

## Eating poisonous fish

Break their chain of operations

THE government must be commended for its action against the fish vendors who are playing with the lives of the people by using harmful chemicals to make the fish appear fresh. Very rightly, exemplary punishments have been meted out to some of the culprits on the spot.

Fish is a favourite diet of the Bengalis and a good source of protein, but not cheap any longer. And even those with meager means would like to have fish on his or her plate as often as possible. To poison an easily accessible source of protein is a criminal act of the most unpardonable nature.

What we are not able to rationalize, however, is that it is not that treating fish with formalin is a new phenomenon among the immoral fish traders. The unscrupulous fish merchants have been resorting to this practice for a long time. Many reports on the matter have appeared in the media in the past. One wonders what took the authorities so long to act decisively. We cannot accept the argument that requisite instruments to test the fish were not available so long. When people are going to the moon it seems that lack of chemical testing equipment seems rather a trite argument to offer. It is a legitimate question to ask as to who will pay for the damages done to the people who have been ingesting the very harmful chemical over the years.

We would hope that this would not be a one-off action, that it would be a continuous drive to ensure that those that indulge in such harmful practices are put behind bars. There is no doubt that a strong syndicate is involved in this business. We know too that most of the formalin-treated fish come from a particular country and a particular region of Bangladesh. Thus a constant vigil is the need of the time if the country is to be saved from being slowly poisoned by some of our own people. Action should be taken not only to make people aware of the dangers but also to ensure that all the fish that enter the market all-over the country are free of the chemical. This is a big ask indeed. But for a start why not restrict the sale of formalin or exercise a very stringent oversight on its sale?

## Deterrent punishment to the guilty

Time to save the coastline from grabbers

AND-GRABBING like occasional land recovery, with the magnitude of the former far outstripping the latter, hardly ever made any inspiring news up until the other day. With stiffer administration and no political axe to grind, ratio of land reclamation to land expropriation is now something to write to home about.

Take this as a sample and you cannot but be greatly heartened by the change of scenario. In a massive drive by the joint forces and local administration the government has recovered 1486 acres of forest land from a band of 15 grabbers from Sonadia island in Cox's Bazar lately. The challenge of course is to retain them in government possession with strong legal underpinnings.

Remoter the land area more convenient is the prospect for grabbing and keeping it by illegal documentation. In this case, the illegal occupants have been using this land for more than five years for shrimp and salt farming by shearing of the mangrove forest. Concocted lease agreements have been managed under what authority -- the land ministry, forest department or what?

So powerful were the vested rackets of government officials, political leaders and other influentials that land gobbling and indiscriminate destruction of forests became the order of the day in the Cox's Bazar coastal areas which turned out to be the happy hunting ground for shrimp cultivation. Millions in government revenue were denied. They would defy forest department cases and even court verdicts couldn't deter them from going about their business. It is time to deal with them with an iron hand.

Not only the expropriators of the people's land should be meted out exemplary punishment and the respective ministries should get back their lands for the protection of environmental balance in the country, a data-based pattern of land administration, management and utilisation will have to be evolved before it is too late for irreversible climatic changes to set in.

## Take care, caretaker government



SHAHNOOR WAHID

## SENSE &amp; INSENSIBILITY

**T**hat is why we began with the words: take care and be cautious. You have a long way to go. You cannot afford to let go at this stage. The dragnet has to be made bigger to cover the entire country. The list must include everyone, irrespective of power, position and identity. But while you do all these do take care, because everyday the number of your enemies is increasing. Strengthen your hands with legal and moral power, and that is the best way to take care. Your advantage is -- you have the people's mandate. So, good luck.

ing armour, chasing vicious groups of smugglers, arms dealers, heroin dealers, militants and state property looters.

You have already netted many big fishes, and we expect to see some more going down soon. Therefore, you have no way to turn back now. You know you shall have to finish what you have started, because if you leave it half-way then that would mean disaster for the nation.

But, while going after them, we are sure you have kept this in mind that these people that you are after are ferocious, violent and devoid of any qualms, and they do not operate in isolation.

Their networks cover the entire region, having connections with similar groups in almost all the countries in South-East Asia and even beyond. Collectively, they have more money than you have at your disposal, and they can

spend in terms of millions of dollars to keep their illegal trade going on without interruption.

Respected chief adviser and council of advisers, so long we have been talking about some criminals who operate big mafia networks in the region. Now we want to talk about yet another group of people who live in Bangladesh, in our midst.

We are sure that, by now, your intelligence agencies have submitted secret files on these people. These are the extremely corrupt civil and police officials who have been willingly working as tools or lackeys of the past governments.

These have been party to many excesses done by the past MPs and ministers and their party goons in blatant violation of all laws, decorum and ethics. Where are they today? Have they sud-

denly vanished, or turned into saints overnight?

We, the common people, do not have any intelligence agency at our disposal, but we have our own ancient method of doing some probing. That is why there is a common understanding among us that a great majority of these officials maintain secret liaison with the local and regional mafia groups to protect their unholy interest in the country? They know very well who use mafia money and guns to keep their power base intact, so that they could go on exploiting the common people and looting public property.

These suave, literate, highly intelligent officials are dangerous enemies of the state, as they hover around the hub of administration while in service. And after retirement they conveniently join a political party to continue their

**Y**ES, the time has come to utter it loud and clear addressing the caretaker government in power... do take care, sirs. It is a well-meaning and friendly advice coming from the common people who want to see you succeed in your endeavors. It is immensely important for you to succeed for them so that they can have respectability back in their lives.

To be candid, you have raised their expectation level to a greater height, and it is likely that they will start to ask for more. Because, it is after a gap of many years that they are enjoying decency, propriety and rule of law in almost all the sectors at the moment in the country. They are hoping to be treated as human beings once again by those who will govern the country in future.

Therefore, take all the care and be cautious when you are galloping down the dark forests in shin-

ing

ing