

## The issue of cross-border crimes

*BDR probe outcome and restructuring are intertwined*

OUR attention has been drawn to the concerns expressed about border-related issues in an internal security report on the post-BDR mutiny conditions. Like everyone else apprehensive about such conditions, we too are worried and for obvious reasons. We note, though, that the new director general of the BDR has been sounding upbeat about matters being under control in the border regions. He states that cross border crimes have been declining, even though the security report does not appear to substantiate his claims. We hope, however, that his optimism is well placed. Overall, though, there are very plausible reasons why the country's borders today arouse our collective concern.

The facts of the matter as they stand now are clear. On the one hand, there is a paramount need to restore command and control over the Bangladesh Rifles and restructure it in the earliest possible time in order to ensure effective border security. On the other, there is the truth that unless the on-going investigations into the Pikhana carnage are completed and unless it is known how many of the BDR personnel will be retained and how many others will be sent home or placed on trial, restructuring will remain a thought on paper only. So what is of utmost importance here is that the investigations and the question of restructuring be not only conceptually but also operationally inter-linked. In the essence, both the processes should be speeded up. Although the country is regularly being reassured of the measures being taken to secure the frontiers, there is the nagging and quite natural feeling that in these existing circumstances border supervision cannot be as we would like it to be. Objective realities cannot be ignored. And for these realities to be addressed, it is essential that the investigations be intensified and their reports finalised at the earliest. It is equally important that the process of restructuring the BDR - giving it a new name, setting up a new force altogether, et al - be undertaken on a top priority basis.

Unless these twin issues are handled to public satisfaction, worries over the borders will grow. Lax supervision of the frontiers can only lead to heightened criminal activities. These may well include smuggling in of arms and drugs, trafficking of women and children and the like.

We reiterate, therefore, our belief that all adequate and necessary measures must be taken swiftly and efficaciously in order for the nation's borders to be protected and safe.

## Slow, rusty trains

*What is the management doing?*

THE Bangladesh railways, which have for years been performing well below expectations, are now doing even worse, virtually limping with a number of problems. A report published in a leading Bengali daily on April 10 gave a detailed account of how the trains have lost both speed and service quality.

Obviously, a train cannot serve its passengers if it often runs several hours behind schedule. But that is precisely what is happening on many routes, with the passengers bearing the brunt of it all. Trains are no longer the safe and reliable mode of transport, that they once were.

True, railways have been facing stiff competition from other modes of transport, especially the bus with the development of the country's roads network. Yet, it still can hold its own as travelling by train has some marked advantages over journey by road, which is still not safe enough in our context. But the railway authorities have failed to capitalise on it and are actually losing more and more ground due to mismanagement and failure to deliver reasonably good service.

A look into the messy railways would instantly reveal that it is still running in spite of the management, rather than because of it. The railway authorities put the blame on shortage of skilled manpower and engines for the dismal performance. Undoubtedly, it won't be possible to keep the trains in service without engines or locomotive operators. There is even a shortage of stationmasters and booking clerks. We get the impression that nobody is willing to join the railways, though unemployment is a major problem of the country.

Clearly, poor planning and even poorer implementation of whatever plans the railway authorities make have led to a situation where nothing is working smoothly. The railway bosses cannot defend themselves by saying that locomotive operators need both training and experience before they can be appointed. The failure to envisage the situation well before the problem actually cropped up is responsible for the shortage of trained manpower today and the resultant fall in service quality. It is not known what the railway managers have been doing all these years.

The shortage of train engines has hit freight traffic also, as the railway authorities could not provide two container trains between Dhaka and Chittagong every day as demanded by the shipping companies recently. So, the casualty list includes trade and commerce too.

The railway authorities have to make some determined efforts to recover from the dismal state.

## A warrior had to leave

It is a pity that a man of impeccable integrity, honour and indomitable courage like Gen. Mashud could not carry on his crusade against corruption, because he is fiercely and fearlessly patriotic, apolitical and uncompromising.

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

A crusader in the war against corruption, General Hasan Mashud Choudhury, had to leave in the end. He will be remembered as a man who, for the first time in the history of this corruption ridden country, tried his utmost to spearhead a campaign against corruption and succeeded in creating public awareness about the need to arrest the cancerous growth of this menace.

In a country where people in high positions do not resign from their posts, Hasan Mashud decided to walk away at the call of his conscience. He could have held on as long as he could because his is a constitutional post, and it would be no easy job removing him. That he decided otherwise shows his mettle.

Under the present political situation it would have been well nigh impossible for an honest, non-partisan and conscientious man like Mashud to have continued to serve as chairman of ACC. He refused to be browbeaten and dictated by anybody about who should and should not be indicted on corruption charges.

That he would be replaced soon became clear when Sheikh Hasina told the parliament that the ACC would be reconstituted to ensure its accountability. Exercising control over the ACC seems to be more important for the government than ensuring that it is independent enough to perform its constitutional role.

Let us not forget that no sooner had the political elites, indicted on charges of wrongdoings, begun coming out of jails on

bail, a campaign was stepped up in the media, especially in some private TV channels, to malign the army leadership and blame it for the anti-corruption drive and for prolonging the caretaker government's rule.

It is those tainted politicians who have been trying to tarnish the image of the army and brand it as a force inimical to democracy and rule by elected political government.

Quick on the heels of the BDR carnage, the anti-army protagonists got a shot in the arm as Hasan Mashud fell because the same tainted politicians were gunning for him. These politicians quickly sink their differences and animosities and speak in one voice when they perceive a threat to themselves from a common enemy and two, when they see the prospect of increased perks and privileges for themselves.

These people cannot forget that it was Hasan Mashud who demanded for the first time in the history of this country that the VIP and VVIP politicians submit their wealth statements -- and made sure that they did it. Full credit to Mashud for his courage and conviction to ensure that nobody is above law.

No wonder M.K. Anwar of BNP and Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir of AL have brought out baseless allegations of corruption against Hasan Mashud.

Someone also said that he tried to bark up many a wrong tree. I am not sure that in the forest of monumental corruption there was or is a tree barked up wrongly. It is true that many anti-graft cases initiated by the ACC fell through when they came up before the higher judiciary. But this does not mean that



Will the ACC continue to act independently?

those who came out on bail or whose convictions were overturned are innocent.

A man of Hasan Mashud's stature would not harass innocent men in the name of anti-corruption drive. Besides, a thief will remain a thief even though he could not be punished in a court of law. The people know who became billionaires overnight through corruption. No matter how many times corrupt people get elected, they will always carry the stigma of corruption.

It is a pity that a man of impeccable integrity, honour and indomitable courage like Gen. Mashud could not carry on his crusade against corruption, because he is fiercely and fearlessly patriotic, apolitical and uncompromising.

Though there are not many Hasan Mashuds in this country, it will always be worthwhile trying to find someone like him as his replacement. But indications are that this government does not need any Hasan Mashud to stamp out corruption from this

country. All that the tainted parliamentarians and others of their ilk outside the parliament are looking forward to is that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina picks someone as ACC chief who will plan his anti-graft strategy and execute it as she wishes. This is the only way the government can ensure the accountability of the ACC. God help us when this happens.

Madame prime minister, kindly ensure first the accountability of this elected government which you head, and then the accountability of the ACC. The BDR mutiny and massacre at Pikhana on February 25, and the post mutiny handling of this tragic event, leave much to be desired of this government in terms of its accountability in a democracy. Most importantly, if corruption is not curbed effectively, building a digital Bangladesh will remain rhetoric and a far cry.

Brig. Gen. Shamsuddin Ahmed (ret'd) is a former Military Secretary to the President.

## Here comes the sun

Farmers and day-labourers, whose hours are set by the sun, may not be benefited by introducing DST in the country. Therefore, the government should give a second thought before introducing the DST in Bangladesh.

A. N. M. NURUL HAQUE

THE government is contemplating to forward Bangladesh Standard Time by one hour from June this year under the proposed Daylight Saving Time (DST) plan in order to tackle the power crisis. The Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources discussed the issue with other ministries at a meeting held on April 5 and asked them to send their views on the proposal.

The caretaker government of Fakhruddin Ahmed first planned to introduce DST system in April 2007 but backtracked due to the complexities surrounding the issue. The caretaker government also decided in principle to divide the country into cluster-wise zones for load management, but could not implement this.

DST is the convention of advancing clocks

so that afternoons have more daylight and mornings have less. Typically clocks are adjusted forward one hour near the start of spring and are adjusted backward in autumn. DST gives us the opportunity to enjoy sunny summer evenings by moving our clocks an hour forward in the spring.

Benjamin Franklin, when American envoy to France, first conceived the idea of DST in 1784 and wrote an article in the Journal de Paris regarding an economical project for diminishing the cost of light.

The modern DST was first proposed by the New Zealand entomologist George Vernon Hudson, whose shift-work job gave him leisure time to collect insects and made him aware of the value of after-hours daylight. In 1895 he presented a paper to the Wellington Philosophical Society proposing a two-hour daylight saving shift.

But the implementation of DST has been

fraught with controversy since Benjamin Franklin conceived of the idea. Even today, some regions and countries routinely change their approaches to DST.

The reason DST works is because it saves energy due to less artificial light needed during the evening hours -- clocks are set one hour ahead during the spring, and one hour back to standard time in the autumn. Many countries observe DST, and many do not.

Adding daylight to afternoons benefits retailing, sports, and other activities that exploit sunlight after working hours, but causes problems of farming, evening entertainment, and other occupations tied to the sun. Traffic fatalities are also reduced when there is extra afternoon daylight.

DST's occasional clock shifts present other challenges. It complicates time-keeping and can disrupt meetings, traveling, billing, record-keeping, medical devices and even sleeping patterns. Many computer-based systems can adjust their clocks automatically, but this can be limited and error-prone, particularly when DST rules change.

The daylight saving date in many countries may change from time to time due to special events or conditions. The United States, Canada and some other countries extended

DST in 2007.

The new start date is the second Sunday in March and previously it was first Sunday in April during spring and during autumn the start date is first Sunday in November which previously was the last Sunday in October. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 changed both the starting and ending dates of DST in US.

Many European countries including UK observe the system of DST. India introduced DST during the times of war but dropped it later. Pakistan introduced DST in 2008.

It is difficult to predict what will happen with DST in Bangladesh. It is said that around 200 mw of electricity can be saved using afternoons daylight advancing the clock by one hour.

But the DST may create confusion among the people about timing of prayers, office, and school timing. Many people may not understand the DST as the illiteracy rate is higher in the country.

Farmers and day-labourers, whose hours are set by the sun, may not be benefited by introducing DST in the country. Therefore, the government should give a second thought before introducing the DST in Bangladesh.

A. N. M. Nurul Haque is a Daily Star columnist.

## Democratic musings

We all should discourage the delusive road to democracy by modernising and strengthening the existing institutions. Democracy is the answer to the problems of democracy -- other non-democratic options go to worsen the wounds only.

ABDUL BAYES

DR. Mashur Rahman -- a career civil servant and now an advisor to the PM -- has written a book titled: "Democracy in Crisis," published by The University Press Limited (2008). The 250-page book consists of the articles that the author had published in newspapers and journals, especially during 2002-2007, when political turmoil impinged heavy tolls on the society. Historic and contemporary events, as observed through the eyes of an experienced civil servant, add to the beauty of the book. In the following paragraphs, I shall briefly highlight few of the observations, at times paraphrased, that sounded interesting to me.

The reminiscence of the author's association with the great leader of Bangladesh at different times reveals some interesting information. When the king of Saudi Arabia met Bangabandhu at a summit in Algiers, he remonstrated that Bangabandhu had been responsible for the break up of Pakistan.

Bangabandhu reacted sharply saying that the king still did not show proper respect and concern for the lives of the Muslims killed and the honour of the Muslim women raped during the war of liberation.

Further, Bangabandhu's sense of "national interest" was so strong that USSR and the Soviet Bloc were disappointed by his strong attachment to neutrality. "The strong nationalist pride often left him alone in the amoral cold-war global power game," writes Rahman.

Mashur Rahman recalls that Sheikh Mujib had the capacity to grasp quickly and lucidly very intricate issues of policy; his decisions were mostly correct even under the most uncertain situation. For example, he preferred that devaluation be implemented when the new crop comes on the market and prices decline. It is in a sense unimpeachable as a strategy for implementation of reform.

The legend, Sheikh Mujib, also denied any special consideration for himself or his family. He did not agree when Sheikh Kamal

was offered a government scholarship (donor financed) because he did not merit. But Sheikh Mujib readily agreed when the author (Mashur Rahman) secured admission and financial grants for Kamal outside those offered to government.

In another space, the author argues that the citizens are at the centre of the stage led by the state. The rights define the essence of citizenship. The kingdoms and empires had residents -- living beings without rights -- not citizens. The modern states, on the other hand, embrace residents with a bundle of inviolable rights. Positive rights are required for the meaning of life beyond biological survival (freedom is development)! Specifications of the rights and the institutions are necessary but not sufficient condition for realisations of rights: "For much of the time since independence, Bangladesh has lived under regimes which were downright unconstitutional and deficient in legitimacy."

The civil society in Bangladesh also comes under severe criticism. In Rahman's opinion, although they raised voice against the corruption and arbitrariness of government, the overall anti-party attitude of the civil society largely worked against elected party government and played into the hands of the coercive elites to arrogate the state power.

The CTG that ruled under the state of emergency ran into an inescapable

dilemma. The interim government emerged on the ruins of the constitutional machinery, thus hugely eroding its own constitutional credibility. Honest protestations aside, the healing of the wounds inflicted on statecraft emerged as a function of how quickly an elected government could be restored. Democracy entered with the exit of an unelected government.

Politics is a spontaneous order rather than a made order. Numerous persons join politics with diverse interests and motives, which are channelled through political parties. "Politics does not consist of foot soldiers walking in lockstep, but rather of ambitious and autonomous individuals seeking power."

The created institutions need to face reforms at every step. Incompetent and corrupt state and social institutions bring down the political system.

The book is a good recipe for readers of all ranks. Hopefully politicians will work hard for removing the crisis faced by democracy so that the system could deliver welfare to the people. We all should discourage the delusive road to democracy by modernising and strengthening the existing institutions. Democracy is the answer to the problems of democracy -- other non-democratic options go to worsen the wounds only.

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