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Hartal

I think it has now become a fashion to write against hartal. We do not even think why the opposition is calling hartal. Like us, opposition parties know that hartal is very much unpopular. But I think they are forced to call hartal time and again. The main opposition party went to parliament and they are still in parliament. But they are not allowed to talk in parliament. The main opposition lost a popular MP Ahsan Ullah Master last year. The top brass of opposition leadership including Sheikh Hasina survived grenade attacks in August. Now SAMS Kibria was killed in a grenade attack. Can those who talk about democracy give any example of such frequent physical attack on the opposition in any democratic country? After any attack, the ruling party

starts to blame the opposition for the attack. As if opposition leaders are trying their best to kill themselves! If the opposition is calling hartal, then the ruling party will tell that they are running after power. If the opposition is seeking power, then why should they kill themselves? The main responsibility to identify the killers rests on the government because they are in power. But they identify the killers before doing any investigation.

So how can we identify the killers? So the killing will continue and the government will continue to blame the opposition for suicidal attacks! And we will have more hartals!

Nafees Ahmed
Dhanmondi
Dhaka

Nepal scene

The Royal Nepal Embassy, Dhaka, Bangladesh organised the celebration of the Democracy Day and King Tribhuvan Jayanti on the 18th of February. As per the ritual we, the students of BUET, including all the Nepalese citizens residing in Dhaka, were invited on the occasion. I was curious to go to the embassy to talk and discuss about the present situation in Nepal. But things were different. A banner explaining the occasion, a framed photo of the late king Tribhuvan, few bouquets of flowers on the table, a few senior diplomats, and a simple offer of morning breakfast. I was just astounded, where are those large number of students who used to crowd the embassy on the previous occasions like the one observed that day?

Every citizen of Nepal is in a serious dilemma at this point of time, to choose between what had been happening and what has been happening. But satisfaction lies nowhere! The politicians have just made us fed-up and the king seems to be getting brutal on the so called insurgents.

To my view, the Maoists and the issue itself have to be addressed in a different perspective.

Umesh Gautam
Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET)
Dhaka

Poor coverage

Our media is not reader friendly. There are huge gaps in analytical coverage on important issues relating to correction of trends and fashion in our rising and changing society. Our leaders are out of date in leading the fast changing new generations, the latter are subtly and indirectly influenced by the richness of the West.

Stark materialism is playing havoc with the ethical and moral boundary conditions. The preachers and the activists are traditional in approach. It is a symptom of the heart ruling a good brains typical weakness of the Bengalees, who have good brains but are not encouraged to use it for the greatest good of the greatest number. We got the gift of the gab, and are carried away with the glib tongue. We are bad listeners; and react too quickly, depending on common sense. Why do we need higher education in colleges and universities. I can anticipate the question lurking behind; why I am being cynical?

Ad hoc passions rule our politics and agitation demonstrations in almost every field. We hardly bother when we are emotional and when to be rational. We are ruled by the mood of the moment. It phlegmatic temperament, as one foreign leader pointed out more than fifty years ago, as I read in a newspaper in Dacca (now Dhaka)?

Perhaps we are self-centred, which is rightly the pastime of the poverty-stricken environment. Surplus money in the wallets loosens the moral approach to things and atmosphere, and materialism

narrows the horizon.

Just before the recent Eid ul Azha, I read a headline in a local daily "goat free offer when you buy a cow" (for sacrifice). How's that? Then what about fatwa on lottery and jua (betting, trying one's some product) market offering?

There is something wanting or missing in the approach to moral issues. The system of education has to be updated, and the style of lectures have to be returned.

There are gaps in the vertical levels of our society, but few activists denounce the flashy trends.

We need more debates on the topic touched upon above.

Aifa Ahmad, Dhaka

Parallel justice

This letter is not in response to the editorial published today (15 February 05), rather an echo of million souls. There is euphoria among general people for returning to relatively safer social environment. Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) has so far successfully fulfilled its mission i.e. reducing the crime-spree, if not eliminating it. In the process of crime elimination, many of the notorious criminals have been killed in "crossfire" or "encounter". However, not everyone is happy about the affair and is terming "crossfire" or "encounter" as extra-judicial killing. Large portions of this section are lawyers including Dr. Kamal Hussain. Ironically, Dr. Kamal Hussain and his fellow lawyers completely failed to bring these criminals to justice. The failure also lies with law enforcers. Constitutional laws have hardly been implemented due to the failures of police and law-practitioners as well as evil influence of politicians. Under these circumstances, the actions of Rab are blessings for common people. It would have never been possible to conduct trials of Picchi Hannan, Ahmadya, David and others, as it was not possible for Sweden Aslam, Subrata Bain etc. Who has the courage to testify against these notorious criminals in the courtroom? Efforts to establish rule of law failed time and again. Sweden Aslam still controls (reportedly) the underworld from the prison. Therefore it is imperative to resort to a parallel justice system— to bring peace and stability. Rab has been extremely careful in target selection and no innocent person has been affected so far. Human rights violation is a far cry when common people had no guarantee for normal death and their lives were full of fear and uncertainty.

Simplification of judicial proceedings is not easy at all. There are some obvious loopholes which can't be eliminated. I have already given some examples above. Furthermore laws are made to give benefit of doubt to defendants so that no innocent man is wrongfully punished.

I would like to thank the Honourable Prime Minister for her bold step. So far Rab has not given any concession to her (seasonal) party followers—we earnestly hope and pray that she will remain steadfast in

her neutral role.

Major Khalid Moinuddin (retired)
from Australia

Is Rab a solution?

A lot has been spoken, written about this. There have been heated debates, and are still going on, about the legitimacy of the Rab's

'crossfire' wrong, it happens accidentally. How can accidents always be the same? The death toll is nearing the 250 mark, which is sparking now the question of human rights violation in the killings. The EU envoy reacted terming them "extra-judicial killings", human rights bodies are always antagonistic about it. One would laugh at point

to be exposed but it happens that the root is never uprooted, some things remain shrouded in mystery.

It is pathetic to say that conditions did not improve rather have deteriorated in spite of the operation of the elite force. It is not understandable why Bangla Bhai is not still captured. Take it or not, the undeclared Lord of the North, the Bangla Bhai,

Asma Kibria expresses her fear at the report of the shifting of her husband's murder case to Rab as they keep everything in dark. The Valentine's Day party is ripped by bomb blasts in the presence of 'tight security'. So should we feel safe in the lap of Rab?

There is one more point. Criminals should be punished but the

'Islamic thinkers'

Strange things are happening since the government's apparent crackdown on Islamist terrorism in very recent days. A senior BNP leader said at the very moment the government crackdown was being announced, that Islamist militancy exists only in the 'foul propaganda' of certain sections of the media. This certainly is odd. What, then, was his own government supposed to be clamping down on?

Stranger still was the statement of the group of Islamic thinkers that appeared in the press. (The Daily Star, February 24, 2005.) It denounced terrorism, including killings and bombings. This by itself is certainly laudable. A number of major questions nevertheless arise.

First, there have been many bombings and grenade attacks in recent times. It is unnecessary to list them all. But these included bombings of traditional cultural functions, such as the jatra. Many cinema houses have been bombed. So have been dargahs of

revered saints. And, least we forget, a number of Ahmadiyya, or Quadiani, mosques have been bombed. These terrorist attacks have killed and maimed many. The Quadianis have been subjected to other forms of oppression, and their fundamental rights trodden. How is it that no Islamic thinker from among the signatories of the present statement spoke out against any of these acts of terror?

Second, some of the signatories of the statement have publicly declared that they aim at establishing a Taliban type of Islamic government in the country. One would like to know how could such a regime be brought about without violence. This actually takes us back to history and deep questions of the ideology that lay behind the creation of Bangladesh, and the role of violent opposition that many an 'Islamic thinker' played during the liberation war.

Finally, the statement calls for punishment of the bombers

and killers according to 'Islamic law'. I should have thought the culprits would be tried under the law of the land. How does any Islamic thinker propose to have them tried under Islamic law when it is secular law that is on the books?

Mahfuzur Rahman
On e-mail

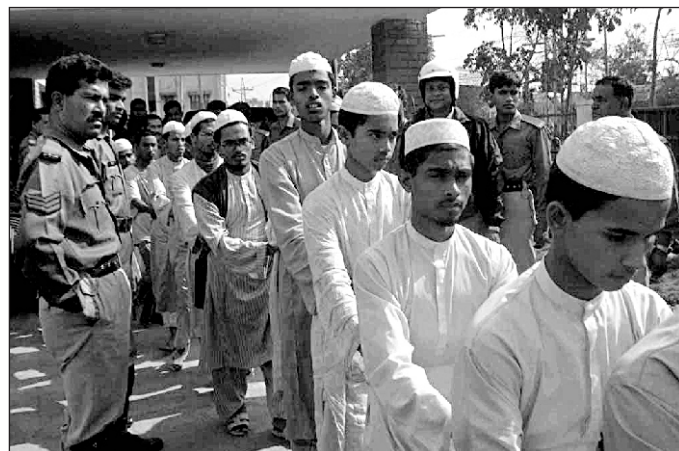
I fully endorse Air Commodore Choudhury's views appearing in your "Opinion" column of 7 February, 2005 and feel the professor from Princeton is far removed from reality. I drove down Cox's Bazar-Teknaf Marine Drive (under construction) for 15 kilometers and did not find a single primary or secondary school. Instead every few kilometres stood a new shiny madrassah. I stopped, whenever possible, to chat with the children who attended the madrassah to learn arithmetic and Arabic free of cost.

I am not against madrassah education. They are at least providing reading, writing and arithmetic to countless chil-

dren who would otherwise be deprived of any education. However, in the absence of an approved curriculum fit for the current age, these madrassahs could be the breeding grounds for 'revolution'. Remember the "Liberation Theology" of Latin American Church? And the recent church funded "Polish Revolution"?

To Dr. Ahmed, blaming western press and racial discrimination etc will not solve our problems. We, the so called enlightened class, should accept reality and set our house in order as the good Commodore suggested. By the way, I agree with Dr. Ahmed that Ambassador Merry Ann was great, so is Ambassador Harry Thomas Jr. He is one of the few who are at ease with the people of Bangladesh at any level. He speaks the language too. His concern about domestic violence and cruelty on women is praiseworthy.

Samiha Zaman
Banani, Dhaka



action. There are some people who are euphoric about their astounding performance of tracking down the criminals. But should we not rethink about this?

A number of criminals are killed in Rab crossfire, every incidence of crossfire is hilariously the same story. If I do not get the term

of human rights violation in the case of punishing the criminals accused of murder, extortion, human trafficking etc. People want the criminals to be punished, so are they by Rab. But as it should be, the criminals should be brought to the existing law undergoing a lawful procedure. The godfathers behind the scene have



PHOTO: AFP

is on the rampage creating panic and anarchy. He has been able to evade the arrest order of the prime minister. The brave elite force fails to nab the mysterious Bhai! The order of the PM fails! SAMS Kibria has been killed when Rab is operating. Their work fails to save a former finance minister of the country.

process should be left to the court. Whatever evidence of misdeeds of the criminals the force has got should be produced before the court to ensure the punishment of the criminals.

Violence begets violence. Who knows, the unsatisfied groups enraged by the killings will not

Buy deshi campaign

The government (in a developing country which is changing fast) is too distracted with political issues and tides, and its policies are mostly short, interim or ad hoc.

In a noisy environment of governance, long-term, background development projects do not get enough time periods for analytical long-term planning, because the governance is stage-managed for political consumption. The focus is on political showmanship, and the front stage is too crowded all the time, while the exercises in the background do not get enough attention for public awareness.

One such topic is the lack of propaganda and publicity tech-

nique to wean away the nouveau rich from the craze of buying foreign goods when equally good quality local products are available. There is an urgent need to start an awareness programme to patronise local products, starting with the items we export.

Today we see that the shops are overflowing with display of foreign good. Even ready-made garment is seen with imported labels and brand names, whereas we export world-class RMG to the US and other zones, and earn 74 percent of the total foreign exchange. Even second-hand clothes are imported, when brand new factory-rejects are

available cheap on the footpaths. Even quality local goods are not purchased by the rich shoppers. The false-label culture is prevailing in Dhaka.

Lately, handloom fashion is coming vogue. We advise our relatives living abroad to take back from Bangladesh (during visits on home leave) hand-made products, which are highly appreciated in the industrialised countries, as the labour cost per hour is high in countries with high standard of living. We have to publicise our culture and goods abroad (note the popularity of the Bangladeshi restaurants in UK, which has changed the eating habits of the English).

We are suffering from a peculiar syndrome of inferiority complex, which is induced by the newly rich families. Some of my local acquaintances avoid going into the air-conditioned shops, and buy most of their requirements for the footpath hawkers and mall hops. Another tendency is that the shops only stock fast selling items, giving no choice to the customers. The publicity culture is weak, and the SMEs cannot afford the publicity campaigns.

The government may encourage some NGOs to pay attention to these awareness campaigns, in collaboration with the chambers of commerce. There are few buyers for quality surplus goods in the market, spe-

cially coming from the cottage and small industries. In fact the whole rural marketing chain is weak, due to the inability of the various cooperative chains to work honestly.

This is not surprising, as our political culture is passing through the same trauma, and the political masters are never at ease, to display their originality in entrepreneurship in fields outside politics. Note the collapse of our jute and sugar industries. The garment workers work under pathetic conditions; the Anti-Corruption Commission and BTRC cannot take off (DS Feb 8); the free-meter culture in the public transport sector is not operating at all. The

thousands of NGO offices cannot be driven from the residential areas to the multi-storied shopping complexes (the upper floors), where enough office space is available. Many public services have been personalised or oriented into cartels. What is the overall systems loss in the civil services?

The list of shortcomings are long, and the patience of the political regimes are short and transient. The political confrontations produce negative outputs like hartal. How to generate public service without remaining in power all the time? The problem is where to start?

AMahasen, Dhaka



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