

Private lodge for death row convicts!

A sub-jail that raises many questions

THE government's irrational actions no longer amuse us. The latest in the list of such actions is the lodging of two death row prisoners in a private building that has been "declared a sub-jail." The government decision to lodge two convicted prisoners, charged with anti-state activities instead of keeping them in the condemned cell cannot be rationalised at all. The government has kept the two condemned JMB kingpins in a sub-jail in the city's Mirpur area on grounds that are not only unconvincing, but also untenable under the existing rules. The security of the convicts should be a matter of concern too. This is the first time that a special arrangement has been made for death row convicts.

By law, condemned prisoners are to be kept confined in the specified cells of regular jail. Already there are a number of other condemned prisoners in the special cells of the Central Jail, including those convicted in the killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman. Why this special arrangement now in respect to these two particular JMB leaders?

The arguments put forward by the administration that the place has been duly secured with members of Rab and the police do not hold good. How can a private building with a common entrance located at a place where members of the public can pass freely be considered secure? On the contrary, it appears that these two enemies of the people are being given preferential treatment over the others of the same status for reasons best known to the government. It is reported in the local media that even food for the two inmates is provided from outside the jail in contravention of laws in vogue in this regard.

Although the government has achieved some success in containing terrorism in the country, actions like this raise many questions in the minds of the public as to its overall transparency and sincerity in dealing with terrorism and terrorists. The government simply must display a watertight plan of action and relentless commitment in dealing with the terrorists. When it is a question of state security and the safety of the people, we must not compromise in any way. If anything goes wrong while the two JMB kingpins are "housed" under the existing arrangement, it will be the government and the government alone who will be answerable to the people of the country.

Lebanon's destruction continues

An assertive UN role needed to end hostilities

IN emergency relief coordinator, Jan Egeland, has termed the Israeli air raids on Beirut a clear breach of humanitarian law. The fact that one-third of the dead and wounded are women or children makes it amply clear that the Israeli planes are relentlessly pounding civilian targets. Lebanon has to brace for the worst humanitarian crisis in its history.

Jan Egeland has very rightly emphasised the need for taking up an evacuation and relief program to avoid deaths and destruction on an even larger scale. But there is yet no pressure on Tel Aviv to stop killing innocent Lebanese and thus obviate the relief operation, which of course, is not the answer to the conflict, which has already caused incalculable damage to Lebanon. Worse still, Israel Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has said that hostilities are not going to end quickly, which means Tel Aviv will continue to press on until its military objective is fulfilled, no matter what price Lebanon will have to pay for it.

The point of worry is that Israel's plan has been fully endorsed by President Bush and the country will soon receive a consignment of precision bombs to enhance its firepower. Meanwhile, the UN has adopted the position of an ineffectual observer that can only appeal for peace, while the aggressor remains totally unimpressed and unmoved.

The magnitude of the crisis is so great that people, mostly foreigners, are leaving the country as emergency evacuation from the worst hit areas is going on. Air raids have already destroyed hundreds of buildings and emergency services have been snapped in many places. And all this is happening in the name of fighting terrorism!

That the Israeli response was quite disproportionate to Hezbollah's kidnapping of three enemy soldiers has been established beyond any doubt. Nevertheless, the international community is yet to do anything tangible to protect the people of Lebanon. There was the talk of sending a UN stabilising force, but the fact remains that no worthwhile attempt has been made to stop Israel from waging a totally unjustified war.

Time could be a vital factor if the international community cares for the lives of the Lebanese people. The UN Security Council should immediately convene a meeting and pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire without wasting any more time.

Corruption, corruption everywhere



ANM NURUL HAQUE

BY THE NUMBERS

TIB released its survey report on corruption in Bangladesh on April 20, 2005. The survey report revealed that the people of this country pay an estimated amount of Tk 6,796 crore a year in bribes to the officials and employees of 25 service sector institutions. The amount accounts for roughly 2 percent of our GDP. TIB conducted "Corruption in Bangladesh: A household survey" in 2004, and revealed that every person in this country pays Tk 485 in bribes, on an average, to these sectors.

TRANSPARENCY International, Bangladesh (TIB) in its corruption database 2005 released on July 5, claimed that various ministries of the government embezzled Tk 526.27 crore in 2,128 corruption incidents during the last fiscal year. The local government and rural development (LGRD) ministry topped the list as it alone misappropriated Tk 208.09 crore which was nearly 40 percent of total embezzled money.

Among 47 sectors that came under TIB scrutiny, LGRD, education, police, health and family planning, and private sectors were the top five corrupt sectors, while the secondary education department had the highest incidents of bribery.

The LGRD minister, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, reacting to the TIB report, said that legal action would be taken against the TIB if it does not withdraw its recent report in which his ministry is labeled as the most corrupt. Rejecting the report at a press conference, he said that the TIB report was a

bundle of wrong notions which was prepared with an ulterior motive to portray the country as a dysfunctional and failed state.

The forest and environment minister, Tarigul Islam, was very critical about the survey method and the sources of information that had made up the corruption database that had also labeled his ministry as one of the most corrupt in Bangladesh.

Prof. Muzaffar Ahmed, the chairman of the TIB Trustee Board, also took a strong stance against the adverse reaction of the LGRD minister and said that TIB was ready to face the LGRD ministry legally if and when it files a suit against TIB for publication of its corruption database. At a press conference held on July 12, Prof. Ahmed lamented that both the BNP and AL government have rejected the TIB reports over the past ten years, terming them spiteful to their governments.

TIB's analytical report on corruption revealed that the government suffered a financial loss of Tk 4,130,916,489 in 370 incidents of complain in the year 2004. The report was prepared after analysing 1,754 news items on corruption published in 25 newspapers from January to December 2004. TIB identified the communication sector as the most corrupt accounting for 23.86 percent of the corruption reports in the newspapers. It also identified the tax department, police, forest and environment department and LGRD as other prominent areas of corruption.

Earlier TIB had released its survey report on corruption in Bangladesh on April 20, 2005. The survey report revealed that the people of this country pay an estimated amount of Tk 6,796 crore a year in bribes to the officials and employees of 25 service sector institutions. The amount accounts for roughly 2 percent of our GDP.

TIB conducted "Corruption in Bangladesh: A household survey" to find out the nature of corruption, the broad spectrum, depth, and losses caused by corruption between September 10 and October 24, 2004, in approximately

3,000 households of 55 districts (2,100 households in villages and 900 in towns), and revealed that every person in this country pays Tk 485 in bribes, on an average, to these sectors.

According to the TIB corruption database, over Tk 34,550 crore went down the drain from the public exchequer in the six years since 2000. On the basis of 3,293 newspaper reports scanned during the year 2000, TIB said that the government had faced a loss of Tk 17,192.58 crore. TIB discovered a staggering loss of Tk 11,296 crore in the year 2001 scanning 1514 newspaper reports. The loss of the government was Tk 4,391.67 crore in 2002. It, however, came down below Tk 1,000 crore in 2003 but rose to Tk 413.09 crore in 2004.

Many of our ministers are accused of corruption. The Danish ambassador in Bangladesh brought the charge of corruption against the shipping minister, and the government, and threatened to stop all development assistance from Denmark. Two MPs from the ruling BNP also brought charge of

corruption against the communication minister. But nothing concrete has yet been heard about the inquiry made by the parliamentary standing committee on the CNG import scam in which the communication minister was allegedly involved.

If any proof is needed about the massive scale of corruption in some of the ministries, it has been provided by the latest report carried in The Daily Star on July 20. The report entitled "Corruption at Communications Ministry," prepared on the basis of the investigation conducted by the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Department (IMED), said that the communications ministry inflated a Tk 192 crore road construction project to Tk 349 crore by manipulating all components of the scheme with a view to siphoning off huge development fund.

The corruption reports of TIB should be considered as a tip of the iceberg. Unfortunately, the government has always been in the denial mode whenever corruption charges were raised against some ministries. It is obvious that the government has been soft on those involved, and social justice has been the greatest casualty in the process.

TIB, as one of 85 accredited national chapters of Transparency International across the world, works at national level to raise awareness about the damaging effects of corruption. It advocates policy reform and increased levels of accountability and transparency.

It began its activities as a trust in 1996 and since then has been working as a catalyst for social movement against corruption and for promoting good governance in Bangladesh.

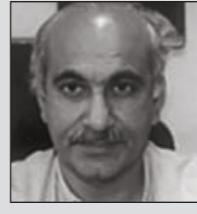
TIB may proceed on the basis of the experience of TI India chapter in their consistent efforts for the enactment of legislations relating to Lok Pal (Federal Ombudsman), Citizens' Right to Information, electoral reforms, declaration of assets, audit of political party accounts, speedy trial of politicians, forfeiture of ill-gotten wealth and attachment of property, in order to minimise the incidence of corruption.

TIB Argentina may also be asked to send information on voter education and accounting of election expenses. It should be the role of the TIB to ensure that the promises made by the political parties in their manifestos, or otherwise, are fulfilled by them.

Bangladesh is to corruption as Brazil is to soccer, so said a British newspaper of the Guardian group, while joking about corruption. Corruption has been so pervasive that Bangladesh has to face such humiliation in the international arena. It is a shame the nation could do away with if the ruling stalwarts, and the privileged, were not corrupt and did not abuse power and position.

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Reinvention is the mother of necessity



M.J. AKBAR

BYLINE

A reshuffle is not the recipe. The UPA government has to reinvent itself. Two years in power have separated the theoretical from the possible, and the possible from the practical. The basic doctrine of the Manmohan Singh government is a common minimum program full of good intentions that no one quite knows how to put into practice. The prime minister needs to reinvent the route map.

GOVERNMENTS tend to begin to lose the plot in the third year of their terms. That is predictable and comes with the calendar. The trouble with Dr Manmohan Singh's government is that more than one plot is meandering out of control. In fact, there are so many plots around, that Delhi is in danger of looking like a colony.

The nuclear deal with America has been a principal focus of the Prime Minister. From 18 July last year, every step along the way has been greeted with relief and applause in Delhi, and all scepticism was brushed aside as prejudice, every question dismissed as bias. When the committees of the American legislatures endorsed the enabling Bill in June, the reception in Delhi's establishment was triumphant. If he has done it once, he has done it a dozen times, but foreign secretary Shyam Saran led the cheers. It was clear to the blind that new conditions had been imposed, but this was airy shrugged off as non-binding. This was the term used.

What were the terms? From January 31 next year, the

President of the United States would provide the US Congress with a report on the rate of production of fissile material useable in nuclear weapons, the assembly of "nuclear-explosive devices" as well as the amount of uranium mined in India. Currently, these are secrets that the Prime Minister is not obliged to share with every member of the Indian Cabinet, and indeed does not. But from next year, we were ready to share it with every member of the US Congress! The deal needs annual approval, and that approval is dependent on Congress getting this report. I may be short of the kind of IQ required to run the government of India, but one hopefully has basic common sense. What is non-binding about this condition?

The American President also

has to tell his legislatures what he has done to "encourage India to identify and declare a date by which India would be willing to stop production of fissile material." What could be more specific than this? Other voices, including that of secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, have confirmed that America does not recognise India as a nuclear-weapons state and that

this deal is a process by which India's nuclear capability can be monitored and kept under control. The exact phrase used by the US Congress is "reduction and eventual elimination."

It soon became evident, that not only were the conditions binding, but the binding was going to begin pretty soon. According to a commitment given by Dr Manmohan Singh to Parliament, India would not accept inspections until all restrictions had been removed. That sequence has been turned upside down. The inspections come first. But the triumphalism of Delhi did not wane.

Suddenly, on the eve of Dr Singh's visit to St. Petersburg in late July, word was put out that he would express some reservations about the deal to President Bush when the two met. What happened in the three weeks between Delhi's welcome to the House committee conditions and Dr Singh's visit to St. Petersburg?

In terms of public perception, the most important event was the anger of the scientists who had fathered our nuclear program, and the support they received from those who were still serving but

could not, by the terms of their employment, speak out. Dr Homi Sethna cannot be accused of being partisan, or of bias, or ignorance. Ditto Dr P.K. Iyengar, another former chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. Suddenly, they were not alone. But the Prime Minister has ignored criticism before, unwavering in his conviction that this is the agreement that will protect the nation in the foreseeable future. He also surely sees it as a historical achievement (as probably does the Bush administration, although for entirely different reasons).

The most credible assumption is that President Abdul Kalam has either written to, or had a word with the Prime Minister, and that Dr Singh carried to Bush not his own concerns but the President's concerns. President Kalam has built up extraordinary credibility within the country, winning the affection of its children and the trust of its adults. There is nothing false about his humility, nothing artificial about his simplicity. If our presidential elections were direct, rather than indirect, President Kalam would be re-elected by a substantial margin. Add to this his professional reputation.

The nuclear deal is the key element of a foreign policy that is drifting in the shallows. The government has lost the plot on economic policy and domestic security as well, as is apparent from any day's headlines. The Natwar Singh episode indicates that the government even tends to lose its balance. After months of completely disproportionate harassment in the name of investigation, and more than one jolly trip abroad, the authorities have found nothing. It is

probable that the Pathak enquiry commission will exonerate both Mr Singh and his son very soon. The Prime Minister still cannot find a replacement for a foreign minister

who could hold his own, and has no response to faintly-disguised taunts from Islamabad on the subject.

What should a government do when it has lost its way? Actually, the simplest solution is to stand still and ask for directions, but governments are terrified that they might be caught doing the obvious thing. Complication is more their style.

A reshuffle is not the recipe. The UPA government has to reinvent itself. Two years in power have separated the theoretical from the possible, and the possible from the practical. The basic doctrine of the Manmohan Singh government is a common minimum program full of good intentions that no one quite knows how to put into practice. The prime minister needs to reinvent the route map. We all want economic growth with a human face, as it was quaintly called. But more attention should have been paid to the contours of the human face. Words are used at the highest levels of government, with no effort to flesh them out. You get the sense that the partners in this coalition do not have a common agenda, but a dozen private ones -- including saving up for that very rainy day called a sudden general election.

The politics of options has begun two years before it should.

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A deceased Emperor makes a comeback over Yasukuni

CLOSEUP JAPAN

As it is said, in politics there is seldom an issue that gets buried permanently. Yasukuni, too, made a comeback to the political debate after it was revealed in 1978 that the grand priest of the shrine secretly enshrined the souls of 14 convicted war criminals who were tried, and found guilty, for crimes against the nation as well as against Japan's neighbouring countries.

MONZURUL HUQ

In Japan there seems to be no end to the ongoing debate over the rationality of honouring the country's convicted war criminals, along with thousands of innocent citizens who gave their lives in past wars to protect the motherland from external and, at times, internal enemies. All such souls are now enshrined in one of Shinto religion's holiest shrines situated in the heart of Tokyo, and the issue has become a subject of intense debate in recent years, both within Japan and in neighbouring countries that had once come under Japanese occupation.

Yasukuni is not an old shrine compared to many other Shinto religious sites in Japan. The shrine was built after the Meiji restoration

of 1868 to honour those who dedicated their lives for the restoration of imperial power that eventually opened the doors to Japan's modernisation. The names of the other war dead were included in subsequent years as state Shinto gradually became an effective tool for fostering nationalist fervour that the then leadership considered essential for making Japan a significant player in the world stage. Then came the turmoil of 1945 and as Japan's unconditional surrender paved the way for the separation of state and religion, Yasukuni lost much of its significance. But not for too long, as subsequent events clearly show.

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after it was revealed in 1978 that the grand priest of the shrine secretly enshrined the souls of 14 convicted war criminals who were tried, and found guilty, for crimes against the nation as well as against Japan's neighbouring countries.

We also know that, like dead political issues, politicians long dead and gone at times make spectacular comebacks to rock their own, and also other nations, over highly debated issues. The ghost of Stalin or that of Hitler might be seen as leading examples that still haunt many in some parts of the world. And when the debate gets overheated, the dead souls are all that we hear about. The never-ending political debate in Bangladesh surrounding the crucial issue of who gave the leadership during the War of Liberation

Japan's conservative politicians and academics, some of whom would like to see a revival of what they consider to be the country's glorious past and see Yasukuni as an effective tool for realising that goal.

The main argument they often cite to justify the position is that the military tribunal that was formed to try the wartime leadership vindictively identified Japan as the only evil in the Asian continent, ignoring the fact that what Japan did in Asia was a mere repetition of the evil acts long practised by Western powers.

The recently uncovered memo

showing that Emperor Hirohito apparently held a different view places such an argument in extreme difficulty, and its proponents are now seeking ways to prove that what had been mentioned in an old and worn out memo is not in line with the reality of present day Japan. But, as the matter is now being debated extensively in the Japanese media, it is definitely not going to be an easy task for the conservatives to outrightly reject the contents of the memo as being totally irrelevant.

The memorandum, written by a former Imperial Household Agency

Grand Steward Tomohiko Tomita, quoted the emperor as saying that he did not visit the Yasukuni Shrine since the controversial decision to enshrine convicted war criminals, because his heart did not approve of it. Family members of late Tomita kept the memo, which was written on April 28, 1988. Although Emperor Hirohito visited the Yasukuni shrine eight times after the end of World War II, he never set foot in the shrine after the Class-A war criminals were included in the list of those venerated there.

Emperor Hirohito died in January, 1989, and his displeasure about the enshrinement of war criminals had been known from testimonies of former close aides. But it is for the first time that a recorded memo has been cited as solid proof of what had long been said and known. It should be mentioned that the current emperor, Akihito, too, has never visited the shrine since he ascended the throne.

The memo sparked controversy