

In fact, this is the draconian style with which the Rab has been fighting criminals. Around 200 people have died in Rab custody. Though the Rab blames them on the classic excuse -- "crossfire", these are certainly extra-judicial killings, which in effect undermine the judicial process. Like the armed para-militia that used to saunter down the streets of the country immediately after independence, the BNP, it seems, has created an army of licensed murderers, who, given the flimsiest of pretexts, is ready to kill people. Some of the so-called listed criminals, have, in fact, died in the hands of Rab. But if these felons had been brought to justice, secrets might have come out, and presumably, some BNP and AL leaders would have to be punished for patronising terrorists and criminals.

When the Rab was formed over a year ago, the police had already been in disarray due to shameless politicisation and unbridled corruption. And the creation of a parallel force has, in effect, come as a final blow to the police's morale. Most policemen are ill-paid and poorly equipped. Instead of strengthening a traditional force like the police, the BNP government, it seems, is bent on undermining the police's role in keeping peace in the country. In his usual rodomontade, the State Minister for Home (SMH), has provided the Battalion with armoured vehicles; in a grandiose occasion, which



License to Kill: RAB members are thought to have carried out innumerable extra-judicial killings.

can only outmatch the SMH's tall-talks, these tank-like contraptions have been handed over to the Rab. One wonders against whom Lutfozzaman Babar's boys are going to use these armoured vehicles.

The Battalion members are drawn mostly from the Army, Bangladesh Rifles and Police. Within days after its inception, some Rab members were caught extorting money from a businessman in the city. Over 100 Rab men, caught while extorting money, have so far been punished; the highest form of chastisement was - before a new law had been passed - to send the offender back to its mother organisation. The irony does not escape us: the Rab will save us from criminals, but who is going to save us from this so-called elite force?

Immediately before the 2001 general elections the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) published its manifesto, promising to rid the country of the menace of terrorism that the Awami League government had failed to root out. In fact, along with corruption, terrorism towered over other issues in the elections.

After the BNP-led alliance won the elections in an electoral landslide, the law and order situation turned grave. Immediately after the elections, goons, in places BNP-cadres, attacked minority Hindus: women were raped, some of the Hindus were evicted from their houses, and their places of worship vandalised. Though newspapers ran numerous reports, Four Party Alliance (FPA) government claimed normalcy; with a characteristic bombast, the Prime Minister criticised the opposition for maligning the country's image abroad.

In fact in its way to keep the country's image clean, the government arrested Shahriar Kabir and Muntasir Mamun, who were making documentaries on minority



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia