

A serious question of accountability

Extra-judicial killings should stop

THE High Court (HC)'s heightened concern over unabated custodial killing by the elite crime-busting outfit Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) expressed during a hearing on December 14 reflects the nation's sensitivity towards the extreme gravity of the issue.

Unfortunately, the law-enforcement unit in question did not stop even after the HC had issued a suo moto on the Director General (DG) of Rab, the home secretary and the two Rab officials purported to be involved in the killing of two brothers of Madaripur during the so called 'encounter.'

Incidentally, reports have it that some 11 people have died in custody after the highest court issued the rule on November 15. This has caused to stick a blot on the concept of rule of law including respect for human rights.

Reports compiled by different human rights group say that more than 1, 000 such killings have taken place since the inception of Rab in 2004.

In the face of serious worsening of law and order, the government of the time went for raising this special police force. All concerned had welcomed the government's decision at that time. Initially, Rab's success in arresting the reigning state of chaos and terror drew acclaim from different quarters. But with the passage of time, questions have arisen about the very propriety and legitimacy of the method being used by this force to deal with the suspects. What is particularly disconcerting is that the persons behind the killings were hardly held to account. This has bred a sense of impunity in the force.

The irony is, for all practical purposes, death penalty virtually got carried out without recourse to due process of the law thereby denying the victims their right to self-defence in a court of law. This goes against the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights enshrined in the nation's Constitution. Even the prime minister had in the Jatiya Sangsad (parliament) said her government would not allow any kind of extra-judicial killing.

We, therefore, welcome the HC's role in addressing this grave issue of public interest. The human rights groups deserve commendation for the hard work they have done by bringing up these incidents of "cross-fire."

The government would do well to be heedful of the highest court's call in earnest and without further loss of time put a stop to the extra-judicial killings once and for all. For at stake here is the sense of justice, the government's image and its role as protector of law and human rights.

Attempted mugging by cops

Where has it come to!

THE aborted mugging bid at Paltan area of the city on Tuesday by policemen who included an ASI is the latest example of custodians of law turning into not just law breakers but even as criminals who they should have been duty-bound to be catching themselves. It is the pedestrians who had to assume the unlikely and role of catching the cops-turned-muggers. Though three other accomplices of the ASI managed to make good their escape, the gang leader failed to do so, as if to further warp the public face of the police. A crime committed by any law enforcer puts a question-mark on the image of the entire law enforcing mechanism.

In the past such happenings were but rare. But now these are acquiring a frequency that must make the police bosses sit up, take note of and do whatever is needed to stem the recurrence of such incidents. These call for internal cleansing, surveillance and supervision at appropriate levels. We must not forget that upon the performance of the police hinges maintenance of law and order which holds the key to social security, peace and progress.

It is extremely important that antecedents of applicants for police jobs be closely scrutinised before accepting any one for appointment. This principle cannot be allowed to be diluted. Then the questions of instilling the right motivation in and imparting proper in-service training to the members of the police force would have to be attended to. These issues are becoming more and more relevant with some members of the police behaving like hardened criminals.

The Paltan incident is another reminder of the pressing need for police reform which will have to be fast-tracked from what is now caught up in slow motion. The much-talked about police reform agenda which, among other, lays emphasis on logistical support and structural improvements, has to take on board the issue of moral degeneration which could nullify all other steps that might be taken to enhance the law enforcers' ability to handle the crime situation and render public service.

A peace medal for war

If a just peace, which Obama wishes for the world, is to be established, justice and fair play will have to be ensured first.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

THE Nobel committee has been known to spring surprises in choosing winners, particularly of the Peace Prize. This year the world was taken by surprise when it chose a newly elected president -- Barack Obama.

The Committee's justification was even more interesting. We were told that the decision was one, which was motivated more out of hope, of what is expected of the winner, rather than an acknowledgement of what he has done. That the decision had created controversy was acknowledged by Obama himself, and we must thank him for the humility to recognise that there were perhaps others more deserving than he, to whom the honour could have gone. No doubt he was as surprised, as most of us were, to find himself in the company of, according to his own words, "transformative figures" who had won it before him.

One could say that the award is as much reposition of faith and hope on the office of the US president as it is on the person Obama. It could also be said that perhaps no award

has come with such a weight of responsibility, where the most powerful public office holder in the world has to constantly strive to justify the award, "to earn it, now that he has got it."

However, it is the substance of a few aspects of his acceptance speech in Oslo, rather than the rationale of the choice, which is the purpose of this article.

To say the least, some portions of the speech did not match the occasion. It was an attempt to justify illegal acts of hostility. The incongruity of the focus of the speech, compared to the sombre occasion in Oslo, was very stark. Quite naturally, when one seeks to validate war and justifies it by restating the contentious concept of "just war" there is bound to be incompatibility in the rhapsodic thoughts expressed by the US president and the actions of the past US governments.

There is, regrettably, an acute mismatch between what the US president preached and what had been practiced by the US governments since the end of the second Great War.

While President Obama accepted his inability to offer a definitive solution to the problems of war, he, nonetheless, reminded us that war remains an arbiter of conflicts and

wanted the world to "think in new ways about the notions of just war and the imperatives of a just peace."

And here is where one finds the realist in the president getting the better of the idealist that he wants us to believe he is. While no nation state can be denied the right to pursue its national interests, problems compound when a proposition (just war) is legalised through subjective characterisation of it. If one country can wage war basing on its understanding of "just," what prevents another state, or a non-state actor for that matter, as we are witnessing now, to resort to the same, on its understanding of the matter? And in any case, can all the preconditions, which Obama suggests should exist before a "just war" can be resorted to, be met?

The US president, while referring to the two wars, (some critics accuse him of forgetting the third, the war on terror) offered no justification for US involvement in Iraq while suggesting that it was drawn in, in the Afghan war. But what one finds very remarkable is his emphasis on the fact that forty-three other countries are a part of this coalition. Large coalition neither validates a strategy nor ensures its success. And, according to experts, this is a coalition of pacifists; more foreign troops fought alongside the United States in Vietnam than are now actually fighting in Afghanistan today.

While President Obama proudly articulates the fact that, "the US has helped underwrite global security for more than six decades with the blood of our citizens and the strength of our arms" one wonders whether the sacrifice of its soldiers and its citizens have not gone in vain, given that though there has not been a third world war, internal and regional conflicts since the end of the WW II have cost huge in terms of life and resources. As for his concern at the arms race, he seems to have overlooked the fact that the US is at the top of the list of arms vendors in the world.

One would like to ask whether or not the US' stand for democracy and human rights, and the right to free speech and to choose own leaders, which he so eloquently advocates, is actually an ideological pretence and a double speak, which has created a clientele of the most autocratic and tyrannical states in all parts of the world, well-known for suppressing the democratic aspirations, and violating human rights, of their citizens.

If a just peace, which Obama wishes for the world, is to be established, justice and fair play will have to be ensured first. And pursuit of narrow self-interest is an impediment to establishing justice. This the US president must keep in mind.

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Nobel Laureate American presidents

Until now only three American presidents have won the Nobel Peace Prize while in office -- Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Barack Hussein Obama.

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UNTIL now only three American presidents have won the Nobel Peace Prize while in office -- Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Barack Hussein Obama. No one outside the Nobel Committee knows exactly what criteria are used to award the prize. But what everybody knows is that its decisions have often been controversial.

In the case of Barack Obama, there has been a lot of hue and cry over the Nobel Committee's decision. In most cases, there is huge jubilation in the country of the prize winner. When Professor Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel, even his adversaries in Bangladesh celebrated the fact that a Bangladeshi has been honoured with such a prize. But the United States is different. The most virulent criticisms of the decision have come from the Americans -- that it is premature or that it is politically motivated etc. etc.

President Obama's decision to send thirty thousand additional troops to the Afghan quagmire has caused even more criticism and unease. No one is satisfied. Those in favour of withdrawal are disappointed and have accused him of being a hypocrite and a warmonger. Cartoons have been published across the nation mercilessly lampooning the president. Of course, the American Right, who want total victory in Afghanistan -- whatever that means -- have called him a defeatist and are overjoyed at his predicament.

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In all this, few seem to remember that although Obama has become a war-time president he did not start these wars. Obama is "cool, calculated and cerebral," and definitely prefers negotiations to open-ended confrontations. Fewer seem to appreciate that when violence on such a massive scale is unleashed, even with the best of intentions, it takes time to bring it under control. This is precisely what Obama is trying to do. I am sure he realises that the US cannot win the Afghanistan war, at least not in the way Bush wanted it. He is trying to get out with some dignity as soon as possible. The American political system is very complex and Obama is constrained by many adverse circumstances.

One of the major criticisms levelled against the award has been that it is premature, that Obama has started many things but finished nothing yet. True, on the international front, Obama has taken great initiatives, but has not yet been able to achieve his goals. Time will tell whether he will achieve them. But I think the main reasons why he has been awarded this prize are that he is the fulfilment of Martin Luther King's dreams (Remember King's speech, "I have a dream...") and because of his quest for peace. He has certainly set the stage for major changes in American foreign policy. He has created a new climate in international co-operation. After eight years of Bush's arrogance and arbitrariness, it is, indeed, a welcome change.

Actually, relentless pursuit of peace was the principal reason why the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to President Woodrow Wilson. The American Right denounced him as "hesitating and cowardly." Like Obama, he was a reluctant warrior. German bellicosity and its unprovoked acts of war against American interests forced him to declare war on Germany in April, 1917. But from the very beginning, he worked for a "just and lasting peace" and campaigned for the establishment of the League of Nations with American participation, which would ensure collective security.

Unfortunately, on both these counts, he failed. Despite his relentless search for reconciliation, a humiliating treaty, (the Versailles Treaty), was imposed by his European allies on Germany, which laid the foundation of an even more violent confrontation only a few years later. Although a watered-down version of the League of Nations came into existence, Wilson was so disappointed that he decided to keep United States out of it. Yet, in spite of all this or may be because of all this, in December 1920, the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to him. He left office in 1921 and died in 1924.

In character, personality and above all, in their attitude towards war and peace, one can find many similarities between Wilson and Obama. But President Theodore Roosevelt, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906, was a very different person. While Wilson and Obama can be considered as reluctant warriors, Theodore Roosevelt was a swashbuckling adventurer and an expansionist (read imperialist). He became a national hero in the US because of his adventures in Cuba at the head of the 1st Volunteer Cavalry, known as the Rough Riders.

Under the McKinley-Roosevelt administration, the Platt Amendment was forced upon the Cuban people, converting Cuba

into a virtual colony of the United States. Roosevelt consolidated America's hold on the Philippines by killing hundreds of thousands of Filipino civilians and fighters. He acquired the Panama Canal Zone in 1903. In foreign affairs, his motto was: "Speak softly and carry a big stick." He was guided by this principle in his dealings with Venezuela, Panama, the Dominican Republic and even Canada. He later opposed President Wilson's League of Nations.

I think that, by this time, readers are wondering as to why the Nobel Committee awarded the Peace Prize to a man like him. Well, because he was a crafty politician and knew how to hide his real intentions.

The Peace Prize was awarded to Roosevelt for his efforts to end the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, which was fought for the control of North Asia. But in all this, Roosevelt was not guided by altruistic motives. He had a hidden agenda. He preferred the Japanese to the Russians because he thought that it would be easier for the US to control Japan's territorial ambitions than those of the Russians. He wanted the Japanese to recognise the American conquest and occupation of the Philippines, which they did. In a reciprocal gesture, Roosevelt approved the Japanese conquest and occupation of Korea.

Roosevelt's ultimate goal was to ensure US domination of not only the Americas but also of the Pacific. He had hoped that Japan's imperial ambitions would be restricted only to North Asia, leaving the rest of East Asia to the Americans and the British. As we all know now, the Japanese had other plans. But I am sure the Nobel Committee, while considering Roosevelt as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, had no knowledge of his hidden agenda or of Japan's imperial ambitions in Asia.

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Population in climate change challenges

Future population growth in developing nations could accentuate climate change whereas a reduction in growth rates would help mitigate climate change, thereby speeding up poverty reduction and development.

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CLIMATE change has emerged as a major global issue of common concern to the world community. Climate change is not only an environment issue but also a development issue, and is considered as one of the greatest challenges facing the world population. The world population prospect (2008 Revision of the United Nations Population Division) projected that the population of the world was likely to grow from today's 6.7 billion to 9.15 billion by 2050.

The Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) 2010 by Germanwatch indicates that the countries most affected by extreme weather events, covering 1990 to 2008, are Bangladesh, Myanmar, Honduras, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Haiti, India, Dominican Republic, Philippines and China. China, India and Bangladesh are the most populated countries, where population growth is a major concern. Population is growing most rapidly in the developing world, which will expose more people to climate change impacts.

As the COP15 summit is seeking effective strategies to meet climate change challenges, population trends and dynamics should also be considered. It is evident in the studies about economic growth, technological change, and population growth that higher population growth is associated with more

GHG.

It can be argued that climate change models possibly undervalue the impact of demographic trends on GHGs emissions growth as only population size is considered but not the compositional changes within the population as it grows. The world population is becoming more urban, and households are getting smaller. These changes have not been truly accounted for in climate change models although energy consumption patterns differ between the rural and urban populations and large versus small households.

Universal access to good quality reproductive healthcare services and meeting the demand of family planning can play an important role in climate change adaptation and mitigation. But these have not yet been incorporated into comprehensive climate change solutions. Governments and organisations must address the need for reproductive health and family planning following the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development), Cairo, 1994, where 179 countries agreed to the Program of Action that marked a fundamental shift in the motivation for population related policies by improvement of individual well-being.

This will not only improve the health and wellbeing of the population but also slow the growth of GHGs and reduce human vulnerability to climate change impacts. The number

of women of reproductive age continues to grow worldwide but there has been a significant decline in funding for family planning programs in international development assistance. This shortfall risks missing a chance to not only improve the lives of people around the world, but also to reduce the environmental consequences of population growth.

In this regard, continuing support of the Cairo program can be regarded as a "win-win" strategy. It should be taken into account that voluntary family planning and reproductive health programs, and investments in education and primary health care tend to lower fertility and slow population growth, reducing GHG emissions in the long run and improving the resistance of vulnerable populations to climate change impacts. The consequences of climate change and demographic change may be substantial in coming decades. Both researchers and policy makers should take into account the linkages between them.

Concern is growing about the impacts of potential changes in the frequency of extreme climate events. More research is needed on how demographic factors affect the vulnerability of populations. Close consideration of differentiated population dynamics and gender inequalities can widen policy options, generate better emissions scenarios and improve identification and targeting of vulnerable populations, which can lead to more effective strategies for mitigating climate change.

Population policies affect fertility, mortality and migration. Climate change raises a range of issues that provide justification for a population policy, which should be part of a

broad range of policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to global environmental change in general.

Distinct population groups and patterns of living clearly impose on the environment in diverse ways. Age structure, household size and spatial distribution, and level of development affect per capita emissions, and must be incorporated into climate change. Countries with high rates of poverty and population growth add relatively little to

greenhouse gases and other irreversible global ecological threats. This is not always taken into consideration -- for instance in the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) Special Report.

Future population growth in developing nations could accentuate climate change whereas a reduction in growth rates would help mitigate climate change, thereby speeding up poverty reduction and development. In the context of the Copenhagen climate negotiations (COP15), we sincerely hope that the countries will take effective steps associated with population.

Understanding the complex relationship between population and climate change and examining the links between population size and other factors related to mitigation and adaptation should be the top priority in addressing climate change and its consequences. Analysing population dynamics can illuminate who is most vulnerable, why, and how interventions can most effectively reach them.

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