

Brutal crimes shake the society again

Incredibly, no attempt has been taken so far to retrain our police personnel at the thana level to think of themselves as representatives of the community rather than instruments of a cynical government machinery. Now a change of attitude is the call of the hour. The administration must rise to the expectation of the people.

MD ASADULLAH KHAN

HORRIFYING reports of killing, rape, extortion and hijacking that fill the pages of the dailies with alarming frequency lead one to believe that if anything the country has again fallen in the grip of barbaric and uncivilized forces. The violence that the country is witnessing now has turned it into a degenerate place of 'Black African' standard. When in the morning of February 1 last, newspapers ran the news of gruesome killing of a 5-year old girl and two women at different places of the country, people went numb with horror, shock and panic because of the brutality with which these murders were committed.

Report carried by The Daily Star on February 1 indicated that Shewly, a five year old girl and daughter of Rabul Sheikh, in the Kashiani upazila was strangled after being violated. As report from police sources indicated, Razib Kazi, a neighbouring youth offered Shewly a candy and took her to a nearby bush and violated her. To violate a five year old girl who has yet to understand the meaning of sex is simply barbaric. The whole country including the women activists group have raised their voice against all these beastly crimes coming up with alarming frequency. Savage, beastly, barbaric, frightening, traumatic and humiliating -- could all these epithets give vent to our expression of anger and hatred against such abusers?

In another incident in the Bhanga upazila of Faridpur district, Sharmin (17) was first raped and then killed by one Sujan, son of Hashmat Bhuiyan in the same union as she refused to marry him. In the third incident in Narayanganj, one Lupta Begum, young wife of Anju Miah, a steel re-rolling mill worker, was raped and then killed as she ventured to return home

after work in a nearby house in the locality.

The gruesome murder of Albagh Ali, a phone fax dealer of Lalbagh on January 28 last sent a wave of panic among city-dwellers and traders in the locality. Even in a country where life is so easily extinguished, there was a feeling of revulsion about the killing. To kill a person or an enemy to death and then shredding the body into pieces is simply barbaric. Apparently, the victims body was chopped into more than 14 pieces and the dismembered limbs in wrappers were recovered by the police from different places in the city. The grisly manner of dismembering the victim's body, packing in several wrappers and then placing at several places makes the crime far more sickening than an ordinary murder.

Crime analysts interpret such grisly nature of killings as striking fear in the populace and sending a message to the law enforcers about the enormous devilish strength of the perpetrators.

The incident bears an analogy with a crime perpetrated in 2004 in the Sutrapur area of the city in which the victim Shamsul Huq's (a trader) body was sliced and revealed in a similar manner. It was discovered later that two sons of a female ward commissioner, linked to the then ruling party, were linked to that crime.

In another incident reported in the dailies in the recent past, Tania, a young girl working in a voluntary organization and residing in Mirpur area was killed by Shahidul Islam Tutul, her paramour and a phone fax dealer in the locality on January 14 last by strangulating her allegedly after raping, as the law enforcers who recovered her body from around the area near Mirpur graveyard indicated. Tania, it was learnt from the confession of the alleged assailant to the police, was pressurizing him to get into wedlock in consequence of his

love affair with her.

Such grisly murder of men and women in their teens are being committed with impunity. Sohnel Hossain Titu, a resident of Fakirapool and a travel businessman was murdered in roadside ditch by the Dhaka-Mawa highway as a sequel to feuds relating to marriage on January 31 last while he was returning from his father-in-law's house.

In a country that we proudly call cultured, civilized and its people imbued with religious, ethical and moral values, such ghastly incidents of rape and murder put a stigma on our collective psyche.

In fact gruesome incidents of violence, terrorism, extortion and kidnapping have started to stalk the country just with the emergence of democratic governance. Sadly true, most notably, the capital city and adjacent areas seem caught in a frightening coil of fear and trauma as extortionists of all hues going by the name Oggan-party, Malam party, chilly powder party are preying upon innocent people going out of their houses to perform their daily chores. It is worth mentioning that in one day on January 21 last, as reported in some dailies, at least 15 persons fell victim to such parties and in the last one week extortionists hijacked several CNGs and two drivers fell victim to their assault.

The distressing crime scene calls for some introspection on the part of the new democratic government and effective solutions. Unhappily, as the new government has started its journey towards building up a democratic governance, it continues to face the most harrowing time with so much of criminal actions jeopardizing governance, development initiative and vigour. The Home Minister while admitting the deterioration of law and order situation at the inaugural ceremony of the senior executive management course at the Police Academy at Mirpur on February 3 last stressed the need for stepping up police drive across the country to contain terrorism.

People only hope that it must not be an exercise in black humour because of the fact that track record of the law enforcement agencies is not anything inspiring. For a government that came to power with soaring expectation, the fall or decline must not precipitate into

a crisis situation. The euphoria over the just concluded election victory would all but dissipate and would be replaced by exasperation that is fast turning into anger. It is not enough that policy directives are framed, it is important that these are implemented and complied with by those in charge of police administration without malice, fear or favour, and of necessity without delay.

Report published in the Prothom Alo on February 3 last about a police Inspector now working in Rajarbagh Police line and owner of huge wealth acquired by illegal means and allegedly killing his first wife Papia by strangulating on August 30 last year and then burying her without autopsy has raised questions if some of these offending law enforcers by virtue of their clout and wealth are immune from all such sinister offences! Reports indicated that the repeated attempts of Papia's mother to file an FIR in the thana relating to her daughter's mysterious death was not entertained. Left with no other alternative, the exasperated mother of the victim filed a case with the court for remedy.

Most alarming, the new surge in crime has believably peaked mostly with the backing of pseudo-politician cum godfathers who do have a pretty share in the toll other than the fact that they employ those thugs at the convenient moment to eliminate their rivals. While in most cases newspaper reporters, columnists and editors write ponderous articles, politicians who are still left with human values shriek in public speeches and police officers often leak stories about political interference destroying their morale, the dastardly acts of the hoodlums that continue to play havoc with the citizens' lives go on unabated.

Incredibly, no attempt has been taken so far to retrain our police personnel at the thana level to think of themselves as representatives of the community rather than instruments of a cynical government machinery. Now a change of attitude is the call of the hour. The administration must rise to the expectation of the people and not wash its hands of the challenges by hiding behind the excuses here and there.

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Of Bangladesh-India relations

Trade between Bangladesh and India is in favour of India. There is a huge deficit which could be rectified by India. India, on the other hand, may consider investing in relevant sectors which could benefit both the countries. A negotiation on trade and investment should start with seriousness that it deserves.

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

BANGLADESH is surrounded by India on three sides, with a small border with Myanmar in the south-east and the Bay of Bengal on the south. Among the SAARC countries India's GDP is more than twelve times and population eight times of Bangladesh. With India Bangladesh has more than 4000 miles of border and shares 54 common rivers. Geographical compulsion, however, dictates that laying the foundation of friendly relations with neighbouring countries should be the cornerstone of foreign policy of Bangladesh.

Demarcation of land and maritime boundaries remain unsettled between the two countries. Exchange of enclaves, adversely possessed territories, construction of permanent boundary pillars, implementation of 1974 land boundary agreement, water sharing with common rivers and trade imbalance are the outstanding issues that should have been addressed and settled long time back in the interest of the peoples of the two countries. Many undemarcated and disputed enclaves remain on this side or the other side of the border which may cause conflict between the two neighbouring countries. The serious border incident of 2000 is a glaring example. The territorial disputes are the most fundamental of all conflicts.

According to pres report, India's foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee is visiting Bangladesh on 9th instant. There may be trade and investment and protection agreement between the two countries, but real purpose of the visit many think may be to convince the new government in Bangladesh to allow India transit facilities. Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pinak Ranjan Chakravarty is of the opinion that both countries should consider the issue of transit facilities for the development of the overall economy and trade. India has been clamouring for a long time for transit in view of her 7 sister states in North-East which are to an extent freeing unrest. Therefore, India is in disadvantage so far these sister states are concerned. The transit may ease it to an extent.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh cabinet has decided

to renew the existing trade agreement with India. The agreement was first signed in 1980 and last renewed for three years in 2006. However, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary sees no prospect of signing any transit deal at the moment. But if and whenever it occurs the proposal should be contingent upon two areas. First, India should resolve amicably land, maritime and enclave's boundary which also includes South Talpathy/New Moore Island and allow Bangladesh land transit to Nepal. This transit facility will exclusively be confined to trade.

Maritime boundary needs to be resolved on priority because both India and Myanmar are processing claims in the Bay of Bengal for exploration of natural resources. According to UN convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982, Bangladesh has the right to claim up to 350 nautical miles of the Bay of Bengal from the continental shelf. Myanmar has already filed its claims to the UN while India is processing the issue, according to National Committee to Protect Maritime Area and Resources. Last date for filing claim with UN is 2011. Bangladesh should not sleep, but must rise to survey the Bay of Bengal for which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has prepared map which perhaps is now lying with the naval headquarters.

Trade between Bangladesh and India is in favour of India. There is a huge deficit which could be rectified by India. India, on the other hand, may consider investing in relevant sectors which could benefit both the countries. A negotiation on trade and investment should start with seriousness that it deserves.

The psyche of mistrust, and suspicion should be replaced by trust and sincerity in improving bilateral relations between Bangladesh and India. Country's interest and security should receive priority in making foreign policy. As of now foreign relations planning to some extent lacks professionalism and appears to be perfunctory. Dynamism, which is an essential prerequisite in the conduct of foreign relations, should not be lacking as such.

Mohammad Amjad Hossain, a former Bangladesh diplomat, writes from Virginia, USA

What to do with deposed Chief Justice?

Would someone tell the lawyers' leaders that the restoration of the Chief Justice of Pakistan to his position cannot be done in this day and time by forcing the government into utter impotence; solution has to come through the parliament and, at the end of the day, through persuasion, backed by a big mobilization of people.

M.B. NAQVI

BURDENED as it is with too many difficult problems, Pakistan is engulfed in a new debate on one particular issue: what to do with the deposed chief justice, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. His is a cause celebre. It is championed by most of the civil society or intelligentsia and the lead role is being played by professional lawyers who have been agitating for the last two years to get him restored to his position a second time because he was again sacked on Nov 3 (2007) by what was a second coup by Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

There was seen a slack in the movement during later 2008 when the new elected government led by Pakistan People's Party took over and the lawyers felt that their last big demonstration of support for CJP was given a setback by their own leaders who did not persist with the last item, a Dharna before the Supreme Court, for any appreciable length of time.

This is indeed a cause celebre. The superior judiciary in Pakistan has been from the beginning submissive to governments, particularly to military dictators. It facilitated all military dictators and gave them sweeping powers to amend the Constitution, sometimes when not even demanded. Recently an ordinary sort of Chief Justice of Pakistan has made history who had not protested at Gen Pervez Musharraf's takeover. Unfolding events showed this Chief Justice was a new type. He practiced judicial activism and took suo motu notice of many violations of human rights.

Musharraf had allowed a large number of Pakistanis to be secretly picked up who were virtually sold to the American CIA (for their bounty money). When the case of these 'disappearances' came before him, the CJP sternly asked the bureaucracy 'where

are they'. He even threatened to call the generals in the court to answer if it was military agencies that picked them up. He also stopped the privatization processes that he thought were laced with corruption. He stopped the sale of Karachi Steel Mills virtually for a song and demanded full account of the assets that were proposed to be doled out for a paltry sum. The result was that the so-called establishment, that comprises civil and military bureaucracy and their traditional toadies among the landed aristocracy, was beside itself with anger.

There followed the famous incident of March 9, 2007 when Musharraf called the CJP to his office and demanded his resignation after presenting a bogus charge sheet that had been secretly distributed to the media earlier. Mr. Iftikhar Chaudhry looked at the so-called charge sheet and said I refuse to resign and shall face a trial in an open court. The dictator was furious and arrested Mr. Chaudhry there and then and detained him in his office for six hours during which he collected senior judges from all provinces and made a Reference against the CJP to the hurriedly convened Supreme Judicial Council (that takes up the cases of superior judiciary).

Justice Chaudhry was not allowed to visit his Chambers and was locked up in a part of his own house and kept incommunicado for several days. On the way from his office the CJP was maltreated by police. This was seen live by all TV set owners. There was a spontaneous reaction from the lawyers' community and a movement began that has continued for two long years.

Forgotten was the record of shortcomings of Mr. Chaudhry, some of them real. This was because of his exemplary conduct in office. His saying 'no' to an all powerful Musharraf's demand for resignation strangely released a new force and a whole new

movement promptly took shape. Details need not be retailed here. Even common villagers came out to have a look on a quiet CJP who would not speak on any matter except about law. Such a movement had not been seen before; its spontaneous intensity is remarkable even after two years.

This lawyers' movement has been subjected to much rumour mongering regarding CJP's supposed shortcomings, some real ones. Many parties, NGOs and independent intellectuals rallied round Mr. Chaudhry. Among the parties many are small ones, though there are two major parties that have made their support an important item of their programme: These two parties are: the second largest party in the National Assembly, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Sharif faction) and the most well organized Jamaate Islami. In addition, most left-inclined and nationalistic parties have adopted his cause as their own.

The argument now centres on the programme of a big agitation on 9th of March next when a long march from Karachi and rest of the country to Islamabad by lawyers will reach Islamabad. Other parties and common people will show up. The long march would end at the Supreme Court building where the lawyers will stage a Dharna for an indefinite period. This can only be in the hope that the government would be forced to reinstate Mr. Chaudhry.

Incidentally Mr. Chaudhry's current legal credentials are excellent: he had presided over a large bench of the Supreme Court on Nov 3 (2007) to adjudge what was Musharraf's second strike: his imposition of an Emergency Plus, complete with a Provisional Constitution Order, usual in Martial Laws, and various measures to restrict media's freedom and pronounced and released to media the same day that these measures were illegal. They should have no effect.

Now, the debate is regarding the realism of the new programme by the lawyers. The long march would take one full day and more, thanks to popular demonstrations along the way. The main criticism is about the Dharna being for an indefinite length. Some supporters have said that this is not realistic: the government comprises country's largest elected party, the PPP, and has the support of many smaller parties. Moreover, the famous 'Estab-

lishment' that has ruled Pakistan consistently since 1953 has also not been amused by Mr. Iftikhar Chaudhry. Furthermore, the entire US-led west does not like the prospect of Mr. Chaudhry returning a second time to the Supreme Court where he is apt to repeat the question where are the "disappeared" Pakistanis. It is a remarkable line up.

Fact is that the lawyers are up against a very powerful opponent. No doubt they can defeat it, provided they get virtually unlimited support from the common people that should be mobilized in Islamabad, especially during the Dharna. True also that support for CJP is impressive indeed. But the critical issues are two: a Dharna by say 10 or 12 thousand -- the realistic estimate by the establishment of those who can remain on the Dharna after the second day -- will not make the government tumble down, given its strategic support.

Secondly all the lawyers are not rolling in wealth; many earn their daily bread virtually from day to day. They cannot remain out of the courts for any length of time for economic reasons. That makes the long march and the Dharna a hard sacrifice. Even so, there is one consideration though: if a staggering number of common people are mobilized and brought on the streets along with the lawyers that will become a different ballgame. Here the quality of support by major parties is less than unquestioning: they have their own interests to look after. The lawyers' leaders are fighting shy of recognizing their own realities.

Would someone tell the lawyers' leaders that the restoration of CJP to his position cannot be done in this day and time by forcing the government into utter impotence; solution has to come through the parliament and, at the end of the day, through persuasion, backed by a big mobilization of people. These leaders of the lawyer community should know the limits to the Dharna -- after all it's a means of demonstration and is not insurrection. They should better announce a time limit for Dharna, say 36 hours or so. And for that the lawyers' leadership must arrange for adequate food supplies and mobile lavatories because the place of the Dharna, from human needs' point of view, is pitiless.

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Discussing crucial issues in the Parliament



MAS MOLLA

AFTER more than two years' long recess, Members of Parliament (MPs) gathered in the Jatiya Sangsad on January 25. This is the first session of the 9th Parliament constituted by MPs mostly from the Awami League (AL) and its allies, and the major opposition -- BNP -- has only about 1/10th of the total number of seats. So the 9th JS is heavily manned by the government party, therefore the government needs to be more accommodating in its dealings with the opposition.

Although all parties attended the very first session, which was acclaimed by many, the AL lost a point in not offering the post of deputy speaker to BNP and in creating an unnecessary (let's say "number-2") post of a second deputy speaker. Now it is clear that the BNP is not ready to be "number-2!" If the government party really feels the need of a second deputy speaker, it could vie for that, and having the constitutional provision, could have one from its own party.

There's much ado about thanking the president. I realise that Article 73 of the Constitution and Clause 34 of the Rules of Procedure provide for a "Motion of Thanks" to the president for his address to the JS. But this provision has lost meaning, instead it takes too much time in the very expensive schedule of the JS session. How? The cabinet and the secretaries prepare the address, and the president just reads that in front of the MPs in the august house. However, as the president himself has read out the speech, he deserves thanks from the MPs.

Therefore, I think that the BNP MPs' walking out of the House during the president's address was indecent. They should have listened to the address, because Iajuddin was their choice -- if

he has done anything wrong, it was instigated by the BNP and its allies, and also because all MPs and parties, and even the general mass, must show due respect to the post of the president -- irrespective of party affiliation and personality. I add here that the JS can amend the Rules of Procedure so that the president can be thanked on completion of the speech, and no "Motion of Thanks" and discussion thereon should hamper the very needed JS proceedings.

There are too many topics that need to be discussed in the JS. MPs are people's representatives and the expensive JS sessions are financed by the people's money. The people need to have job, food, energy, housing, clothing, vehicles, better education for continuous growth and development, and the right of living in peace. There are many more issues that need to be discussed meaningfully in the JS.

The very essential issues to be discussed are: how to produce enough food, how to keep the prices of essentials within the people's reach, how to harness enough energy to run machines of all kinds, what type of education is needed, where and how to build houses for every citizen who should be sent abroad for work and what should be the process, how many public vehicles we need and how to ply them (also how many private cars should ply on national thoroughfares), how to ensure law and order and peace for the people, how to guard against neighbours' intrusion into our sovereign land and water, and so on. And finally for discussing these crucial matters in the JS, if the MPs should have right to express their mind freely surpassing the unnecessary bar of Article 70.

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