

Death in law enforcers' hands

We strongly protest and urge govt action

REPORTS of three deaths of people in police custody only within a span of 5 days are simply unacceptable. If police are the public face of the government then it is a very scary face indeed that the citizens are watching recently. The latest incident of death of a man Mujbar by name under inexplicable circumstances has allegedly happened at the hands of the Darussalam police in the city last Thursday. The man was picked up from the Savar area the same day in the afternoon by a group of policemen and by night his body was found floating in the Turag river bearing torture marks on his lifeless body. According to the brother of the deceased, the policemen had allegedly demanded money from him for his release but when he failed to give it he was beaten to death. This stands corroborated by Iqbal, the deceased person's son who described in a prominent Bangla daily how the police treated his father: "They handcuffed him, gave him blows, kicked him, choked him in water by the river side, asked him for money, which his father said he didn't have, before hauling him up on to a boat." The police, however, denied all allegations of beating the person to death and rather branded him as a drug peddler.

The joint human rights report published by Ain O Shalish Kendro and Odhikar painted an overall picture of extrajudicial killings by the law enforcing bodies that is going on unabated in the country in the absence of veritable inaction on the part of the government. It says that in the last six months, as many as 61 people have lost their lives in so-called crossfire or encounter. The report mentions that many people remain untraceable after having been picked up by the law enforcers and after a gap of a few days their lifeless bodies are found abandoned in some place.

It is ironic indeed that life of the citizens appears to be equally at risk when in the hands of the law enforcers as they are in the hands of the criminals. There have been numerous allegations against the special elite force RAB of extrajudicial killings -- tagged as crossfire, gunfight and encounter -- but incidents of death in police custody did not reach such frightening level as they have in recent times. The police force seems to be working as per its own agenda oblivious of the laws of the land. The voice of the entire media, including that of The Daily Star, has been loud and clear on the issue of extrajudicial killings. But it is with a great deal of consternation we notice that nothing has been done to put a stop to this unconstitutional practice. On the other hand, to our dismay, some responsible people in the government have often given supportive statements or made attempts to evade the questions about it.

The incidents of death in RAB or police custody must stop now if the government is serious about establishing a society on the basis of law and justice. The rule of law must be given priority over everything else. We end on a surprising note that Awami League had clearly made a pledge in its election manifesto to stop extrajudicial killing. But the reality is so glaringly different.

Carnage in Lahore

Unending sectarian violence weakens Pakistan

A new suicide attack in Pakistan further demonstrates the increasing vulnerability of the country at the hands of religious extremists. This time, the victims have been worshippers at a well-known shrine in Pakistan's cultural capital of Lahore. As many as 42 worshippers have died as a result of the blasts at the Data Ganj Bakhsh shrine, with the macabre possibility that there could be fresh new casualties coming up from among those severely wounded in the explosions. This is not the first time that Lahore has been the target of a militant attack. In May this year, an assault on an Ahmadiyya mosque led to the death of 82 worshippers. All over Pakistan, in these past three years, no fewer than 3,400 people have been killed in such attacks, with the security forces proving powerless to prevent such violence.

It is no coincidence that in recent months, places of re-ligious worship in Pakistan have generally been targeted during Friday prayers, to a point where people in Pakistan and outside it apprehend such violence every time the day comes around. The rather curious bit here is that the Pakistani authorities, especially their intelligence agencies, have had little clue as to the planning and execution of such violent acts. It appears that the Pakistani Taliban and groups like it have built a network the government has been unable to penetrate. The increasing ferocity with which such militant bodies have been operating, through expanding their areas of activity, have pushed Pakistan into a situation that only worsens its already precarious condition. It is obvious that the war in Afghanistan has had its spillover effect for Pakistan, with the Taliban now freely working in such regions as the tribal areas. Besides, a fundamental reason behind this expansion in violence has been the extremist perception of the American role in Pakistan, a notion the Islamabad authorities have not quite been able to dispel.

That said, in recent times the fanatics have been propagating the idea that Sufism and its many manifestations, which are a part of the religious history of South Asia, go against the basic tenets of the Islamic faith. A few years ago they blew up a shrine in the NorthWest Frontier Province. They have threatened to do the same at the shrine of Lal Shabbaz Qalandar in Sindh. And now they have committed a new misdeed in Lahore.

All of which puts Pakistan in a quandary. The state has been weakened considerably. As for the government, it has not shown itself to be any better.



Caution: Football fever is contagious.

Football frenzy

One cannot expect that a country's social, political and academic activities should halt because of the WC. But almost such a situation now exists in Bangladesh, though it has not happened in other WC-participating countries, or the host country.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

ONE cannot be faulted if one feels transported to Brazil or Argentina while passing through any part of Dhaka. Thousands of Brazil and Argentina flags flutter from rooftops, windowsills and car bonnets. One will not see an excess of flags, some as much as fifty feet long, elsewhere in the world. There are also big hoardings of World Cup 2010 teams, with local favourites hogging most of the cutouts.

Football fans are reveling riding on rickshaws, motorbikes and four-wheelers, each contingent representing Brazil or Argentina, flying their flags and wearing their team jerseys. Such is the passion for Brazil and Argentina among Bangladeshis, though most hardly know anything about the countries beyond their football pitch. Some youth are acting in such madness as if the entire world will halt if either team fails to take the WC trophy.

Famous Uruguayan poet Eduardo Galeano said, "In his life, a man can change his wife, his political belief, even his religion, but never his football team." This is also applicable for Bangladeshis as football frenzy here moves around the same favourites -- Brazil, Argentina, Italy and Germany.

One cannot separate average Bangalees from two things -- football and politics, so goes a popular saying. It happens every four years, as football frenzy shakes up the country and during an election. WC football is a

global phenomenon and people of all nations look forward to it. But nowhere is WC fever more intense than in Bangladesh.

It is also the season to make megabucks. The city's sports goods stores are flooded with jerseys and T-shirts. Tailoring shops are busy making flags day and night. The sale of silk cloth for making mega-size flags must have crossed several crores of taka. Electronic companies are topping rebate offers for TV sets with special gifts like footballs.

"It's easy to give someone a Ronaldo cut. You just have to shave off the whole back and leave a little tuft in the front. But when someone with practically no hair wants a Kaka cut, it's like asking for the moon," said a haircutter, as most young men are now asking for a Ronaldo, Messi or Kaka haircut. This is what WC magic is all about.

Sadly, football frenzy has taken a wrong turn here. The authorities of educational institutions, particularly of higher education, are being compelled to close their campuses often because of political clashes, but no one has ever heard, that watching WC football on TV is a compelling cause for the untimely closure of a prestigious university like BUET. Yet, incredibly, this was the fact.

Clashes between students in favour of attending classes and those demanding early closure to watch WC matches unhindered led to the early closure of BUET. In fact those preferring football to academic routine got away with their demand. BUET's

incident is not the only instance of students squabbling over the WC. Similar incidents have also occurred at other places.

It appears that studying is just as difficult to do as working once the kickoff whistle blows. Some educational institutions were closed during the 2006 WC to allow students to enjoy football matches unhindered, even at the cost of academic learning.

Admittedly, the WC is regarded as the biggest global sporting carnival, which often infuses excitement in football-loving individuals. But when the excitement hampers a university's academic atmosphere, it not only assails academic progress but also makes a mockery of the discipline students must develop.

Buet students, who turned unruly, not only disrupted the academic calendar but also failed to appreciate the spirit of sports. Passion for a game is one thing, but giving in to it so deplorably is quite another. Indeed, BUET students, the country's best, have given a poor account of themselves.

One cannot expect that a country's social, political and academic activities should halt because of the WC. But almost such a situation now exists in Bangladesh, though it has not happened in other WC-participating countries, or the host country.

A young man was electrocuted while trying to attach an Argentina flag to a tree-top, and another boy committed suicide, as his impoverished parents could not buy him an Argentine flag. Such football frenzy in a country with a standard below that required for the WC does not bear a good sign.

Football has a habit of turning sensible human beings into passionately obsessive ones. When this phenomenon spreads across an entire country, following a successful WC, football fever takes hold. But when passion for the game and an irrepress-

ible desire of watching every match combine to create unusual behaviour, it is quite reasonable to question the sanity of those involved.

This might not be as ridiculous as it sounds, given that medical researchers noted a 25% rise in cardiac arrests during the WC matches. Not to miss a minute of thrilling entertainment with the sport's superstars, many have brought forward their retirement dates, while others have even postponed their weddings and honeymoons.

Quirky statistics relating for this do not always have negative undertones, something to which Russians can testify. During the 1994 WC held in USA, Russian police were delighted to announce a 70% drop in the national crime rate every time the country played one of its scheduled matches in North America.

Like the Bangladeshis, the Sudanese have not yet had the chance to see their national team perform on the world stage, but this has not stopped them from displaying their obvious passion for the event. So when a local power company in Khartoum in 2006 warned of possible electricity cuts unless residents reduced their over-use of certain household appliances, the entire city spontaneously chose to plunge itself into darkness, leaving only their television sets, broadcasting live WC coverage, to provide their homes with a little light.

In a similar situation, Bangladeshis become violent and attack power stations. Football frenzy with good-natured enthusiasm is a healthy sign. But the insanity that has taken the form of a strange disease in Bangladesh needs to be cured.

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Rich man, poor man

One hopes that the rich man's club will deliver on its promises. Whatever theory they follow, they should ensure a stable economic system that will help the poor countries to move on the path of development.

MAHMOOD HASAN

WHILE economies around the world continue to be in turmoil, the leaders of rich industrial nations and "emerging economies" met in Toronto on June 25-27.

There were actually two separate summits. The rich man's club, better known as G8, met on June 25-26. The other, known as G20, which is a forum of G8 plus 11 "major economies" and the European Union, met on June 26-27.

Originally, this forum of 20 members was formed in 1999, at the level of finance minister and central bank governor, to tackle the Asian financial crisis (1997).

It was not until December 2008 that the leaders of G20 were invited to Washington by President George Bush for a summit meeting to discuss ways to deal with the devastating recession that had spread worldwide at that time. It met for the second time in London in April 2009 and again in Pittsburgh in September 2009. Canada hosted the fourth summit in Toronto.

The Pittsburgh summit had set up the International Economic Council, which was mandated "to reform and sustain the global economic and financial system." It was with this mandate that the Toronto summit focused on recovery from the global economic and financial crisis and reviewed the implementation of commitments made at the London and Pittsburgh summits.

The composition of G20 is rather unusual. It encompasses all the five continents and accounts for over 85% of world

GDP. 80% of world trade is controlled by them. 65% of the world's population lives in these countries. Interestingly, not all the eleven "emerging market economies" chosen to participate have attained the same level of development. They were invited because they have positive economic growth and have large markets, some with large trade surpluses.

At both the G8 and the G20 meetings leaders were pitched in an engaging debate over how to tackle the recession. All the members acknowledged that their economies were slowly peeping out of recession and showing signs of growth that remained largely uneven and fragile.

The developed countries, burdened with massive debts and deficits, had opposing views on government spending. The European leaders said that they had to withdraw the economic incentives to balance their accounts. They had to reduce their debts and budget deficits by curtailing government spending and raising taxes.

The Americans stressed that "strengthening the recovery is the key," and any exit of government spending at that stage would jeopardise the recovery and could result in double-dip recession. Government spending was vital to create demand and employment, they argued. The Chinese agreed with the Americans.

Both the views were accommodated in the Final Declaration of G20 Summit -- saying "these [fiscal tools] will be differentiated and tailored to national circumstances." They, however, agreed to halve their budget deficits by 2013 but did not

mention anything about their massive debts.

The Declaration emphasised the need to develop a framework for strong, sustainable and balanced growth. It identified four pillars for reforming the financial sector -- strong regulatory framework, effective supervision of financial markets, resolving problems of "systemically important financial institutions," and transparent international assessment of financial institutions. Clearly, the banks and financial institutions in the developed world are going to come under strict surveillance.

The G8 Declaration dealt with security issues. The leaders were "profoundly concerned" with Iran's nuclear program. They "deplored the attack" on a South Korean warship by North Korea and "condemned" the killing of sailors, and expressed "grave concern" over North Korea's nuclear and missile tests.

On Palestine, the leaders said that the blockade of Gaza by Israel was "not sustainable and must be changed," but refrained from suggesting what that "change" would be. The Declaration, however, emphasised that "Israel's security concerns must be safeguarded."

G20 summits have become a biannual event. They will meet again in November this year in South Korea. G8 will meet again in France around the middle of 2011.

Though G8 claims that it works in "partnership with the international community," there are some questions. Through its "outreach" sessions it consults representative countries from different groups and continents.

This year, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper invited Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia (Chair of NEPAD), Malawi (Chair of African Union), Nigeria, and Senegal from Africa. Colombia, Haiti, Jamaica were invited from South America and the Caribbean. Evidently, there are no criteria for inviting the "outreach" countries.

If the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have to be achieved by 2015, to which the G8 is committed, then representatives of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and G77 could have been invited to make the discussions more inclusive.

It is undeniable that the LDCs are continuously struggling for basic needs such as food and energy. These two large groupings are well recognised by the United Nations, where they make substantial contributions.

The formation of the G8 and G20 has effectively sidelined the United Nations. At a time when the United Nations ought to have been playing a crucial role in addressing the economic problems facing the world, G20 huddled together to find solutions that are neither legal nor obligatory in nature. Whatever actions are taken by the rich nations will affect the LDCs profoundly. But if the UN took the same measures they would at least have the sanction of legality.

The recession has changed all economic theories. The leaders on both sides of the Atlantic seem to have made a pig's breakfast of two major economic theories. Keynesian economics advocates that governments should intervene during economic downturn, while the (Milton) Friedman model strongly opposes government interference in financial markets.

Past G8 summits had made tall commitments, but could not deliver. At the Gleneagle Summit (2005) the G8 promised to raise \$50 billion for Africa. Only \$20 billion have so far been disbursed. The summit at L'Aquila, Italy (2009) committed \$22 billion for food security, out of which \$ 6.5 billion have so far been raised.

One hopes that the rich man's club will deliver on its promises. Whatever theory they follow, they should ensure a stable economic system that will help the poor countries to move on the path of development.

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