

PM's directive is being subverted by her own men

Handle the offenders with an iron hand

THE reported grabbing of riverbank for building a market at Golachipa is an instance of clear violation of the Prime Minister's directive to the contrary. This time it is a ruling party lawmaker who is allegedly involved in the crime in collusion with some officials of the administration.

The incident has occurred at a time when the government is virtually at war with grabbers of riverbanks including other types of khas lands by vested groups. But in spite of its efforts, the government is finding it hard, though, to rid the rivers of the powerful quarters involved.

It was expected at this moment that the administration and the ruling party people would work closely to fight the land-grabbers together and render the government drive successful.

Unfortunately though, as the Golachipa case clearly illustrates, the ruling party MP in question and some officials of the administration themselves are now subverting the government's policy.

What would the man in the street infer from it? And they would even be questioning the government's seriousness of intention.

One often comes across similar reports of ruling party workers getting involved in extortion, tender-business and various other kinds of violent crimes. By these acts, they have already inflicted irreparable damage to the government's image and credibility. The government needs to control these elements with an iron hand.

The Golachipa incident is a test for the government's will. Its own men in the administration and the party thus caught in the act of grabbing khas land of a river have thrown a challenge to the government from within. The challenge has to be met squarely.

The violators of the government directive in this case deserve the same punishment as is being dealt out to others committing the same offence. And any leniency or vacillation on the part of the government to handle the offenders in the present case in an exemplary manner will only be read by many as a sign of its weakness.

It is therefore high time that the government swung into action. Otherwise its credibility will be at stake.

Tragic deaths at sea recalled

Information given by survivors should be acted on

LAST week, this paper carried a shocking report based on the survivors' account of the harrowing experience of more than 500 Bangladeshis who were on their way to Malaysia, or so they thought, in search of jobs.

The story is well known but the excruciating details of the ordeal as revealed by the 116 survivors should intensify the authorities' determination to track down the culprits named, legally proceed against them and mete out deterrent punishment to them. Unless there are appropriate follow-up actions based on the new information of suffering undergone by the victims and their families will go in vain and there would be recurrence of such tragic events.

Let's not forget that this set of racketeers do not have the formal label of manpower agents. With the authorised agents or even the fake ones there is the paperwork and documentation, at least the semblance of it. But these frauds lure into their trap those who are too poor to afford air-fare. These rackets will have to be dealt with primarily at the community level.

The deaths and fortuitous rescue were the culmination of a series of events, starting with the payment to the frauds, through the transfer from their villages to the coast of their departure. It is inconceivable that such an operation could be carried out without the local people, the police and the coast guards getting wind of it. If sufficiently motivated, they could have prevented the victims leaving the country.

That is where the questions of awareness building at the local levels, surveillance and taking suitable preventive measures crop up.

Over the years, many such incidents have been reported and yet nothing has been done to put a halt to them. How many lives must be lost before we wake up? It is true that only the government and the police cannot stop such practices. The best antidote to the crime is community involvement. People who have returned home, like Emdad, can provide the strongest arguments against such misadventures. The government could ask them to narrate their experiences to the people in their villages.

Genuine manpower agents must also start a campaign against such racketeering because it hurts not only the country but also their reputation.

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

The legal process needs to be completed

We, as a nation must move forward. Similarly, the final resolution will also underline that crime does not pay and indemnity is not available for anyone participating in a violent conspiracy that leads to mayhem and murder. A successful conclusion of this process will also enable us to subsequently address the completion of the course of action related to the War Crimes Trial.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

LAST year, like many others, I welcomed the decision of the caretaker government to restore the sanctity of August 15 as the National Mourning Day. By doing so, they reaffirmed the belief of the people of this country that Bangabandhu was not only the Father of this Nation but also that what happened on the tragic night of 15 August 1975 was a crime whose final adjudication needs to be completed.

That fateful day has just passed once again.

In the meantime, those responsible for the further prosecution of the case have clarified that the judicial course of action will be reconvened in the first week of October when the Supreme Court reopens after their long vacation. It has also been hinted that the process, in all likelihood, will end before Victory Day -- the 16th of December. One can only hope that this time, we can walk the talk.

I have been re-reading for the past week a commendable work 'Bangabandhu: His life and politics' (in two volumes) as edited by Monaem Shorakar and published by the Bangla Academy. A comprehensive publication, filled with rare excerpts and photographs, it reveals a man who unwaveringly followed his dream of a separate homeland for the Bangladeshis. It highlights how, with courage and determination, Bangabandhu welcomed incarceration on several occasions, and despite that, stuck to his task and his conviction. He did not agree to compromises and half-way solutions. In that context, he became synonymous with an idea and eventually became the symbol of freedom and independence.

The work also sheds light on the different efforts undertaken by Bangabandhu, leader of the newly independent country, in successfully providing not only relief and rehabilitation to more than ten million displaced persons but also in the undertaking of measures to restore order and stability within a war-ravaged economy. There are also details about how he initiated steps towards the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign country in the arena of international relations.

However what touched me most was Chapter 7 in the Fifth Section of Volume Two -- pages 720 to 742. It contains details of the assassination of the great leader, members of his immediate family and several others who were at that time on duty in his residence. There are also eye-

witness accounts of the horrific tragedy as it took place and of the situation immediately after (with the bodies of the victims still lying in several parts of the private residence of Bangabandhu, in and around Road 32 of Dhaka's Dhanmondi Residential Area).

Reading the accounts all over again, left me with a bitter taste in the mouth. How could we do what we did? How could we repay the unquestioned leader of the Bangladeshis with such damning cruelty? We were lucky to have Bangabandhu in our midst. Unfortunately, instead of profiting from his resolute leadership, we paid him back with murder.

The August putsch was carried out by certain sections of the armed forces and a group of disgruntled politicians. They roamed the streets of Dhaka and swept aside innocence, their eyes showing as much clarity as glass. The voice of liberty was snuffed out by the very men trained to save, rather than maim.

Murder was bad enough but what followed was even worse. On September 26, 1975 through an Extraordinary Bangladesh Gazette Notification, the usurper President Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed and his compliant Secretary of the Ministry of Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Justice informed the nation that under 'The Indemnity Ordinance, 1975 (Ordinance No. XIX)' restrictions had been put in place with regard to 'taking any legal or other proceedings in respect of certain acts or things done in connection with, or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or steps necessitating the historical change and the proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of the 15th August, 1975'. What an abuse of the English language!

The consequence of such lack of accountability was only natural. Murderers did not hesitate to commit another crime. That is exactly what happened on 3 November, 1975. Four prominent leaders of the Awami League, formerly Ministers, including the Acting President and the Prime Minister during our War of Liberation were brutally killed within the Dhaka Central Jail. A three member Judicial Commission, as expected, was immediately constituted to investigate the matter, but that was the end of that story. Nothing happened.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party was eventually formed -- the beneficiary of the tragic scenario. Several opportunistic persons, devoid of principles, jumped into



its bandwagon and helped to destroy the basic pillars and ethos that had guided the efforts of the nation in the carrying out of the War of Liberation. Reactionaries and known collaborators (of the repressive and illegal Pakistani occupying forces) aided them in this regard.

The BNP leadership however forgot that what goes round usually comes around. Their espousal of lack of accountability for murder of innocent people came back to haunt the BNP through the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman in May 1981. This murder was however immediately addressed through the formation of a Special Tribunal. It found certain persons guilty of complicity in the crime and they were immediately executed.

Such a process of completion of the judicial process was however not available for those associated with the killings that took place on August 15, 1975. It took 21 years before the crime could be addressed. The Awami League government sworn into office in 1996 took two important steps -- the overturning of the iniquitous Indemnity provision and the initiation of a normal judicial process (not through a Special Tribunal) for trying those guilty of the crimes committed on 15 August. This measure commendably reiterated the belief of the aggrieved victims in the fairness of our Judiciary. The government also declared that day as the National Mourning Day and a public holiday.

Unfortunately, the new BNP Alliance government (elected to office in 2001) cast basic civility out of the window. Their obdurate disliking for Bangabandhu saw the Alliance government canceling on 28 July 2002 the observance of the National Mourning Day. This was politics of hatred at its worst. The judicial process pertain-

ing to the alleged killers of Bangabandhu was also more or less suspended through machinations between the politicised Judiciary and the government in power. It was amazing to see how the virus of 'embarrassment' spread within the echelons of the judicial hierarchy. Fortunately for the people, due process of law and the principles of natural justice were upheld on July 27, 2008 when the High Court declared illegal the cancellation of this significant Mourning Day.

I believe that the observance of this day as the National Mourning Day has reaffirmed the establishment of the rule of law.

However, reinstating this day as the National Mourning Day has only been just the first step. Like many others, I want to see a full conclusion of this process. We need to have a swift completion of the trial of those alleged to be killers. Steps also need to be taken to identify where those charged with the crime are presently residing (if they have not been apprehended as yet) and to bring them to justice. Everyone must have his day in court and if found innocent, should be allowed to live as free citizen. The judicial process must be completed -- the sooner the better. Without this, our homage to the great leader will sound hollow.

We, as a nation must move forward. Similarly, the final resolution will also underline that crime does not pay and indemnity is not available for anyone participating in a violent conspiracy that leads to mayhem and murder. A successful conclusion of this process will also enable us to subsequently address the completion of the course of action related to the War Crimes Trial.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador and can be reached at mzamir@dhaka.net

It's official: RSS is the boss

The BJP and its ideology have been uppermost in Jaswant Singh's mind. He might have huffed and hawed but he continued to be a member of the party's high command. What struck me the most was his puerile assertion that he stuck to the principles he had imbibed in the military academy. The academy is a crucible where religious identities and communal bias of cadets get melted.

KULDIP NAYAR

I was more than a storm in the tea cup. Jaswant Singh's book on Quaide Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah made more news than his expulsion from the BJP for having written the book. I have been a witness to the era of partition and before. I think Jaswant Singh has been unfair to the history. If blame is to be apportioned -- a futile exercise after 62 years -- all the three parties -- the British, the Muslim League and the Congress -- in that order, are guilty. It is a subject which academicians from both the countries should discuss across the table to go over the reasons why the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, had got so alienated from each other that something like division had become inevitable in the early forties.

Still it is a fact that both Hindus and Muslims left their home under the belief that they would return once the frenzy subsided. Their hope did not come true because both Punjabs ousted members of the community other than their own. And then there was so much bloodshed and so much destruction wrought that they could not have gone back and start life as if it was all a bad dream. And when the rulers in both countries accepted migration of population, which they had resisted earlier, it was all over.

The thesis that Jawaharlal Nehru, not Jinnah, was responsible for partition did not evoke any discussion beyond the

media and the BJP. The reason why the debate really did not take off was because other parties did not participate in it. The attention is increasingly focused on the BJP's inner fighting. Arun Shourie, an academician-turned-politician, has made the scene more sombre by hurling abuses on the BJP's leadership, naming the party president for all the ills. Shourie has appealed for an intervention by the RSS which has in the BJP its political instrument. The RSS spokesman has said that it can guide, not control. Even this studied remark shows that the boss is the RSS which is an avowed exponent of Hindutva.

The RSS is the same organization which was banned following Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. Many BJP members, including L.K. Advani, the party's top leader, have graduated from the RSS. With all liberal credentials, Atal Behari Vajpayee stood at attention in the khaki shorts whenever the RSS held the rally of its adherents in Delhi to convey that even the Prime Minister (Vajpayee was then heading the BJP-led government) was not outside the party's discipline.

The RSS has been anti-Jinnah from the day Pakistan came into being because its formation was considered "the cutting of the Bharat Mata into pieces." That explains why Advani's praise of Jinnah during his visit to Karachi landed the BJP leader in trouble and he had to resign from the party presidency at the instance of the RSS.

It is a paradox that when Vajpayee went

to Lahore and visited the Minar-e-Pakistan, he wrote in the visitors' book that the integrity and prosperity of India depended on the integrity and prosperity of Pakistan. Vajpayee got away with his remark because he was India's Prime Minister. The RSS could do nothing against him because it did not want to lose the power it enjoyed. Any action against Vajpayee would have brought the government down.

Many years ago, soon after the emergency when I shared jail with the RSS men, I was invited to address an RSS shakha -- the only time I did. I told them if they wanted to undo Pakistan they should let Muslims in India feel that they were equal citizens and facilitate them to enjoy all that the Hindu majority did in terms of employment, economic betterment and accommodation. My argument was that the Muslims got distanced because they did not get their due.

The RSS has not changed its anti-Muslim philosophy. That is the reason why the BJP does not get the community's vote, 15 per cent. The Hindutva terminology is explained as nationalist. Yet in all Hindu-Muslim riots, the RSS men have been found involved. What happened to the Christians in Orissa was the doing of the Bajrang Dal, the militant wing of the RSS.

It is a pity that the BJP has never stood on its own. The RSS gives its strength. Therefore, even the liberal elements in the BJP do not speak out against the inveterate hatred of RSS towards secularism. What was once the Jana Sangh became the BJP after it parted company with the Janata. The point at issue was that the latter insisted on the Jana Sangh members to snap their tie with the RSS, an undertaking they had given while merging into the Janata. Jaswant Singh preferred a Hindutva outfit to the liberal Janata. Even today he has not uttered a word against the RSS. He has never questioned the ideology of Hindutva. Nor has he ever

challenged the BJP's role as a political face of the RSS.

Jaswant Singh was found wanting in taking a posture on Gujarat. He was critical of chief minister Narendra Modi and favoured the dismissal of his government. But he never said it openly. He has correctly recalled that while travelling with Shourie to Ahmedabad, Jaswant Singh asked Advani to suggest to Vajpayee the dismissal of Modi government. What Jaswant Singh has not told is the brainwashing of Vajpayee they did. During his speech in Mumbai, after arriving from Ahmedabad, Vajpayee made a virulent attack on Muslims that they were making trouble wherever they lived.

The BJP and its ideology have been uppermost in Jaswant Singh's mind. He might have huffed and hawed but he continued to be a member of the party's high command. What struck me the most was his puerile assertion that he stuck to the principles he had imbibed in the military academy. The academy is a crucible where religious identities and communal bias of cadets get melted. There is no Hindutva or Islamic ideology guiding them.

My main disappointment is over the outcome of the party's three-day Chintan Baithak (brainstorming session) a few days ago at Shimla. I thought the country would know where the BJP was heading. It seems to have lost its way and does not realize this. After the meeting, all that BJP president Rajnath Singh said was that Advani would continue to lead the party for the next five, 50, 100 years. I have nothing against Advani. But the BJP needs to change its image. Hindutva is against the country's ethos of pluralism. Hindutva excludes minorities. The BJP is losing space because it is going against the nation's temperament. The party knows too well but can't change because of the RSS.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.