

High Court's tough stand on deaths in police custody

Punitive action necessary as deterrence

THE tough approach taken by the High Court on the issue of custodial deaths is welcome and encouraging. The hard stance it has adopted toward the police, through warning them that not only must such deaths not recur but also that earlier deaths be investigated in full should go a long way in ensuring the rule of law. The tragedy, indeed the irony for us has been that those responsible for ensuring the security of citizens' lives are today themselves putting an end to some of those lives with impunity. We have said repeatedly, and so have others, that the death of any individual in RAB or police or any other custody is not only a violation of human rights but also plain murder on the part of the security and law and order forces. The most unfortunate aspect of it all is that neither the police nor RAB have taken such truths into consideration. Worse, their actions have been defended in various semantic ways by successive governments since the middle of the decade. In the end, it is the country which has been shamed before its own citizens and before global conscience.

Now the High Court has moved to put a leash on the police. We consider it an opportunity to create the conditions for a prevention of such extra-judicial deaths occurring again. But, of course, we remember only too well that earlier directives by the judiciary regarding the murder of citizens in custody have all been ignored. This time round, the High Court must ensure that the police demonstrate not only a high degree of accountability in their actions but also convince the nation that they can return to being a disciplined force at the service of citizens. Such accountability and discipline have not been observed in the deaths of the three men who recently died in police custody. What makes it worse is the deliberate attempt by the police authorities to put a spin on the tragedy by suggesting that the three men were involved in criminal activities. That is as outrageous as it is reprehensible. Besides, even if someone is accused of a crime, no one, not even the police or RAB, has the right to do away with the life of that individual. To ensure that it does not happen again, there must be in place a built-in mechanism that will stop the law-enforcers from encroaching on the rights of citizens.

The High Court directive makes a good number of relevant points the police must study and follow to the letter. We are particularly happy knowing that it has asked the department to go through newspaper editorials and articles on extra-judicial deaths and then go for corrective action. We also believe that it is now of critical importance that an impartial investigation into the three deaths be conducted, a full report be prepared and the report made available to the public in its entirety. There must be no hushing up. Those guilty must be given exemplary punishment as deterrence for the future.

Meanwhile, we believe the National Human Rights Commission, which has adopted a strong position on the custodial deaths in question, must be so empowered and must so function as a watchdog that public expectations of it are not belied. It must cast its net far and wide in the job of ensuring human rights in the country.

No-holds-barred BCL impunity continues

Why the kid-glove approach under a convenient guise?

WHY with each passing day feuding within BCL cadres centering around turf wars and money making has been on the ascent is much too known to bear repetition. But what we find patently incomprehensible is the apparent lack of seriousness and inaction of the government reinforced by a clear abdication of the authority of the ruling party before the BCL cadres.

RPO has required political parties' de-linking with any front organisations which are to operate independently with a constitution of its own. That is a coveted positive thing provided for; but can it be held up by the government party as a reason to circumvent its responsibility in treating criminals as criminals whatever label they take on even if it is that of BCL?

The point we wish to drive home is: does the reform of the RPO mean that the party in government will wash its hands of all responsibility about diabolic student excesses when they create violence in the campus, vitiate academic atmosphere, assault a VC and proctor or a teacher and, what more, monstrously hurl already beaten up fellow students of another faction from the ledges of second and third floors of a student hall? How cruel and brutal that is! Yet, the perpetrators are identifiable and so can be brought to book. But will they be? Except perhaps for their expulsion from the party and suspension of the BCL unit in question! Can anybody guarantee even the little penalty given them will not be nullified soon after the dusts settle?

Why hoodwink the people with an attempted but expedient tactic of skirting action? It forces the government's credibility to touch a new low and some of its good work getting overshadowed in the process. Good governance is only worth the authority it is exercised with. If seeing inaction in the face of growing misdeeds of errant students the public were to suspect that feuding politicians are themselves nurturing support groups among students, will they be wide off the mark?

However much the police are under instructions to act, more as a matter of public posturing than perhaps as a conviction by the leaders, they are basically seen as virtual bystanders. They must be induced by the government to treat gun-running students as nothing but criminals and have them punished accordingly.



Football... and the silence of the grave

A lot of hearts were broken here in Bangladesh when the team lost. You could see it on all those morose faces, all rendered morbid by a calamity they had never foreseen. It was an entirety of Bangladesh that was left beating its chest in despair.

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina thinks that the World Cup is over as far as Bangladesh is concerned. You know, she could well be right. For her, as she confesses, or nearly, the game was over when her favourite team crashed out of the series. And that was Brazil. You tend to wonder how she must have reacted when Brazil lost, rather inadvertently, to the Netherlands.

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Football is much like politics. It arouses some of our most sublime, and sometimes some of our basest, passions. Weeks before this year's World Cup got underway, the degree of emotion that often gets the better of our reason began to manifest itself through all that hoisting of foreign flags, fundamentally Brazilian and Argentine, all over the country. Not a street could be located that did not willingly lose itself in a flood of these flags. And they came in all

shapes and sizes -- tiny, not so tiny, big, large and gigantic.

On some streets, Bengali football aficionados made it a point to let citizens know that they were behind all that tough job of putting up the flags across the street. Their names were on the flags. They ran from post to pillar and from pillar to post, looking for pillars on which to post the flags and for posts from which they could proudly proclaim the imminent triumph of the teams of their preference at the World Cup. Those teams were for them pillars of unbridled strength.

Bengali journalists flew all the way to Johannesburg to file their on-the-spot dispatches about the historic goings-on at the tournament. Here at home, at their desks in their discrete offices, they got into animated discussions on the stars who would emerge even more brilliant from the Cup.

People talked of Messi, endlessly. They speculated on the many ways in which he would storm into history, of the halo that would transform him into a beatific face in football's best traditions. Not one among those philosophising souls even remotely considered the chances of Messi ending up being part of a messy performance at some

point.

Bangladesh's former and present footballers spoke with all the wisdom at their command of how the Argentines and the Brazilians would end up ruling the world of football. Ronaldo, Kaka and Messi, it was drilled into our humble little imaginations, were the wave of the present and the tsunami of the future. Woe befell you if you so much as voiced a quiet note of dissent. And then began the stream of defeats. Shock and awe, we soon came to understand, did not have to be terms only the American military employed in battle. It was also something that could floor star footballers and, with them, their fanatical followers.

The English went down speedily. The much-vaunted David Beckham watched in despair from the stands. Not many tears were shed when England lost. There was a reason. Over these past many years, England fans and the British media have tended to look upon their players more as pop stars than as footballers. Beckham and his wife Victoria have been glorified beyond the reasonable.

Much the same kind of praise was showered on this year's England team. And then it lost. You were not surprised. And then Brazil lost. Its fans were shocked. You were not, for you had recalled all along that in football, as in politics, nothing is taken for granted and unpredictability is the great certainty.

All across Bangladesh, Brazil's flags came down. Some Brazil lovers wept, copiously. Others remained stunned. And some

quietly prayed for the fall of the Argentines. And they did that because Argentine supporters, in misplaced sentiment, had thought that with Brazil now out of the way, it would be their team that would fly home to Buenos Aires with the World Cup.

They forgot the ferocious precision with which the Germans might cut their team down. And cut it down they did. It was brutal, it was fast, it was surgical. At times it was hard watching Argentina take all that bruising and battering. Brutality was at work. Football, you realised, had turned into a blood sport, with the blood oozing from the battered remains of what was once the Argentine squad. When the mauling ended, Bangladesh went eerily quiet. Not a soul spoke, not a heart beat in happiness.

There is a silence that reminds you of the smouldering ruins of Troy. Life, you tend to think given the gaping holes which today define the hearts in Bangladesh's Brazil fans and Argentine loyalists, has lost much of its meaning. The sepulchral is what you now hear in place of the animated reflections on how Brazil or Argentina or both would change the world as we have known it.

The Germans are coming. Or is it the Spaniards? It does not really matter. You see no flags that will make you think of Berlin or Madrid. The heart in the Bengali has cracked. There are echoes of Miss Havisham nearly everywhere. Cemeteries crowd your imagination.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Editor, Current Affairs, The Daily Star. E-mail: bahsan@star.com.bd

Here comes the D-8

The roadmap, which was endorsed during the Kuala Lumpur Summit in 2008, is aimed at encouraging greater economic cooperation among member states and assisting in mobilising resources from governmental and private sectors in implementing D-8 projects.

HARUN UR RASHID

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina is to leave Dhaka for Abuja (capital of Nigeria) in the early hours of July 7 to attend the 7th Developing-8 Summit on July 8, and will leave Abuja on July 9 and arrive in Dhaka on July 10.

The summit is held after every two years. Nigeria is to hold the 7th Summit during July 4-8. The theme of this year's Summit is "Enhancing Investment Cooperation among D-8 Members." Among the important topics of the summit would be the D-8 Roadmap for Economic Cooperation (2008-2018).

The last summit took place in Malaysia in 2008. Dhaka held the summit in 1999. In the summit, Malaysia is also set to hand over the chairmanship to Nigeria.

All the summits are held with a view to improving the well being of the people of the G-8 in a global economy. Also, it is aimed at boosting the participation of member states in the decision making process at the international level.

The initiative of D-8 was taken during the tenure of Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. The group was established after an announcement in Istanbul, Turkey, on June 15, 1997. Membership is open to other countries, though no expansion is currently planned.

The Developing 8 (D-8 or Developing Eight) is a group of developing countries with large Muslim populations that have formed an economic development alliance. It consists of Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

The combined population of the eight countries is about 60% of the Muslim people, or close to 13% of the world's population.

The main areas of cooperation include finance, banking, rural development, science and technology, humanitarian development, agriculture, energy, environment and health.

The objectives of D-8 are to improve developing countries' positions in the world economy, diversify and create new opportunities in trade relations, enhance participation in decision-making at the international level, and provide better standards of living.

In 2006, trade between the D-8 member states stood at \$35 billion, and it was around \$68 billion in 2010. Transactions between the 8 developing countries account for 3.3% percent of world trade. The figure is projected to reach 10%-15% percent in the next few years.

The roadmap, which was endorsed during the Kuala Lumpur Summit in 2008, is aimed at encouraging greater economic

cooperation among member states and assisting in mobilising resources from governmental and private sectors in implementing D-8 projects.

Before the heads of state/government meet, there will be a meeting of governors of central banks to address the challenges of fiscal and financial policies, and of heads of chambers of commerce to focus on business and investment promotion.

The summit in Nigeria will reinforce and sharpen economic cooperation among member countries through sharing of expertise in the fields of energy, transport, tourism, banking, financial institutions, infrastructural development, human resource development, science and technology, migrant workers and remittances, small and medium scale enterprises, as well as information and communication technology.

During the meeting, Nigeria is expected to launch a project-driven investment fund to promote business growth among D-8 countries.

The summit will focus on the involvement of the private sector as the main driver of the economy. It will address the areas of investment, customs matters, visa processing and other related matters with a view to promoting economic development.

The Abuja Declaration will be released at the end of the summit. This declaration will address issues that could help cushion the effects and challenges facing D-8 member states on global economic recession, world trade, energy, transportation, climate change and global warming as they affect agriculture, food and security.

The Developing-8 Group is divided into three bodies -- summit, council, commission.

The summit has the highest level of

authority, and is composed of the leaders of each member state.

The council is the principal decision making body and forum for consideration of issues relating to the D8, and is composed of foreign ministers from each member state.

The commission has executive authority, and is composed of commissioners appointed by each member state's government. Commissioners are responsible for promoting compliance of D8 directives in their respective nations.

An executive director is appointed by D8 members to facilitate communication and to act in a supervisory capacity during each summit or lower-level assembly.

On the sidelines of the summit, the prime minister is expected to discuss bilateral relations with Nigeria. With more than 155 million people, Nigeria is Africa's largest democracy and has the second largest economy. The oil rich country is also known as the "Land of Opportunities" for its huge economic potential.

The Bangladesh prime minister, on June 28, underscored the need for collaboration in the scientific, education, agriculture and energy sectors, and cooperation in investment and information technology, when the Nigerian Special Envoy Ambassador M.K. Ibrahim called on her to extend an invitation to attend the summit.

On bilateral relations, she said that Bangladesh attached due importance to its relations with Nigeria. The prime minister and the Nigerian envoy hoped that the existing friendly bilateral relation between Bangladesh and Nigeria would be strengthened further by the visit.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.