

Extra-judicial killings

PM's words heartening but need to be followed by concrete action

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina appears to have clear views about the extra-judicial killings which have of late been a subject of intense debate in the country. She has told a group of human rights ambassadors from some European nations that her government is strictly opposed to such action and that if anyone is found engaging in extra-judicial killing, he or she will face the law. Coming against a background of questionable 'crossfire' killings, about which we made our views known only a few days ago, we think the prime minister's comments couldn't have come a day later. We therefore take hope from her expression of sentiment on the issue. Her realization that the unnatural deaths which have lately occurred have not been going down well either in Bangladesh or abroad (which again is quite natural) leads us into thinking that we can now look forward to a reversal of the situation.

It is certainly unfortunate that such deaths, which began in the period of the BNP-Jamaat alliance government, should have continued under the present dispensation. That is because the ruling Awami League had promised before last year's elections that if it went to power it would put an end to extra-judicial killings. That has not happened and in the last nine months more than seventy individuals have died in 'crossfires.' Making matters worse only a few days ago was the assertion by a minister that 'crossfire' killings were a way of reducing crime. It was embarrassing, but we are now reassured by the way the prime minister seems to be looking at the issue. We might add here that Sheikh Hasina's views, in order to be taken at face value, must now be put into implementation. Expressions of concern over important issues are not enough. They must be followed by concrete action. Which means that from here on, the government must ensure that certain measures are taken where putting a stop to extra-judicial killings is concerned.

In the first place, there must be concrete and adequate safeguards against such killings and under no circumstances must individuals detained by the police or RAB lose their lives in questionable manner. In the second (and this follows from what has just been said), such safeguards will call for constant oversight on the part of the government if transgressions are to be avoided. Finally, a mechanism must be in place for the government to undertake a periodic review of the activities of the security forces.

All of this is do-able and indeed must be done if the stigma of 'crossfire' killings is to be removed from our law-enforcing agencies. We expect Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government to prove themselves equal to the task. Let them bear in mind that it is not morally and politically right that a democratically elected government preside over situations which militate against decency and basic human rights.

Allow the ACC to work independently

It shouldn't relapse into anti-corruption bureau status

ONE other than the chairman of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Ghulam Rahman has voiced his concern over possible further dilution of the ACC's authority and mandate as an anti-graft watchdog body. Within months into his job he seems to have come to realise that the ACC is a 'toothless tiger' to borrow his expression but his current worries are that it is now possibly on the verge of morphing into a 'clawless' body.

For, according to some proposals sent by the cabinet committee to the ACC for its opinion, the government seeks to require of the ACC to obtain its prior permission before filing anti-graft cases against public officials, policy makers, lawmakers and local body representatives. While reacting to such a move by the cabinet committee, the incumbent in ACC has demurred at the effort at making 'the commission more powerless by changing its laws in the name of reform'. Most people will share his concern.

The independence of the Anti-Corruption Commission was deemed to have been ensured by delinking it from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) which went down well as a qualitative change in the anti-corruption dispensation. Much of the ills and ineffectiveness of the so called Bureau of Anti-Corruption originated in its being an appendage to the PMO. But by requiring the ACC to obtain prior permission of the government before drawing anti-corruption proceedings against just about anybody who is somebody in the country, that structural separation of the ACC from the PMO is seemingly being put paid to.

Although the ACC has not delivered the goods expected of it, yet it is a fact that the level of public consciousness of the need to fight corruption in high places has intensified in recent years. In this context, we wish to point out that since the proposals are in a recommendatory phase, the government will be well advised not to go ahead with these; instead, be supportive of independent working of the ACC as a pivotal, statutory anti-graft body. However, our comment will be incomplete if we don't point to the pressing need for making the prosecution cast-iron if we are to make the crusade against corruption a success.

Our famished road of flattery

In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, Azaro's father tells him that greed and insatiability resulted in the creation of a monster. When this monster couldn't find enough animals to eat in the forest, it came out on the roads travelled by men. This famished monster of the road became part of all the roads in the world.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

A parliament member appeared on a late night show, but that's not why I am writing today. She claimed to have recurrent nightmares since she attended a political rally, which came under grenade attack. And, guess what she said about what she says when she wakes up in the middle of the night? In a subconscious slip, she screams after all these years if her leader was safe. Now I will tell you why I am writing today. I spent the rest of that night sorting out whether what she said was flattery or Freud.

Many times they overlap. People have complex emotions when it comes to those they worship and admire. There is nothing wrong with it. They can be in sincere awe of those who are gifted and superior. But there is a crossover where the lauder becomes lackey. Flattery is insincere praise with a manifest objective. Its sole purpose is to win favours for personal benefit.

So, flattery is praise with a selfish twist. It defies the law of gravity, going high from low. People also resort to flattery for the sake of survival. Not too long ago, we saw this circus on television. The scion of a political family was flanked by two senior politicians, both of whom smiled at the camera. They said they were delighted that a young man half their age was anointed party boss.

This is what anthropologists call the "pecking order," when weak animals pay court to strong ones. It involves fawning, flattery and falsification. Richard Stengel writes in *You Are Too Kind: A Brief History of Flattery*, that harmless snakes mimic the bright colours of poisonous ones. Similarly, butterflies that might be eaten by predatory birds mimic the colours of their foul-tasting cohorts. In the Darwinian world, imitation of the fittest also ensures preservation of life.

But chimpanzees take this matter too far. The subordinate chimp greets the alpha male, sometimes even kissing his feet, or bringing a leaf or stick as offering. There are

other things weak chimps do for the pleasure of strong ones. Females offer their backsides for sniffing and inspection.

Flattery in the human world is much more complicated. We don't do it entirely for survival. It's not done entirely out of servility either. Here the weak flatter the strong over a wide range of matters. Often the matter exceeds this world, entering the next life.

For example, a writer named Ptahhotep in ancient Egypt offered advice on how to ingratiate with the Pharaoh. One should laugh after the Pharaoh laughs, because it was going to be very pleasing to the Pharaoh's heart. What was flatterer's reward for a job well done? He was to be buried near the Great One's tomb, so that he could continue to flatter his master even after death.

There was a time in this country when flattery was tradition. Subjects couldn't walk with their umbrellas open in front of their zamindar's house. They also couldn't wear their shoes, and were forced to carry them under their armpits. It was considered insolence if a person of low birth looked a highborn in the eye. Rules of engagement between lesser and greater were turned into rituals.

Times have changed. So have rituals. Flattery persists as a relic of exploitation of men by men. The weak still pays court to the strong. The low-salaried pays court to the high-salaried, the less powerful to the more powerful, and less fortunate to the more

fortunate. One's wish is another's command. Bribery is flattery in cash. Flattery is bribery in kind.

In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, Azaro's father tells him that greed and insatiability resulted in the creation of a monster. When this monster couldn't find enough animals to eat in the forest, it came out on the roads travelled by men. This famished monster of the road became part of all the roads in the world. He is still hungry, and he will always be hungry. This is why there are so many accidents in the world.

For us that monster proves even worse. The men in the villages now walk with their umbrellas open and wear their shoes. Most of them can look others in the eye. But the monster has come out from darkness to light. It has devoured the enlightened path, still hungry for more. Education has eclipsed us.

Under the new feudal order, subjects don't open their mouths in front of their masters. They don't tell the truth, and wear obedience on their sleeves. They don't look their lords in the eye. In suits and boots, this marching army of ambitious folks is ready to do anything to build their careers. On this famished road, light snatches its own lustre. We live in the growing shadow of being flattered to flatter.

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Nobel Peace Prize for visions

President Obama may not have achieved much to show yet, but has, nonetheless, engendered substantial goodwill overseas through a series of speeches with far reaching implications; persistence to pursue a nuclear weapons free world, reaching out to the Muslim world with friendly hands; and making efforts to restart "two state" negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

AFTER eight years of George Bush's cowboy presidency that created a 'tidal wave of hate America' in the rest of the world and diminished American image as a peacemaker through international dialogue and mutual respect, the world finally lands a leader -- a reformer, if you will -- who showed a vision of "hope and change" to advance "diplomacy rather than confrontation around the globe".

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France said the award was given in recognition of "America's return to the hearts of the world's peoples," while Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany believes it was given as an "incentive to the president and to us all" to strive harder for peace.

The 2008 Nobel Peace Prize (NPP) winner, former president Martti Ahtisaari of Finland, interpreted the award as an approval of Obama's goal of achieving Middle East peace. The 2002 winner, former president Jimmy Carter called the award to Obama "a bold statement of international support for his vision and commitment." Former vice president and the co-winner of the 2007 award, Al Gore, called Obama's winning "well deserved."

Amid all these laudatory notes from global leaders, the conservative Republicans, neo-cons and the Obama

haters went berserk soon after he was declared the 2009 NPP winner.

"This is completely bizarre," said Iain Martin in *The Wall Street Journal*. "Traditionally, it has been standard procedure that winners of the prize do their peacemaking first." With whom has Obama made peace -- Hillary Clinton?

"Obama isn't the first American president to win the NPP, but he's the first to win it without having accomplished anything," wrote John Miller, of the *National Review*. "Obama's award is simply the projection of wishful thinking."

Republicans portrayed Obama's winning the award as unworthy. They viewed the award as the committee's repudiation of Bush's unilateralism in dealing with global issues.

In a fundraising letter, Michael Steele, chairman of the Republican National Committee -- an African-American himself -- wrote: "The Democrats and their international leftist allies want America made subservient to the agenda of global redistribution and control. And truly patriotic Americans like you and our Republican Party are the only thing standing in their way."

Rebuffing the influx of negative outbursts, NPP Committee Chairman Thorbjørn Jagland argued that Obama's efforts to heal the divide between the West

and the Muslim world and scale down a Bush-era plan for an anti-missile shield in Europe have contributed to -- if not a safer world -- a world with less tension. "Alfred Nobel wrote that the prize should go to the person who has contributed most to the development of peace in the previous year." Jagland asked: "Who has done more for that than Barack Obama?" The committee expounded that giving Obama the peace award could be interpreted as an early vote of confidence to build global support for the policies of his young administration, namely nuclear disarmament and his conciliatory approach, based on more on diplomacy and dialogue, towards addressing global issues.

The Committee asserted: "Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future," the committee said. "His diplomacy is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population."

Obama detractors are asking him to decline the award. "To be honest," the president said in the Rose Garden, "I do not feel that I deserve to be in the company of so many of the transformative figures who have been honoured by this prize, men and women who've inspired me and inspired the entire world through their courageous pursuit of peace." He, however, plans to travel to Oslo on December 10 to "accept this award as a call to action, a call for all nations to confront the challenges of the 21st century." The White House said that Obama will donate the prize money of \$1.4 million to charity.

Obama is only the third sitting president to win the NPP. The others were Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 for negotiating an end to a war between Russia and Japan, and Woodrow Wilson in 1919 for the Treaty of

Versailles.

President Obama may not have achieved much to show yet, but has, nonetheless, engendered substantial goodwill overseas through a series of speeches with far reaching implications; persistence to pursue a nuclear weapons free world, reaching out to the Muslim world with friendly hands; and making efforts to restart "two state" negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Many of us believe that the last thing Barack Obama needs at this moment in his presidency is a trophy for his visions. The award may inadvertently complicate his dealings with the intricate challenges in Afghanistan and Pakistan; the insurgency in Iraq may have subsided considerably but the situations is still quite fragile; North Korea is still belligerent and staging missile tests every now and then; although Iran joined the negotiating table, it still shows defiance against moratorium on uranium enrichment; Israel is defiant to freeze the illegal settlements in occupied Arab lands.

President Wilson's award came three months before his presidency ended while Obama's award came with 3 years left in his presidency. In his NYT October 11 commentary, Professor John Milton of the University of Wisconsin wrote: "Wilson never had a chance in his post presidential life to shape the multilateral diplomatic world he envisioned. Perhaps in Barack Obama he will get something like a second chance."

Many of us argue that President Obama may have deserved the prestigious award for his visions; but at this early juncture of his presidency, it may be more a liability -- perhaps more burden than glory, if you will. The burden of earning it deservingly is enormously perilous.

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The case against a surge

It's important to remember that the crucial, lasting element of the surge in Iraq was not the influx of troops, but getting Sunni tribes to switch sides by offering them security, money, and a place at the table. US troops are now drawing down, and yet -- despite some violence -- the Sunnis have not resumed fighting because Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is courting their support.

FAREED ZAKARIA

AT the heart of General Stanley McChrystal's request for a major surge in troops is the assumption that we are failing in Afghanistan. But are we really? US has had one central objective: to deny al-Qaeda the means to reconstitute, train, and plan major terror attacks. This mission has been largely successful for the past eight years. Al-Qaeda is dispersed, on the run, and unable to direct attacks of the kind it planned and executed routinely in the 1990s.

Fourteen of the top 20 leaders of the group have been killed by drone attacks. Its funding sources are drying up, and its political appeal is at an all-time low. All this is not an accident but rather a product of the US presence in the region and efforts to disrupt terrorists, track funds, gain intelligence, aid development, help allies, and kill enemies.

It's true that the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated considerably.

While it is nothing like Iraq in 2006 -- civilian deaths are a 10th as numerous -- parts of the country are effectively controlled by the Taliban. Other parts are no man's land. But these areas are sparsely populated tracts of countryside.

All the major population centres remain in the hands of the Kabul government. It is worth the effort to gain control of all 35,000 Afghan villages scattered throughout the country? That goal has eluded most Afghan governments for the last 200 years and is a very high bar to set for US mission there.

Why has security gotten worse? Largely because Hamid Karzai's government is ineffective and corrupt and has alienated large numbers of Pashtuns, who have migrated to the Taliban. It is not clear that this problem can be solved by force, even using a smart counterinsurgency strategy. In fact, more troops injected into the current climate could provoke an antigovernment or nationalist backlash.

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crucial, lasting element of the surge in Iraq was not the influx of troops, but getting Sunni tribes to switch sides by offering them security, money, and a place at the table. US troops are now drawing down, and yet -- despite some violence -- the Sunnis have not resumed fighting because Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is courting their support.

US and the Afghan government need to make much greater efforts to wean Pashtun tribes away from the most radical Taliban factions. It is unclear how many Taliban fighters believe in a global jihadist ideology, but most US commanders with whom I've spoken feel that the number is less than 30 percent. The other 70 percent are driven by money, gangland peer pressure, or opposition to Karzai.

And when we think through our strategy in Afghanistan, let's please remember that there is virtually no al-Qaeda presence there. Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. Mike Mullen recently acknowledged what US intelligence and all independent observers have long said: Al-Qaeda is in Pakistan, as is the leadership of the hard-core Afghan Taliban. (That's why it's called the Quetta Shura, Quetta being a Pakistani city.)

All attacks against Western targets that have emanated from the region in the past eight years have come from Pakistan and not Afghanistan. Even the most recently foiled plot in US, which involved the first Afghan that I know of to be implicated in global terrorism, originated in Pakistan. Yet

we spend \$30 in Afghanistan for every dollar in Pakistan.

There's little evidence that Pakistan's generals have truly accepted that they must defeat all the jihadis in their country (as opposed to just those who threaten the Pakistani state). But they have been more cooperative and active in the past year than ever before. A civilian government, the jihadi takeover of the Swat Valley, a change in public attitudes, and increased American aid have all contributed to a more effective US-Pakistan relationship. Greater energy, attention, and resources will surely yield even more.

What about the argument that Osama bin Laden and his minions will simply shift back across the border if the Taliban is allowed free rein? Well, they haven't done so yet, despite the pockets of turf the insurgents control. And it is easier for us to deny them territory than to insist that we control it all ourselves -- we can fight like guerrillas too.

Remember that US and its allies have close to 100,000 troops in Afghanistan now.

Keeping them there is the right commitment, one that keeps in mind the stakes, but also the costs and, most important, the other vital interests around the world to which US foreign policy must also be attentive.

©Fareed Zakaria is editor of Newsweek International and author of *The Post-American World* and *The Future of Freedom: Liberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*.