

JMB financing

Gather further intelligence and seal routes

IT is reported that the Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, a militant organisation having the agenda of carrying out subversive activities, is receiving funds from home and abroad. It seems money supply is on, despite the top leaders of the militant outfit having been arrested by the police.

The job is cut out for the intelligence agencies. The report published in this newspaper yesterday says that the JMB is actually using the most simple method for keeping its money supply lines open. The JMB activists living abroad are reportedly sending money to their relatives and ultimately it is being delivered to JMB operatives.

The job is cut out for the intelligence agencies. The report published in this newspaper yesterday says that the JMB is actually using the most simple method for keeping its money supply lines open. The JMB activists living abroad are reportedly sending money to their relatives and ultimately it is being delivered to JMB operatives.

The JMB is suspected to have a network all over the country and its members are trained in underground operations. The law enforcers are supposed to be familiar with the JMB's modus operandi. Now, it is their job to find out the monetary links and how and where the finances get used. As a security analyst has pointed out, there is the pressing need for reassessing the situation since the militants have changed their tactics after the police arrested their leaders.

If the experience of other countries in the region is anything to go by, it is imperative that the threat that the JMB now poses is contained before it assumes menacing proportions.

The law enforcers must also identify the elements and parties cooperating with the JMB along with a better grasp of the end-use of the money. Things must improve vastly in this area as informed decision making is key to success in countering extremist threats. Also, the efforts need to be focused and calibrated to specific and reliable information.

An unending predicament

Need to set definite timelines for road works

CITY roads strewn with potholes and ditches, big and small, are a source of constant agony for the road users. The Meradia main road, which is under some development work for the last eight months, is a glaring instance of callousness and sloth on the part of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). To all appearances, the road looks abandoned by the authorities concerned, while officially excavation work is going on for placing the storm sewers to relieve the road of the curse of waterlogging. But to the dismay of the residents of the locality and the daily road users, it is the ditches dug and the cement pipes scattered haphazardly on the road that are the real source of their suffering.

Unfortunately, the Meradia road is but the tip of the iceberg when one takes the entire area of the Metropolitan Dhaka and the roads crisscrossing it into consideration. In fact, similar spectacles of pitiful road conditions are but a rule rather than an exception. And the administrations that come and go have been sitting on this problem indefinitely.

But what is the use of all these so-called works on the roads if those turn into a living hell for the road users? And it is not only the difficulty in movement that roads thus put into disuse by the so-called works cause; the cost of living of the residents of the localities through which those roads pass as well as of the regular commuters also rise.

The Executive Engineer in charge of the zone under which the sewer installation work is in progress at Meradia, however, explained the technical reasons for the delay in completing the task. But what remains to be explained is: what alternatives have been kept for the commuters and the general public during the period when such an important communication link is closed to the traffic and especially, when such work entail inordinate delays?

The authorities, therefore, need to seriously look into this aspect of public suffering when undertaking such work on busy roads of the city. And in case, any alternative route for the traffic is hard to find, then the authorities must be more careful in setting the timeline for completing the job, so that the road users may at least brace themselves for difficulty for a predictable time period.



Justice cannot be tampered with.

Some rule, some law!

As for the first, the case is under investigation, and one should not comment on the substance. But what has caused public consternation are the process of investigation and the contradictory statements emanating from people in high positions; and all because the person that happens to be at the centre of the issue happens also to be an AL MP. The matter has assumed a murky character because of the degree of opacity that has come to be associated with it.

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

IT does not surprise me at all to come across people letting out sighs of helplessness at the way certain legal matters have been handled of late. So much for the rule of law in Bangladesh, they say, more in a hapless rather than accusatory tone. And one can hardly disagree.

The causes of their outbursts relate to the case of murder of one Ibrahim and the presidential pardon to 20 murder convicts a few days before Eid.

As for the first, the case is under investigation, and one should not comment on the substance. But what has caused public consternation are the process of investigation and the contradictory statements emanating from people in high positions; and all because the person that happens to be at the centre of the issue happens also to be an AL MP. The matter has assumed a murky character because of the degree of opacity that has

come to be associated with it.

The police are acting very shy, almost to the point of being apologetic when it comes to the question of Mr. Nurunnabi Choudhury Shaon, the said MP. What is most surprising is that the police on the very first day of investigation had pronounced the "not-guilty" verdict in his favour. Whether the police can make such pronouncements before completing the investigation is a question that assails our mind.

A month has elapsed since the murder but Shaon is yet to be questioned. And reportedly too, the police are deeply engrossed in contemplation as to whether the pistol, the murder weapon, which happens to belong to the MP, should be seized or not. One finds it difficult to believe that the police are still not decided about one of the most important material evidence in the case. In the backdrop of the clean chit given by the police, the statement of the state minister for law that the

MP is liable for arrest under the Arms Act, has been contradicted by the police. Whose words do we take as correct?

Without attempting to pass a value judgment on the case, or pointing fingers at anybody, one cannot help wondering whether we should let our political future rest on people who cannot even assure the safe custody of their personal weapons. Can we trust a person who leaves his pistol in his car unattended? By the way, it is the same person whose name was deleted recently from the list of accused in the Malibagh murder case.

The other matter relates to the pardon granted to 20 persons under sentence of death. Nobody questions the president's prerogative to mercy given him by the constitution. And it is not the first time that that prerogative has been exercised.

During the erstwhile 4-Party Alliance rule a person sentenced to death on charge of murder was granted pardon by the president, and that was severely criticised by the AL. President's prerogative to mercy has also been exercised by the current regime in the case of the son of the deputy leader of the House. But the Grand Alliance government has gone one up in that while the former had surrendered to the court and then sought mercy, in the latter case the convict was granted pardon while still a fugitive -- in violation of the law.

The Gama murder case is unique on several counts. Hardly have we seen so many given the death sentence in a murder case, and hardly have we seen the presidential prerogative invoked before the end of the trial process. For all that we know all the convicted persons could have been victims

of a frame up. But we have no way now of ascertaining that since the trial process has been brought to an abrupt halt. And that has raised many eyebrows.

The question is why did the Ministry of Law feel it necessary to initiate mercy petition while the case was in the High Court? Does it display lack of confidence in the higher judiciary, or was it anticipated that the sentences would be upheld by the appellate court?

I am personally against capital punishment and certainly believe in the maxim that it is better to err on the right side of judgment, that it is better to have 20 accused go free rather than one innocent punished wrongly; but everything must be done through the legal process. And when one sees some of the death-row prisoners emerging from the jail gate with pedestal fan and TV antennae in hand one is kept wondering at the way rules have been defied.

Regrettably, this has been a subversion of the judicial process, an expression of no-confidence on the judiciary. And it has dragged the President's Office in the shoddy process. While the president can do little but to sign on the dotted line, one would have hoped, being a lawyer himself, that he would have combined the dignity of his office and the wisdom of his legal mind and sent it back to the ministry for reconsideration.

It is well to keep in mind what Aristotle said about the fate of man when separated from law and justice.

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan ndc, psc (Retd) is Editor, Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Wanted, a Nobel Prize for Honesty

I have an excellent nominee for the first winner of the Nobel Honesty Prize: Alexei Kudrin, Finance Minister of Russia. In the first week of this month he told the news agency Interfax that the best thing his countrymen could do to help the national economy was to smoke and drink more.

M.J. AKBAR

NOW that a legitimate recipient can be identified for a Nobel Prize for Honesty, it is time Oslo introduced such a prize. One sensible option would be to scrap the prize for peace since each year the committee has to torture itself to find a candidate -- before it hands over the cash and plaque to someone who has just declared war.

I have an excellent nominee for the first winner of the Nobel Honesty Prize: Alexei Kudrin, Finance Minister of Russia. In the first week of this month he told the news agency Interfax that the best thing his countrymen could do to help the national economy was to smoke and drink more. These are his specific words: "If you smoke a pack of cigarettes, that means you are giving more to help solve social problems such as boosting demographics, developing other social services and upholding birth rates...People should understand: Those who drink, those who smoke are doing more to help the state."

There is an also-ran in these stakes. On September 10, Sha Zukang, Undersecretary General for Economic and Social Affairs at the UN, encouraged by a glass or four of alcohol, told Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General: "I know you never liked me, Mr Secretary-General -- well, I never liked you, either." But the winner is Alexei Kudrin, by a longshot. He was sober.

His message is simple. Smoking gives you cancer; cancer kills you early. A dead person cannot claim state pension, which is good news. Death also shifts the age-youth ratio in favour of the young. Further, you pay higher taxes on cigarettes and drink -- more money, then, to the exchequer; wonderful! QED. Die to save the fatherland!

This is exactly how any finance minister driven to despair by deficits would express himself. But the rules tell him to talk like a weasel and promise more food, electricity, shelter and security even if he has to bankrupt the future in order to secure your votes today.

Dr. Manmohan Singh, who had a hard

time as finance minister and isn't actually on a picnic as prime minister, is never going to give such excess, but you can almost hear him straining at the leash. Years of being politically correct at the cost of economic discipline are beginning to tell. He tipped over when the Supreme Court instructed his government to feed the impoverished instead of letting grain rot. Dr. Singh's retort was sharp; in sum, that the government was not in the business of charity. If the grain had to rot, so be it; if the impoverished wanted food they would have to go to the market. There is economic logic, apparently, in letting rats get fat. The Supreme Court, said the PM, should live outside the policy zone. If a lesser being had made such a remark, it would doubtless have invited contempt of court, but even supreme judges know better than to summon a prime minister at the drop of a remark.

The prime minister is a politician. Any suggestion to the contrary is promotion of a myth. Evidence suggests that his populism would be community-oriented rather than poverty-specific. He understands the nuances of the game better than some self-proclaimed professionals imagine. Community is the key; poverty is too amorphous an identity, whereas caste and religion are the truly powerful instruments of mobilisation. It is not accidental that Dr. Singh's cabinet has scheduled a caste census for next year.

Being a politician, he knows that his main responsibility is to keep the govern-

ment afloat until heir-apparent Rahul Gandhi declares himself fit to rule rather than merely campaign through non-sequiturs. Dr. Singh keeps sane in the waiting room thanks to a quiet sense of humour. He has, for instance, advised his ministers to check out the United Nations code on corruption. Does he think that the whole cabinet will begin to tremble at the thought of being caned by Ban Ki-moon?

Indeed, it is possible that ministers like Commerce Minister Anand Sharma who, poor chap, has declared to the prime minister that he has personal assets of a mere Rs.26,741, might apply for a UN poverty certificate, while we concerned Indians pass the hat for charitable contributions. It is a shame, in these post-Gandhian times, that as important a personage as Anand Sharma should have less in his bank than it costs to buy an official suit, unless of course he buys his suits from what lies in his cupboard rather than in his bank account.

Given the parlous state of so many of our ministers -- the indigent Subodh Kant Sahai, for instance, has personal assets of only Rs.1.4 lakh -- should we suggest to Oslo that they should also offer a Nobel Prize for Poverty?

Censorship is hereby imposed on all those who believe that what Indian politicians would really win year after year is the Nobel Prize for Hypocrisy.

M.J. Akbar is Editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, and India on Sunday, published from London.