

## Elitism and irreverence



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE Daily Star has once again editorially commented on the issue of deaths in the so-called 'crossfire' in which the elite law enforcement outfit of RAB has been involved. One was under the impression that the largely untenable deaths in the 'crossfire' have come to an end. However, some more deaths in recent times in conditions that cannot be satisfactorily explained stand out as a sad reminder of the follies and failings of our politico-administrative institutions.

It is not for the ordinary or gullible members of the public to take a deep look at such extra legal killings because their concern is one of immediate relief from the depredations of the local bully or the entrenched tormentor. However, a civilized government cannot be a prisoner of such damaging retrograde thoughts. A very significant

### STRAIGHT LINE

The crisis of our law and order situation has not sprouted overnight and as such the solution will not be instant. The creation of so-called composite elite force and the dubious desperado action indulged may succeed in temporarily keeping some terrorists on the run and the authorities may get some credit from unsuspecting public on this count but the real problem will remain in situ with roots and branches.

aspect which demands serious attention is that the so-called terrorists killed in the crossfire were in fact politically patronized and blessed. As a result, there is no guarantee that such killings will prove positive as has been implied in some utterances.

One may remember that the "operation clean heart" also resulted in the extra-legal killings of identified terrorists and criminals and that too happened after only one year of assumption of power of a civil government. The law and order or crime situation did not register much of a change for the better. In fact, extra-judicial killings have not succeeded in controlling crime anywhere in any country. Crime and terrorism do not cross the bearable limit on its own. There are always cogent and credible factors behind such abnormalities. One needs to probe into those with the concern of a protector. Extra-judicial killings

cannot be a sensible alternative proposition.

If as a civilized nation we expect our regulatory institutions including the police to regularly brush up their professional skills then we cannot be a party to willy-nilly facilitate the creation of a scenario wherein one would be willing to believe that those perpetrators of crime who cannot be brought under the law have to be dealt beyond the law. Needless to mention here that in such an assumption lies the suicidal admission that the criminal justice administration of a democratic polity have failed to act and the state has forsaken one of its primary functions.

Since no right-thinking Bangladeshi would reconcile to such a scenario that smacks of a failed government they have a duty to find out why some organs of the state have to resort to apparent vigilante action. The nation needs to know if law-enforcement per-

sonnel are deliberately deviating from the statutory directives in anti-crime operations.

Eulogizing or praising the 'crossfire actions' has created a worrying environment wherein result-oriented investigating officers are increasingly getting inclined to resort to short-cut methods to please official boss or the political masters. The worrisome part is the threat to put an alleged criminal or an ordinary suspect under the so-called 'crossfire scenario' in order to gratify ulterior motives.

Since most crossfire deaths are not seriously pursued for establishing the suspected culpability, the culprits in the enforcement and investigative apparatus discover a macabre win-win situation in such patently illegal acts. Elements of accountability and fear recede into background and investigation by the book becomes a pathetically low priority. Professionally speak-

ing, this is an instance of heightened jeopardy because in Bangladesh the crime fighting machinery already stands accused of not cultivating a scientific modus-operandi and quite often relapsing into the untenable third-degree methods.

The question is, do we want sustained laborious action under the law to strengthen our democratic foundation or do we need rash desperate action without the cover of law? The crossfire actions, undoubtedly, do not fit in with the first proposition. We need to be absolutely clear about that.

The ultimate punishment in the alleged 'crossfire' about whose credibility many are not convinced, appear as summary response from desperate executives of law enforcement machinery. The legality of actions leading to such extreme action apart, any responsible citizen might like to know if in our often over-zealous

anti-crime operations, we are just treating the symptoms without venturing to study and assess the objective conditions promoting criminality. We do not need sociologists and criminologists to tell us that present-day crime is a complex social phenomenon caused by a multiplicity of factors and determining culpability is an extremely mind-exacting task.

Everyday life experience tells us that quite often the fun-seeking delinquency of yesteryears turn into uncontrollable don of the day due to the patronage of powerful quarters and the unexplained inaction of the enforcement outfit. Therefore, when deaths occur in the so-called 'crossfire' some myopic elements may be satisfied but a civilized society which wishes to live by the canons of law cannot but be concerned.

The alleged deaths in 'crossfire' are forestalling the benefits of thorough investigation wherefrom the citizens could have known the pathetic as yet compelling factors behind the growth and maturing of criminals, the shady role of the patrons and the alleged inertia of the regulatory units.

The fact that successive governments have failed to put any effective brake on unlawful activities in the sensitive sectors raises disturbing doubts about the sworn commitments to control crime and

corruption. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for the worried public to believe that the fearsome deaths in the 'crossfire' should be the preferred alternative. Spectacular but dangerous palliatives cannot understandably be the substitute of painful sustained action.

What we need is adequate provision of witness protection and victim support in the criminal justice administration. To make those effective we need large injection of governmental funds. Any further delay will only swell the ranks of summary-justice seekers and the admirers of vigilante action. The decapitating adversity of the victims of crime demand mainstream support of the system.

Sadly enough, we now have misguided citizens and law enforcers in our midst who think that if a criminal is known, whatever be the process of such identification, there is not much harm in doing away with such element for the good of the society. Little do they realize that their logic is queer because in such eventuality the worst criminal on earth can also justify the blackest crime on the pretext of good motive.

If the government, in the persons of law-enforcers becomes law-breaker, it breeds contempt for law. To declare that the government may commit crimes to ensure

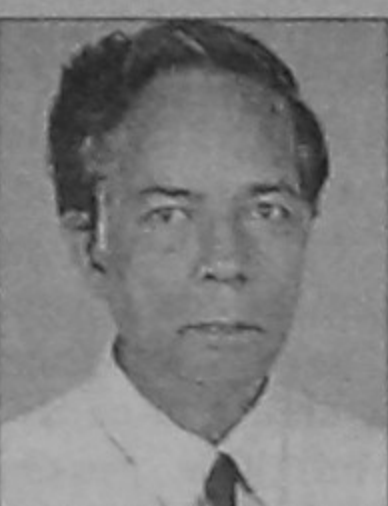
punishment of criminals would invite terrible retribution. The objective of the civilized government is not to score points or play to the gallery but to ensure that justice shall be done. Law is the means and justice is the goal.

The crisis of our law and order situation has not sprouted overnight and as such the solution will not be instant. The creation of so-called composite elite force and the dubious desperado action indulged may succeed in temporarily keeping some terrorists on the run and the authorities may get some credit from unsuspecting public on this count but the real problem will remain in situ with roots and branches. The residue of large scale violations of human rights by the guardians would be a shameful and painful memory to live with. It is time to ensure an effective halt to this continuing dark episode of our enforcement operations.

Howsoever facile the sound bits of the politicians may appear, we have to remember that we cannot defend the liberal principles of a democratic society by cultivating and encouraging a medieval prejudice. Therefore, a law enforcement outfit which takes pride in its being an elitist organization cannot be irreverent to the rule of law.

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## Domestic violence: Society must protect the victims



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE gruesome, killing of Fahmida Akhtar Nazma, a young housewife by her husband Dr. Tozammel Hossain, a physician of the orthopedic hospital in the city, at their Mirpur residence, on July 6 last has stunned the whole nation once again. Dr Tozammel, it was learnt from newspaper reports as revealed by police investigations, had extra-marital relations with his elder brother's wife living close to his house. It was also revealed through an FIR lodged by Nazma while she was alive that her husband drank regularly and was abusive and that she had found more than one woman as his paramour. Sadly true, Nazma was done to death in the most barbaric manner as she protested against her husband's extra-marital affairs.

Beating, rape, acid burning of young housewives and college

going girls are the images of violent crimes generally associated with the most depraved individuals in the country. Because of the increasing and sickening frequency, no one is shocked any longer to hear of such atrocities.

The story of some depraved husbands killing their protesting wives for their extra-marital affairs is not new in this country. Years before Dr. Iqbal and Munir were hanged to death by the verdict of the highest court for killing their wives. But in a media-driven environment such macabre incidents of private distress is often catapulted into the public arena.

Not only in the cities and towns of Bangladesh but also in the villages, terror has come stalking. And the weapon of fear is not only the gun but a can of petrol or kerosene or a matchstick. A woman on fire has made dowry deaths the most vicious of social crimes. It is an evil prevalent in the society and despite efforts by some activists and women's rights organizations

to eliminate this menace, the number of victims has continued to rise.

In villages of this country marriage was once considered a very sanctified bond united in the worst or best of times, in sickness or in health through the vicissitudes of fortune. But dowry related deaths have shattered that bond of peaceful and happy relationship. Reports published in the newspapers in the recent past indicated that in Lakhmipur in the greater Noakhali district, a pregnant housewife was burnt to death. Another report suggested that a young housewife was put in shackles and tortured brutally for dowry. A recent survey by the Bangladesh 'Ain o Salish Kendra' revealed that in the last six months from January to June this year 179 women were subjected to domestic violence in which 112 wives were killed by their husbands in collusion with their in-laws that included 99 housewives killed for dowry.

The killing of Reema, Sonia, Sathi, Jayanti Reza, Shanta and

Rehana by their husbands for protesting against the latter's extra-marital affairs and the more recent killing of Sadia Rahman by her police husband in March and of Nazma by her doctor husband early this month have left citizenry wondering if education and affluence have anything to do with societal progress and behavioural pattern. Reports appearing in local dailies on June 27 last indicated that Sonia, a charming young girl and a student of Eden Girls' College was married to Morshed Alam Chowdhury Khokon in 2001.

A few days after the marriage, he asked Sonia to bring four lakh taka from her father that he would use to start a business. Morshed started torturing Sonia as she initially refused to approach her family for such a hefty sum of money. Traumatized by years of physical abuse, Sonia informed her father of the torture and humiliation she was suffering when her father met Morshed's demand in full by selling his landed property.

But Morshed's greed was insatiable. He demanded another two lakh taka and this time Sonia refused to approach her parents and consequently faced further battering by her husband and in-laws. After learning about the cruel torture she was suffering, Sonia's parents brought her along with her 5-year old son Sourav to their house. But the end came on the fateful morning of February 13 last year when she was abducted on her way back from college and was taken to Morshed's house forcibly. She was beaten black and blue by her husband and in-laws and at one stage she was stabbed in her belly. Sonia succumbed to her injuries while under treatment at hospital.

Sonia's father Khairul Alam, a resident of Shyampur area of the city lodged a murder case in the Shyampur thana implicating Morshed and her parents. All the members other than Morshed now freed on bail are threatening Sonia's parents to withdraw the

case or face dire consequences.

On the other hand, with the death sentence awarded to Jayanti's killer husband Azam Reza Chowdhury by the lower court now commuted to life imprisonment by the High Court, Jayanti's relations are now thinking of preferring an appeal to the Supreme Court.

A recent survey conducted by the Bangladesh Women's Council has called for a social movement in the present context of 49 per cent of the housewives being subjected to persecution at home. Unhappily, sensible citizenry in the country hang their head in shame when they learnt that Bangladesh ranked second in respect of women repression in the world crime graph after Papua New Guinea.

Criminologists and crime assessment wing of the government and some NGOs assert that crime rate among the youth, especially such deviant young husbands has gone up by as much as 40 per cent. The survey makes particular mention of the fact that there is a noticeable increase in dowry related crimes by young husbands from middle class and upper middle class families. The sudden affluence that has emerged, both in rural areas and in the cities, over the last one decade is considered as one of the primary factors.

The money, as social scientists

say, was not channelled productively. For instance, instead of being used to enhance women's education and provide women's employment, for social change, it was used to perpetuate ostentatious life styles. With "get rich quick" becoming the new goal in life, dowry became one of the perfect instruments for upward material mobility. Growing consumerism, flashy life styles and, in most cases, joblessness and drug addiction are fuelling these crimes.

Unhappily, there exists a toothless attitude in a majority of the modern families who participate in dowry based marriages instead of opposing them. People talk glibly about dowry prohibition and anti-dowry movement but when it comes to the wedding of their own sons and daughters, most people would indulge in the vice themselves, too. For women it is still a difficult battle to win. They are handicapped by history, victims of a firmly embedded gender system.

More intriguing, in most cases girls do not have any knowledge of or participation in the deal. Dowry is often a monetary deal between two men -- the bride's father and the groom. Despite the promulgation of Acid Control Act 2002 and Dowry Prohibition Act, the number of dowry related violence is climbing up. Eminent social scientists have rightly pointed out that a big

social movement is a must to stop this giving and taking of money. The law may help taking temporary punitive action, but later women would need real social and ideological support to stand firmly against an age old system that has almost got an unwritten societal sanction.

Women face double peril. Inside the barred doors it is humiliation, outside there awaits public ire. Harassed and tortured women are now going to court or police for protection. But even if appeals for protection are met, only scorn greets them when they return home. Despite every stigma, dowry continues to be the signature of marriage in Bangladesh. No doubt the laws remain stringent, but a dowry death is a relatively easier crime than murder to prosecute and so the crime continues. And a majority of the victims belong to the under privileged classes and they have hardly any means to fight out the lengthy legal battles. While court appearance and seeking police protection in all these types of torture and violence by husbands and in-laws appear to be a traumatic experience, most women prefer to sweep their bitter experience under the carpet, even to die in silent protest. Their strength must come from the society and the government.

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## Geographic information -- a development imperative

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GEOGRAPHIC Information System (GIS) is a particular form of information system which uses information referred by geographical co-ordinates. As GIS technology possesses increased processing power, it is being increasingly used across the world. Since the beginning of 1970s, the developed world has successfully used GIS for natural, physical and human resources development and management programmes (Rashid and Ali, 1997).

In the third world, by this time, GIS has entered different degrees of use and is at different stages of development. The use of GIS in Bangladesh has started in 1991. The status of GIS varies from country to country in terms of the extent of application. This attempt aims at elucidating the present status of GIS activities in Bangladesh along with its importance and urgency in the present context of the country.

### Importance

GIS is playing an active role in identifying and paving the way for solution of different spatial problems. It is designed to store and manipulate data relating to locations on earth's surface. Its major advantage is that it can read and analyse different layers of spatial information in the form of maps and satellite images easily and allows identifying the spatial relationships. Estes (1992) indicated that GIS can facilitate access to information, creation, updating and modification of maps; improve the ability to develop scientific models and operational resource management tasks; enhance graphic display of complex phenomena; and provide tools for enhancing decision-making.

### Rationale for use in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is one of the overpopulated countries of the third world with an area of only 147,570 sq km that has a very limited resource base and a very low land-man and resource-man ratio. The explosion of population has, in fact, become a major obstacle on the way to development planning. At the same time the physiographic features, morphology, geological structure, location and other natural settings have combinedly made the country, vulnerable to disasters and environmental hazards on one hand, and stored possibilities for development on the other. The major elements in these processes include severe floods, cyclones and storm surges, drought, abnormal rainfall, nor'westers, tornadoes, river bank erosion, alluvion-diluvion, landslide, saline intrusion, industrial and urban pollution, deforestation, ecological imbalance, effect of global warming etc (Pramanik, 1994).

Under these circumstances, most spatial problems could be analysed and mapped using GIS with the help of available traditional data sources to make sure of the optimum use of resources and thus move towards sustainable development. There are many sources of maps available here which could be used for environmental mapping, resource monitoring and appraisal in GIS format. The sources include thana map, Survey of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Water Development Board, Master Plan Organisation, Bangladesh Small Area Atlas, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority, Soil Resource and Development Institute, Local Government and Engineering Department, University of Dhaka, SPARRO, etc.

GIS is now going to complete two decades of its arrival in Bangladesh. It will not be unfair to say that the state of GIS in Bangladesh is far below that in the developed world, even in many developing countries, in terms of application areas, expertise, popularity, number of installations and institutional strength. But a flourishing technology like GIS and its development is an urgent need for a low lying disaster-prone, overcrowded and underdeveloped country like Bangladesh for converting her burden of vast population into human resource and for resource management.

### Application in developed world

To evaluate the present status of GIS in Bangladesh, we should know first about its use in the developed world and at the same time compare the status between the developed world and Bangladesh in terms of application areas, expert and instrumental adequacy.

However, GIS application in the developed world can be shown under different headings as the following:

Academic areas: GIS is applied to research in humanities, science and engineering; primary and secondary schools, school district definition; facilities management; bus routing; spatial digital libraries and education planning.

Business: GIS is applicable to banking and insurance; real estate development project planning; sales and renting services; building management; retail and market analysis and delivery of goods and services.

Government: GIS plays its role in national topographic mapping; population census; election and voting; international development and humanitarian relief; natural resource management including water resource management, timber harvest management, wildlife habitat studies, sustainable development, public land management, land registration, property assessment, forest management, mining and mineral exploration.

Natural hazard analysis: GIS is

used in cyclone, storm and hurricane track study; global warming; air, noise and water pollution; environmental impact study; flood warning; flood depth mapping; disaster management; analysis of hazards and disaster with other thematic information and spatial pattern of risk from disasters.

Urban management: GIS contributes to planning, tax assessment, crime analysis, community policing, electricity and gas distribution, pipelines, telecommunication networking, electrical facilities automation and fire fighting.

Transport networking security and defence: GIS helps in route selection, public transit, vehicle tracking, military training, intelligence gathering, homeland security, law enforcement and criminal justice. For example, fire department, using GIS, enhances its routing capabilities to ensure rapid response in emergencies. The military uses GIS to determine the appropriate battle plan and organise troop movements.

### Setting off GIS in Bangladesh

GIS technology made its beginning in Bangladesh in 1991 through ISPAN (Irrigation Support Project for Asia and the Near East) for the FAP-19 (Flood Action Plan-19) Project. The organisation is now named as EGIS (Environment and GIS support projects for water sector planning). At the beginning there were only a few GIS installations, most likely numbering nine, in Bangladesh. Besides, the use of

GIS was confined to the government offices only. There was extreme lack of GIS experts and personnel. Most of the GIS installations were run by foreigners. As a result, GIS use in Bangladesh was essentially expensive. LGED (Local Government Engineering Department) was first to use it in its different operations.

### Present application in Bangladesh

Now GIS is being used in Bangladesh in planning and development purposes both in public and private sectors. At present there are more than 30 installations in the country and about half of them are operational (Rashid and Ali, 1997). Most of the GIS installations here are donor assisted and still operated by foreign experts with limited home personnel. Yet, recently a number of government and private institutions have installed GIS with their own finance and are utilising it for various purposes including resource management, research, policy and decision making etc.

GIS is now being used to generate readily accessible information on the land resources of the country for researchers, extension workers and decision-makers on land and agricultural resources management as well as agricultural development planning. This database constitutes the foundation for a new effort to develop a comprehensive multi scale GIS

based Land Resources Information System (LRIS).

GIS based flood forecast models (MIKE-II) have recently been developed in Bangladesh. MIKE-II and its GIS interfaces are suitable for application at the planning, design, implementation and operation levels. The MIKE-II system is a valuable tool for determining flood control and drainage structure operation rules and providing inputs to flood preparedness programmes.

Arsenic researchers of the country are also applying GIS technology for detailed arsenic contamination mapping, modelling and related physical processes of arsenic contamination.

### Pioneering role of universities

Almost all the universities of Bangladesh have installed GIS and have been formulating courses on GIS and setting up GIS labs for the purposes of education, training, certificate course, research and services, specially to develop degree-oriented academic curricula at graduate and post-graduate levels and to accomplish collaborative research works with local and foreign organisations and institutions.

### Problems

GIS in Bangladesh is also experiencing problems on the way to its development. The rapid changes and development of hardwares and softwares pose a serious prob-



lem in its upgradation when necessary. There is hardly any co-ordination among organisations using GIS in terms of users' needs, applications, procurement of new softwares and data gathering and exchange of data among the government organisations, research bodies and academic organisations. So far the geographers have demonstrated better skills in analysing GIS outputs in the form of maps. But the local experts at government level are mainly from a non-geography background. Besides, lack of availability of resources, institutional weakness, poor information base, lack of government initiatives, conflicting interests between donor agencies, lack of expertise -- all have constrained its march.

### Concluding remarks

GIS is now going to complete two decades of its arrival in Bangladesh. If we analyse and consider this almost long but

aply slow march of GIS in Bangladesh, it will not be unfair to say that the state of GIS in Bangladesh is far below that in the developed world, even in many developing countries, in terms of application areas, expertise, popularity, number of installations and institutional strength. But a flourishing technology like GIS and its development is an urgent need for a low lying disaster-prone, overcrowded and underdeveloped country like Bangladesh for converting her burden of vast population into human resource and for resource management. To do this, it is imperative for government to pay a special heed to it while the universities should develop a revised academic curriculum at graduate and post graduate level as the role of geographers is still low in the field of GIS in the country.

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