

The PM's stern call leads to rebel surrender

All concerned must exercise restraint

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina's stern call has had the desired effect, and has led to the surrender of the rebel BDR troops. This brought to a peaceful end in Dhaka to what can be termed as the most serious incidence of breach of discipline of any part of the security force.

We congratulate the prime minister on her sagacious handling of the situation which resulted in prevention of a bloodbath. We echo her call for restraint by all concerned. We are happy to note that the opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia has urged both sides to exercise restraint.

The peaceful resolution brought out the tragic fact of army officers being killed along with some of their family members. We strongly condemn this barbarity perpetrated by a section of BDR troops. The brutal killing of these officers cannot go unpunished.

In our editorial yesterday, we welcomed the PM's announcement of general amnesty. However, we want to point out that such an amnesty generally covers act of rebellion and breach of discipline, but does not and cannot cover acts of murder and mayhem which some BDR troops indulged in.

The demands of BDR troops are all too known by now and have been heeded by no less a person than the prime minister herself who has formed a high level committee to look into these in a bid to initiate realistic steps towards meeting them. After all these, if you still persist with anarchic behaviour and violence that is outrageously unbecoming of any member of an organised force, then you are liable as the PM has already warned for the sternest of action.

We express profound condolences over the casualties, especially of the army officers, may be numbering at least 50 as stated by a member of the cabinet, and the figure could be higher. As we pray for the salvation of their departed souls, the sense of loss being too grievous we have words of special condolences for them.

We know that it is difficult for anyone to live down the hurt that is inflicted through such act of cruelty, but our entreaty is that more revenge cannot be the answer.

Let's not forget, confrontation begets confrontation; violence can only breed violence. The solution lies through peace. As we put out a call for all sides to exercise utmost restraint at this grave hour of crisis we are merely echoing the expectations of the whole nation.

We must behave responsibly

Don't lend ears to rumours

THERE are two other observations blended with words of counsel which the PM uttered through her speech yesterday afternoon that deserve to be commented and elaborated on. That is because of the sheer relevance they hold to the imperative of positively addressing the current situation stemming from the BDR imbroglio.

She urged the people to beware of vested interests' insidious attempts at inciting violence and trouble. They operate taking advantage of the confusion in unfolding scenarios and try to plant tales or give spins to stories to suit their purposes of panicking people and angling in troubled waters. So, they could run a rumour mill of their own. On the other hand, there are people who are habitually disposed to rumour-mongering to outbid each other in running sensational stories without the slightest regard for the consequences these might lead up to. Such wild tales basically go to serve the interests of vested quarters. So, the people are advised not to lend ears to any rumour mill.

While the citizens exercise responsibility as listeners, readers and audience in lending credence or otherwise to something that has been making rounds, it is the media, both electronic and print, that needs to be specially vigilant at a time like this. For what the media carries as news and views do influence public opinion, and can even their belief system. That is because: (a) they have the greatest reach among the people; and (b) they are the vibrant and modernised sources of information that people look up to for authentic news and views.

It is of utmost importance, therefore, that the media take special care and effort to play their role with an intensified sense of responsibility in the highest national interest.

The morning after

Even more important, we have received a fine example of how a civilian government and the armed forces can work together in harmony, under the authority of the prime minister (who holds the defense portfolio), when the nation's security is under threat.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

IT'S over. As I write this piece it looks as though the BDR mutiny that had brought the capital to a stand-still for the past two days has finally come to a close, and that the rebelling jawans have surrendered unconditionally, are handing in their weapons, and freeing all hostages.

In the end, the threat of a full scale offensive by regular army units, with tanks moved into position and air-strikes reportedly prepared for, appears to have made the mutineers realise that further resistance was a dead-end street.

The fear was that, with so much blood on their hands, the rebels would calculate that they had little more to lose, and would want to go out with guns blazing. We can all surely be glad that it didn't come to that.

Kudos must go to the government for its mature handling and resolution of the issue.

Many have already criticised the general amnesty that was offered to the mutineers by the prime minister, but I think, all things considered, that it was the wise and prudent thing to do, rather than to order a storming of a compound with several thousand armed rebels and an unknown number of hostages in the heart of the nation's capital.

Anything that would get the rebels to lay down their arms and surrender without the risk of a massacre had to be worth a shot. The government's priority had to be the quickest and most peaceful resolution of the crisis possible.

In any event, a general amnesty does not mean amnesty for those who were the ring-leaders of the mutiny or who were directly involved in the killings and other atrocities.

A general amnesty, as I understand the term, would only absolve rebel jawans of guilt for taking part in the mutiny, not for

any crimes committed during the mutiny.

All things considered, it seemed to me like the only possible practical and practicable resolution to the crisis. If the worst-case scenario had occurred and the army had been forced to storm the compound, leading to unimaginable death and destruction, the prime minister would at least have had the satisfaction of knowing that she had done everything in her power to resolve the crisis peacefully.

I thought that Sheikh Hasina's speech yesterday afternoon was very prime ministerial and hit all the right notes, and it was both her sincerity and resolution of purpose that played the key role in resolving the crisis.

When she told the mutineers that she would ensure that they were treated fairly, coming from her, it meant something to them. It is at times like these that her true worth as a national leader comes through and we can see that she has developed into a leader of considerable stature in the eyes of the public.

I also think that some kudos is due the leader of the opposition and the opposition political parties for showing admirable restraint and solidarity, and not fanning the flames with intemperate or inflammatory comments.

The crisis has certainly shown us the importance of political leaders who are trusted and respected by the people. I think that our political leaders, including, as I have said, the opposition, have acquitted themselves very creditably.

Hopefully their response to this crisis signals a recognition of the maturity both sides will need to demonstrate if our democracy is to function better than before, and will usher in a period of heightened responsibility and statesmanship among our leaders.



What happens now?

The army, too, as far as I can tell, has acted with admirable restraint and at all times under the authority of the civilian government. Let us now hope that cool heads prevail, and that as the full details of the atrocities committed during the siege become clearer, that they will still exercise restraint and professionalism, and that they will heed the prime minister's admonitions to not take the law into their own hands.

If there is anything positive to be taken away from this tragedy, it is the fact that both the government and the armed forces have acquitted themselves commendably throughout.

Even more important, we have received

a fine example of how a civilian government and the armed forces can work together in harmony, under the authority of the prime minister (who holds the defense portfolio), when the nation's security is under threat.

Hopefully, when the dust has settled and we return to the everyday business of life, we will find that both our political leaders and the armed forces have received a timely reminder as to their duty to the country, and that we are entering a period of greater political maturity and conscientiousness on the part of all concerned.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

Mutiny cannot be condoned

In a civilised world a mutiny is mutiny and stern action needs to be taken against the mutineers who have not only broken a time honoured discipline by taking the law into their own hands, but have stained their hands with the blood of the officers whose life it was their sacred duty to protect.

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

ATROCITIES committed by BDR mutineers on February 25 will put to shame any force no matter by what name you call this force and no matter how the mutineers and their supporters would try to justify the mutiny.

In a civilised world a mutiny is mutiny and stern action needs to be taken against the mutineers who have not only broken a time honoured discipline by taking the law into their own hands, but have stained their hands with the blood of the officers whose life it was their sacred duty to protect.

The full scale of inhuman killings and barbarities the BDR mutineers have

committed is yet to be revealed. We do not even know yet how many army officers including the BDR chief Major General Shakil Ahmed were killed in cold blood and their bodies thrown in the gutter leading to a sewerage line falling in the river Buriganga. Floating dead bodies are being retrieved as I write this piece.

Is not the army a national institution whose officers and men fought gallantly and laid down their lives for our independence? Are not the officers whom the BDR mutineers have brutally murdered the sons of this soil? Are not these officers wives and children who have been mistreated and murdered by these mutineers for no crime whatsoever daughters of people like you and me? What crime did they commit to die the way they did?

Someone has to answer.

If the BDR mutineers had any grievances which they say they have, why could not they approach the government through the media? Were the army officers they have killed responsible for all these grievances? Was it within the powers of the army officers they have killed to have raised the pay and allowances of the BDR personnel?

There might have been stray incidents of some army officers having been unjust in dealing with their under command BDR troops. But you cannot say that all army officers are bad. I myself have served in the erstwhile EPR and then again in BDR after our independence as a sector commander and GSO-1 in BDR headquarters.

As a staff officer I have a contribution in creating the post of DAD from the senior JCOs of BDR and in reorganisation of BDR as a force. Never did I have any occasion to feel that I or for that matter any army officer was looked down upon as an alien thrust upon BDR. I felt the same camaraderie between officers and men under command in BDR as I did when I was in the army. In fact I found

BDR troops more loyal.

It is a very critical moment for the army leadership. Imagine the magnitude of sadness and grief, the rank and file of the army are going through following the barbaric and inhuman killings of so many of its officers, including a general, and their family members. It has power to put down the mutiny in no time. Its restraint stems from its commitment to uphold the rule of law. Let not this commitment be weakened by frustration.

Let us put politics aside and deal with the crisis as it must be dealt with as per the rule of law. There is no way the mutiny of a paramilitary force like BDR can be allowed to go unpunished. Justice demands that those who have committed this heinous crime must be found out and brought to justice.

Madame Prime Minister, let the rule of law take its course. Let justice prevail. To let the perpetrators of such heinous crime in a paramilitary force go unpunished is likely to lead to more such misadventures in future.

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The unrewarding awards

These days awards are rewardless, like jobs can be thankless. They don't create a stir anymore; nobody takes interest except for those who win and their families, friends and wellwishers. You may not want to look a gift horse in the mouth. But if you look an award winner in the head, it mostly belongs to the party in power.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IT was Jack Benny, the American comedian, who said that he didn't deserve the award he had received, but he had arthritis, which he didn't deserve either. An award is meant to grant recognition that is merited by a deserving person. But, sometimes, like target practice, it hits a few and misses others. People who get awards don't always deserve. At times deserving people don't get awards. Hey! Mahatma Gandhi didn't win a Nobel Prize.

By and large, what works for gifts also works for awards. It's the thought that counts, not what is given in the form of crest, trophy, medal or cash. Now it seems there is fat in the fire. The very thought that counts is taking the thunder out of awards.

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want to look a gift horse in the mouth. But if you look an award winner in the head, it mostly belongs to the party in power.

The upshot is that awards no longer conform to standards. In national awards, talent is an excuse to confer political recognition. There is also a thriving industry in the private sector, which churns out awards that are bought and sold for money and favours. I know someone who was once nominated for such an award and his name was even announced in the newspapers. Since he worked in the hospitality industry, the award organisers insisted on holding the ceremony in his hotel, free of cost. Refused by him, they dropped his name from the list.

Many of our luminaries flaunt that very award on their resumés. This is but one example of how awards and winners seduce each other. There was a time when a winner had to earn his award. Today, an award has to earn its winner. It's just one more item that can be added to your shopping cart, one more case of

conspicuous consumption by the rich and ambitious.

Obviously, there are exceptions to prove the rule. In 1964, French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre turned down the Nobel Prize, justifying that to accept it would jeopardise his integrity as a writer. American actor Marlon Brando refused to accept his oscar in 1973 to protest against the poor treatment of Native Americans in Hollywood. Indian writer Arundhati Roy rejected the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in protest against the Indian government toeing the United States' line.

When Bollywood star Akshay Kumar was recently chosen for the Star Screen Award for most popular actor, he decided to pass. He said his fellow actor Aamir Khan deserved it more than him. Aamir's film Ghajini grossed Rupees 75 crore more than Akshay's Sing is King.

British actor Peter Ustinov said that at times the refusal to accept an award could be another way of accepting it with more noise than is normal. But it's not easy to check the temptation. Very few people can resist an award.

Yet, however small their number is, some people do push back. For them an award is meaningless to win if it doesn't come with victory. And, victory for them isn't a crest or a trophy. They are after causes and issues, their lives defined by what they stand for. These are people who live to fight; they don't fight to live. Their lives are rewarding without awards.

Many of them luckily win posthumous awards. How does it make sense to recognise people after they are already dead? How can we separate emotion from nomination, not to say that the winners aren't around to benefit from the winning. I understand, it's better late than never, but posthumous award is tragedy of a kind. Many people are dying to get recognition in this life, and it goes to those who are no longer of this world.

Sadly, either political consideration or a consideration amount motivates today's awards. The highest bidder takes the win. The winner takes it all. All takes nothing. An award has become its own nemesis. It's slander in the guise of honour.

I say such an award should outrage any self-respecting mind. If he doesn't earn it by dint of his merit, political connection or purchasing power shouldn't make it worth his while. Instead, a sensible person should find it hard to live with the guilt that the moment he touched that award, his reward slipped out of his hand.

It won't happen I know, nonetheless it's my fond wish. Someone in this country should refuse to accept an award if not given for the right reason, meaning his or her merit. A nation which plays foul with its best cuts off its nose to spite its face.

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