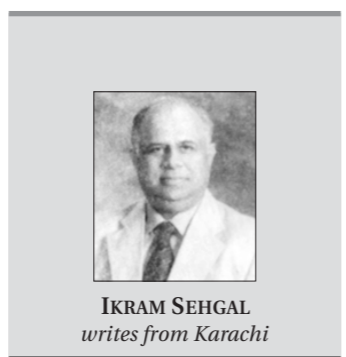
It has already been established that the idyllic situation of surplus

food flowing into deficit food areas does not happen, not only because the needy do not have the power to buy the needed food, but also because "the market," conventionally seen as perfectly competitive and as a supreme medium for the expression of individual choice, does not exist. In Bangladesh the supply of goods, particularly of essential commodities, from the agricultural fields/godowns to the market place entails an "extortion price" which is ultimately paid by the consumers. Longer the route of transportation, the greater the levy extracted by the extortionists from the owners of goods and/or transporting agencies. Allegations of criminal gangs patronised by the ruling party engaged in extortion are common knowledge, and the failure to prosecute them strengthens the suspicion people have of complicity of segments of law enforcement agencies and of political godfathers in the extortion business. Besides, once the goods have reached the market (after payment of extortion money) the bands of criminals controlling the markets determine the price of goods regardless of demand-supply equation. This complete distortion of market and price mechanism is made possible because the ordinary people are held hostage by an infinitesimally small number of criminals whose devilish influence has polluted the entire spectrum of politico-economic space of the country.

Bangladesh, sometimes described as a "landscape of disaster" with a "catalogue of woes," has an urgent need to put its governance back on track to relieve millions of honest and hard working people from being stigmatised as non-performers. So far as the flood is concerned, it provides a golden opportunity to the authorities to prove their commitment to help the people now threatened with death, disease, and deprivation.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

## Don't freeze out Bangladesh



IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi

APPROACHING Dhaka from the air, one is struck by the expanse of water around the capital city. Dispersed habitations dot the flooded delta, the roads in-between are non-existent, the low-lying areas around the city awash with the rampant floods immersing as much as 60 percent of Bangladesh. With food crops in the fields almost all gone, up to 30 million people, about one-fifth of the entire population, have been displaced from their homes. There are signs of the floods abating somewhat, disease more than hunger and starvation may take over, the government says they have 9 million tons of foodgrains in stock. The government is coping as best it can, appeals for help have already been made internationally, a lot is needed and very soon. Bangladeshis are a resilient people, faced with death and destruction by recurring natural and man-made disasters, it is amazing to see how the population adjusts to the ground realities, life goes on for its teeming population. Dhaka city has not stopped to bustle, the traffic jams only increasing in size and duration. Pakistan needs to make an immediate symbolic gesture for flood relief, it will go a long way if a couple of choppers along with relief goods are sent post-haste.

Explaining the on-going peace process between India and Pakistan to select groups of intellectuals, one

was struck by three things: viz (1) the high-level of interest among Bangladesh intellectual circles about the consequences for both Pakistan and Bangladesh, (2) the near unanimous conviction that India was not serious about the "peace process," and (3) if any result was possible, it would be at the expense of Bangladesh. As a Pakistani, one was put in a very unfamiliar role, trying to instil optimism in a sea of scepticism, and in the process defending the Indian position. One was caught up in lively

There was near unanimity in pessimism that India was using the talks for their own purpose and had no intention of a successfully concluding them. The reasons for India's lack of seriousness differed from person to person. A vast majority pointed to the previous track record of India-Pakistan dialogue saying this was reason enough to doubt Indian intentions. While history cannot be ignored, can we afford to pass up this chance of a lifetime to come out from under the constant threat of the

compromise acceptable, however reluctantly, to all the parties in the Kashmir issue, the overwhelming opinion was that it was nice being an optimist, but that both Pakistan and myself were in for severe disappointment. Some felt that Indians would give minor concessions to Pakistan here and there, and given the circumstances Pakistan would be forced to be satisfied with these concessions, India would then isolate Pakistan from Bangladesh and their problems with India, particularly the water

India's penchant for three maritime task forces in the Indian Ocean, one was put in the unusual position of explaining the inordinate Indian rise in defence spending because of arms and equipment purchases planned earlier by the BJP government but payments for which would become due during the current financial year. The new Indian Defence Minister Chidambaram's request for more defence funds was trotted out to show calculated "double-talk" by India. Assurances were sought that

the smaller countries were in danger of being economically overwhelmed because of a flood of Indian goods, commodities, machinery, etc, one agreed what was needed was a qualified SAFTA that would give inherent protection to some key manufacturers in the country, saving Pakistan and Bangladesh from becoming consumer-oriented captive Indian markets.

Given the strong democratic roots in Bangladesh, that Pervez Musharraf was popular was surprising, he has caught the mass imagination by the perception that his strong stance encouraged India to come to the negotiating table, and agreeing to discuss Kashmir as a dispute to be resolved. Nevertheless, there was plenty of criticism about our lack of democracy, Zafarullah Khan Jamali, for some obscure reason, got far more sympathy than is apparent for him in Pakistan. The general feeling of frustration over the continuous "Ladies' War" seems to have evoked the requirement for stability security that any strongman delivers to a country. Had the ageing but agile Gen Hussain Mohammad Ershad's personal life not attracted far more adverse attention that it does, the former President would have benefited far more politically, he still remains a potent democratic entity. While the propaganda about Bangladesh on the way to being a "failed state" is sheer nonsense, what is necessary is good governance, and both the ladies should get on with it, as the incumbent Khaleda Zia needs to get her act together. In Pakistan, we have a presidential system masquerading as a parliamentary one, in Bangladesh we have a parliamentary system being run as a presidential one. For the moment Bangladeshis have to fend off natural disasters and cope with the women-made ones for the foreseeable future.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

**AS I SEE IT**  
**While the propaganda about Bangladesh on the way to being a "failed state" is sheer nonsense, what is necessary is good governance, and both the ladies should get on with it, as the incumbent Khaleda Zia needs to get her act together. In Pakistan, we have a presidential system masquerading as a parliamentary one, in Bangladesh we have a parliamentary system being run as a presidential one. For the moment Bangladeshis have to fend off natural disasters and cope with the women-made ones for the foreseeable future.**

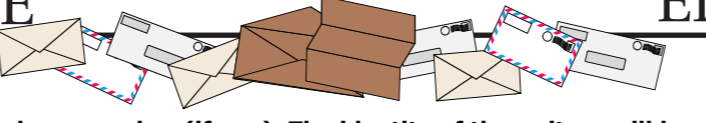
dispute which was of a life and death nature. Any amount of remonstrance that Pakistan saw Bangladesh as a major stakeholder for peace in South Asia and question of being weaned away for any number of reasons from our growing friendship with Bangladesh, transcending by far the mutual feelings gradually lost after the very first year of independence in 1947, cut no ice. We must be careful not to give other nations in South Asia the feeling that the only thing that matters is Indo-Pak rapprochement and that we have no use for the continued friendship of others, particularly Bangladesh.

India's substantial rise in defence spending by the new Indian government's budget was held to cynosure, if the Indians were really serious about peace, they asked, why were they arming themselves so blatantly? Some retired naval officers gave an exhaustive apprehension about

while Pakistan had to give maximum rope to the peace process, we would keep our powder dry.

Bangladeshis faulted Pakistan on the water dispute even though it was pointed out that we were in almost a similar situation and that in their case they had failed to internationalise the dispute. They felt that in negotiating the Indus Water treaty in 1960 under the encouragement/auspices of the World Bank, we had allowed the construction of Farakka Barrage by default. It was patiently explained to them that despite the 1960 Indus Water Treaty, India had unilaterally gone into construction of dams in violation of the subject of present discussions. One had to agree, however, that if India were to expand their ambitious plans to link rivers, make dams and create more catchment areas, it would desertify Bangladesh. Similarly despite the signing of South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA),

## 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.

### The more complex, the more stable

Trying simplistic solutions of complex system disturbs the in built stability and increases instability. The complex human mind is not designed to be treated like a machine, or as a statistical unit. It reacts, and spills over the theories applied by the societies...

What is common between population control (family planning) and the tropical forest (the greenhouse effect)? The advice is to control the family, not the forest.

What is common is the general complexity theory of the ecologists. The more complex a system, the more stable it is. It efforts are made by man to introduce changes to control the system, or to achieve certain goals, then instability will set in, creating more problems.

environment activists, now being supported by powerful North countries, who are asking the developing countries not to cut down or disturb the tropical forests.

This Universe is too vast and too complex for complete human understanding. The vastness and complexity makes the universe so stable. The sun continues to shine, the moon appears as usual for thousands of years, and this earth of ours still exists (a sick, man-made management system).

On the other hand, a small system like a personal garden will die out if left to itself, without maintenance by the gardener; whereas the huge jungles and forests continue to live and thrive merrily for years and years, if left undisturbed, without any external monitoring and assistance (note how wild the grass grows even on the unused city plots).

the earth's atmospheric temperature is said to be due to our tampering with the forests for the materialistic development of the human civilization. This principle may also be applied to government and economics, according to the ideas developed by scientists and economists such as Ehrlick, Hayek, and Friedman.

Other examples tempt us: the breakup of Soviet socialism (communism), the unity of the poor, the struggling West European nations; the trade blocks. Therefore there appears to be no guarantee that man-made capitalism will be safe and stable.

Births and deaths (population of the living creatures, including human beings) take place in highly complex systems in nature, and attempts to control or simplify, or to set some goals through human or artificial means, are likely to create more instability than more stability,

according to the complexity theory.

The size of the family and the human population in the industrialized countries follow a common pattern of smaller families and lower growth rates. Family 'Planning' was indirect in such countries due to many artificially created reasons, such as internal mobility and migration, late marriages, and the invasion by the females of the factories, offices and shops. On the other hand FP as practiced in the under-developed countries is by direct and planned methods.

Studies are needed, spread over several generations, on these plans and controls, and the resulting short-term and long term effects of FP programmes. In contrast, the rapid industrialization has set in a chain of instabilities which the civilization has to tackle in the 21st century. Nations today are armed with nuclear devices destructive enough to destabilize the

vast and complex ecosystem. Combined with the general unstable political climate, we are living in a trigger happy world, waiting for the pressing of one wrong button.

The analytical inputs are far more complex than set out in stray examples above. Solutions are not easy to find, or even the identification of the action strategies. The options and priorities have to be spotted and defined. It pays to learn from errors (the Greenhouse Effect, fast consumer societies, political and economic systems).

This is not possible, as the scientists tell us that it is impossible for the evolutionists to make long-term predictions about the future of the human race ("The Anthropological Principle," the 700-page book written by barrow and Tipler, published in 1988 by the OUP).

The complexity theory has offshoots and side questions. How

about the effect of mass prayers on macro systems? Since control increases instability, the Western world is advocating free market economy; but the messages are coming from tightly guarded economic trade blocks! Where is the inconsistency?

Life is worth living --- at least it keeps us busy, and makes us more complex. Now for the lakh-taka question: have conditions in Bangladesh become so complex that there are glimpses of the signs of stability, according to the theory under review? Time for a pause here, before proceeding further, because, if we are to believe in G Wald, "We are the products of editing, rather the authorship."

AMM Abad  
Dhaka

Dowry  
According to this system, the father

gives the daughter gifts in cash or in kind at the time of wedding. With the march of time, this detested system has taken roots in our society. The dowry system is encouraged by the so-called rich people. Some rich people give a lot of money and other precious things to the husband of their daughters. They think that it will bring peace and happiness for their daughters. However, the bad effects of dowry system are dreadful. Women have suffered both mentally and physically because of dowry. Sometimes they are threatened with divorce.

This is a barbaric practice which should be stopped. So, We, the conscious people have to think over this matter to root out or banish this system from society once and for all.

Zahid Mollik  
Dept of Eng  
Sadat College  
Karatia, Tangail

Asia Cup Cricket 2004 and Bangladesh

No word is good enough to describe the matches in the Asia Cup played by the Bangladeshi Tigers (!?) They really deserve felicitations from the fans! Being a Test-playing country, they at least should have valued their designation. What they performed, in Sri Lanka, is a resplendent show of nonchalance. None among the Tigers showed the strength to dominate over other teams except some sporadic roars. This scattered individual display came to nothing as the eleven players could not work as a team. As a result, the team did not get the touch of a cherished victory. Our balloon of expectation has been punctured after this dismal show.

ABM Shaful Islam  
Dept of English  
Jahangirnagar University