

The Relief Thieves

THE headlines in the newspapers these days never cease to shock the readers. Sometimes they are downright embarrassing. The huge amount of relief goods -- essential items that could have saved more lives or helped to ease the suffering of victims of natural disaster - seized by law enforcers from the dens of deputy ministers, MPs and their minions, is a sickening reminder that corruption has no limits and that for the corrupt, there is no end to greed.

It started with the news of law enforcers carrying out a raid on former MP Mosaddek Ali Falu's cement factory, which happened to be made with corrugated tin stolen from relief supplies. Even the seals saying that they were for relief purposes were still on the iron sheets which would have been used to rebuild homes devastated by floods or cyclones.

After this startler came a whole lot more. One after the other the law enforcers raided houses and buildings owned by stalwarts of the immediate past ruling party and discovered hordes of relief items.

Corrugated sheets for relief purposes seem to be the favourite item to be stolen and horded. These essential relief items were found in the village home of former deputy minister for land Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu in Natore and from a college established by former BNP lawmaker from Shujanagar upazila in Pabna, Selim Reza Habib.

Forty-four pieces of the CI (corrugated iron) sheets were found in the house of former deputy minister for land Ruhul Quddus Talukder at Ramshakazipur village under Naldanga upazila. They had been used in the veranda of his drawing room, the shallow water pump room and the employees' quarter. The law enforcers could not find the former deputy minister there.

It gets a little hackneyed after that with more and more of these corrugated sheets found in various BNP bigwigs. In Pabna 342 CI sheets were found from the educational institution established by former BNP lawmaker from Shujanagar upazilla in Pabna, Selim Reza Habib. Naturally the MP was not to be found. There were more such discoveries in Barguna, from the house of UP Chairman of Sreebordi upazila and union BNP President, from a college in Nilphamari established by a former BNP lawmaker,

The army-led joint forces arrested former BNP lawmaker Helaluzzaman Talukder Lalu from his house in the Bogra town on charge of corruption and then raided a nearby house, reportedly owned by BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman.

A huge amount of government relief materials and 11 wireless sets was recovered from the house of Lalu after his arrest.

Lalu, of course has a history in such criminal activities. He was involved in the Bogra wheat scandal in August, 2002. He put pressure on the food department officials at that time to purchase rotten wheat. The then prime minister apparently just scolded him.