

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Withdrawing cases by diktat

A case of "Law" bowing to politics

THE government's decision to withdraw what it terms 'politically motivated' cases against political leaders including a graft case against the former president Ershad cannot but raise questions.

Dismissing by a broad stroke of the pen the graft case pending prosecution for long 18 years in the court, the government has given the due process of law a short shrift. This is a glaring instance of the government's disinterest in pursuing the cases of corruption. A few thousand cases have been struck out of the list on the plea of those having been politically motivated. Ershad's exoneration only brings to a bold relief the executive's interference in matters falling within the ambit of the court.

The former president Ershad, for example, was cleared of 18 of the 21 cases lodged against him through court after his ouster from power. Of the remaining three, the High Court had already made the graft case on radar purchase ready for adjudication. But the government committee concerned has decided to withdraw the case on the pretext of its being motivated as it was filed during the four-party alliance rule.

What strikes the average person is how does the executive arrogate to itself the jurisdiction of the court to decide if the corruption charges against Ershad were motivated or not? And if the executive becomes the ultimate arbiter, one wonders what remains of the function of the judiciary.

The way the government is withdrawing one case after another on the presumed ground of their being motivated, it has the potential to create 'immunity culture' in society. And such practice by the government, will only encourage the tendency to commit more crime by people in high places.

What is further worrying is the state minister for law Qamrul Islam's reference to withdrawal of many cases by the BNP-led four-party alliance government under a similar pretext of their being politically motivated. Should one then draw the inference that the incumbent administration is justifying their action, as BNP-led government did as such?

One wrong cannot be righted by another wrong. In fact, it has the multiplier effect adversely impacting the function of the judiciary.

Khaleda's ill-judged remark

Is it becoming of her?

THE remarks made by the BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia day before yesterday at a discussion meet in Dhaka took us by surprise. She is reported to have told the meet that an indirect threat of a tragedy in the armed forces like Peelkhana carnage is being rumoured.

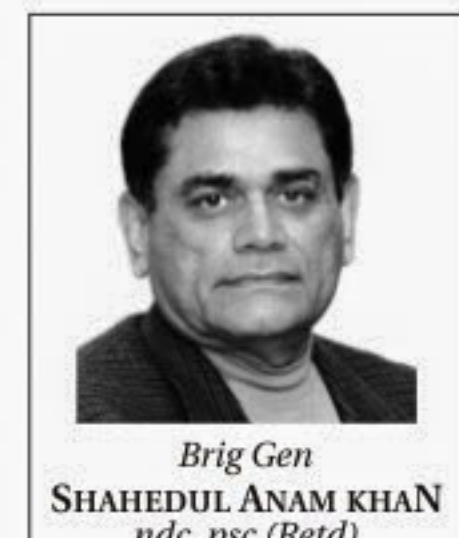
It is indeed a matter of concern as the remarks come from none other than the current leader of the opposition in parliament, two times Prime Minister and chief of one of the largest political parties of the country. Her comments have apparently caught even the senior leaders of the BNP on the wrong foot. The leaders expressed their ignorance about the source of information. A senior member of the BNP standing committee however observed that the comments reflect her own thinking.

We wish to say that even if she has the information of such nefarious designs she should have shared those with the government instead of making an irresponsible public statement of it. She ought to keep in mind that apart from our own people she has a wider audience to take note of such sensational utterances. She should have known better that her remarks and comments on any issue if not substantiated could send wrong signals to different people.

Her comments on the perceived threat to armed forces come at a time when the nation is coming to terms with the BDR massacre and its fallout. We appreciate her concern for the armed forces but expressing fear of a probable threat against it is not only an expression of frivolity with a serious matter but also unwarranted.

We sincerely hope that she would share the information, if any, with the government to help avert any incident in the armed forces like she perceives. And also refrain from making public statements that fuel unnecessary confusion about such an important institution like the armed forces.

Terrorists and terror financing



Brig Gen
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ndc, psc (Retd)

EVERY now and then we come across reports that reinforce the fact that it is difficult to root out terrorism entirely. While

the present government can take due credit for the success in preventing serious acts of terrorism in its two years in office, one cannot say with equal conviction that the agencies have been able to stop the organisational activities of the terrorists completely.

To put a cap on clandestine activities, given our limitations of human intelligence capacity, is not possible in Bangladesh, and other countries with the most sophisticatedly equipped anti-terrorist forces would find it very hard to end it. In fact, it will do us well to keep in mind the axiom that absence of evidence (of their activity) is not evidence of absence (of the phenomenon), [an argument of logic that was embezzled by Donald Rumsfeld to establish the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq], to be able to preempt the terrorists from doing damage to people, property and life.

We are seized with the issue, once again, being prompted by several reports that have appeared in the media recently related to terrorists and terror financing in Bangladesh. A report in the leading Bangla daily has revealed that al-Qaeda has established links in Bangladesh. This has been established from the statement of JMB leader Sayedur Rahman, now in custody, and deduced from statements of Rajib Karim, an expatriate Bangladeshi found guilty recently of terror plot in Britain. The revelation was a foregone reality, but had not been supported by hard evidence so far.

It is not difficult to infer the existence of psychological and ideological linkages between the Islamic extremists groups in Bangladesh and the al-Qaeda. It is well established that the senior leaders of the JMB and Huji (B) were so-called Afghan veterans, and one of them

even "rose" to the position of bin-Laden's bodyguard, and these people, as well as those from the dozen Muslim countries who had participated in the war against the Russians, were told after the withdrawal of the Russians to go back home and establish Sharia rule in their respective countries.

perhaps several options open to it.

Given the relatively quiet environment in Bangladesh, al-Qaeda would not be willing to risk going for aggressive action, but would much rather use our territory as a safe haven in the event they needed to escape the any heightened pressure in other areas of

on which we must remain constantly focused.

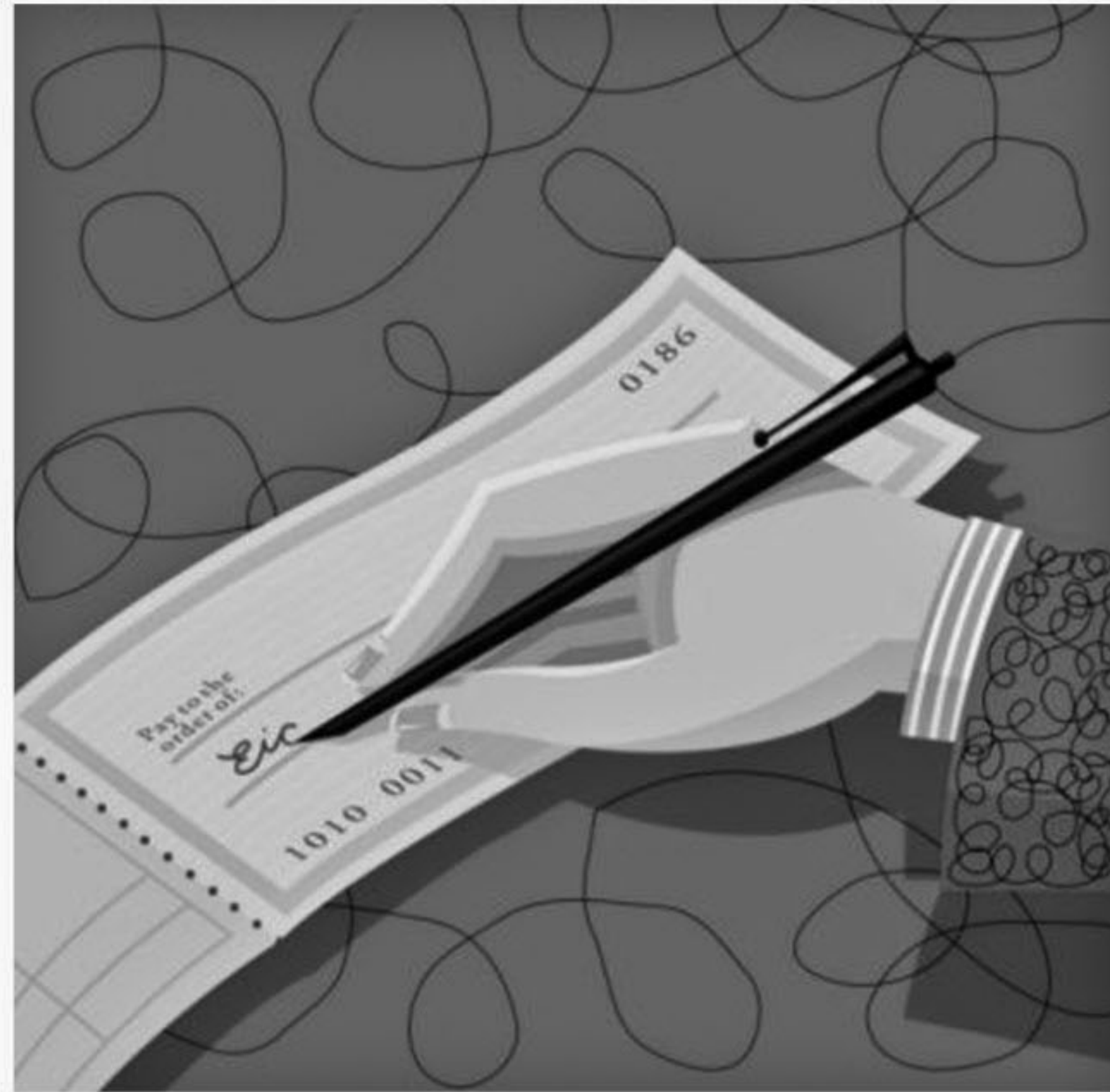
It will also not be wrong to suggest that al-Qaeda's reactions would be influenced by the nature of our participation in the future in the so-called war on terror. And to that end the government must be complimented for having resisted US pressure on Bangladesh to actively involve its troops against the Islamic extremists in Afghanistan.

While Laden's directive might have been the fountainhead of the ideological inspiration of the indigenous extremist groups, and we can work out plans to "de-inspire" these groups, what should worry us more, and towards which our energy should be directed, is uncovering the organisational link and their local sponsors in the country, and pinpoint the source of their money supply. And in this regard we need to have specific action plan than merely having a money laundering act, which too has several contradictions that must be reconciled.

And that brings us to the more pressing question of terror funding. In this regard the statement of the state minister for home is as revealing as it is distressing. According to him, Islami Bank Bangladesh is spending 8% of its profit to fund militants in the country, which it does through the Islami Bank Foundation; that amounts to more than Tk.25 crore. This is for the first time that a source of terror fund in Bangladesh has been identified by the government. The bank has refuted the allegation.

We are sure that the information is based on hard evidence. We cannot countenance a bank funding militancy; we wonder why the government has not initiated necessary action against it. If the minister has been so specific as to put his finger on the exact percent of its profit being used to fund militancy there is no reason to dither. Or has the minister spoken out of turn. It is on the government and the Islami Bank to prove their respective points.

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What had eluded us so far is specific intelligence about the organic link. But there are a few other things that the agencies need to find out, besides, to help devise a comprehensive strategy to counter these groups. For example, it imperative for the agencies to find out what the al-Qaeda plans are in respect of Bangladesh. As it is, there are

the region. Thus destabilising, or creating conditions that would force the law enforcing agencies to go on overdrive on the anti-terror front, is not an option for them. However, to have sleeper cells in Bangladesh with the task of developing tentacles clandestinely and wait for the right moment to react is a choice open to al-Qaeda and

Democratic leadership needed

ZAHURUL ALAM

THE 50s and 60s of last century earmarked massive retreat of colonial forces in Asia, Africa and South America, although the decay of colonialism started earlier in the century. Most countries achieved independence under nationalist banners, and in most of those countries authoritarian regimes were established following end of colonialism. Many of the regimes continue to remain till now. According to the Economist Intelligent Unit's (EIU) estimates, in 2010 all 55 countries with authoritarian regimes belonged to the Third World countries -- former colonies -- while only 12.3% of the world's population enjoyed full democracy.

The democracy indices in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Jordan and Iran, some of the countries currently experiencing protests against authoritarian regimes, ranged between 1.84 and 3.74, while the same indices ranged between 9.5 and 9.8 in Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Norway. The EIU democracy indices are based on five broad categories of 60 indicators: i) electoral process and pluralism; ii) civil liberties; iii) functioning of the government; iv) political participation; and v) political culture.

Power handover to authoritarian regimes instead of democratic political forces appeared to be a much better option for the colonial powers from the point of view of continuation of their political and economic interests in former colonies. The authoritarian regimes thus emerged or planted in most of the Third World countries invariably prevented development of democratic and civil society institutions or destroyed the existing ones to ensure sustainability of captured or obtained power.

Opposed to the mid-twentieth cen-

ture, the modern world is characterised by more humanitarian approaches built on the existence of numerous human rights and civil society organisations, free media and improved ICT. These have changed the

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political philosophy of the West as well as of the East.

However, a considerable part of the developing world still remains under the dilemma of choosing the right path for future development due to the lack of organised political forces to fill in the vacuum created by the fall of authoritarian regimes. The lack of civil society organisations, and inadequately developed media and information and communication system are an added annoyance for those countries.

Following the fall of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, the peoples' movement for democracy spread all over the Middle East and Northern Africa, covering among others, Libya, Algeria, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Bahrain. Long lasting non-democratic and non-

accountable systems in most of the developing countries deprived and continue to deprive an overwhelming majority of their populations of their fundamental rights, leaving them in poverty, bad governance, corruption and slow growth rate.

Currently, over 92 million people in the rich Arab world live in poverty, while the lion's share of the national wealth is concentrated in the hands of the coterie of rulers and their allies. Disagreement of the people with the prevailing situation instigated the protests, the mass, scale and intensity of which must reach culminating points leading to the expulsion of the rulers and their allies. The unrest indices in 2010 ranged between 53 and 87, while those of corruption ranged between 50 and 146, in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Libya and Yemen.

The fall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt has demonstrated that the lack, or weaknesses, of political forces to play leading role in the people's democratic movement result in replacement of one authoritarian regime by another, making the people's sacrifice null and void. Egypt's development, if another authoritarian regime takes over, will be delayed for long until competent political leadership emerges.

The situation in Tunisia after the fall of Ben Ali's 23-year authoritarian rule seems to be better due to the existence of some sort of democratic institutions: parliament, political parties, etc. Despite the above, Ali declared a state of emergency prior to his departure that prompted the army to take over control of security from the police. Public gatherings were banned and the security forces were authorised to kill people in case of non-compliance of any type. The implication is that the fate of democracy in Tunisia will largely depend on the ability of the

existing political leadership to consolidate their strength before any authoritarian force gets a chance to intervene in state affairs or dictate the course of the country's future socio-political development.

Libya has been undergoing a mass anti-authoritarian movement since February 15. Muammar Gaddafi captured power in 1969 following a military coup, and has been ruling Libya for 42 years; more than half of the average life expectancy of Libyans at birth. Since the political philosophy of "Gaddafism" rejects parliamentary democracy and political parties, Gaddafi has banned or destroyed all political parties and civil society organisations in Libya following his power capture.

The country was run by the Revolutionary Command Council for seven years following power capture by Gaddafi. In 1977, Gaddafi convened a General People's Congress (GPC), which is the only de facto political entity in Libya, while the country's real political leadership remains with Gaddafi himself. Thus, against the backdrop of absence of credible and competent opposition political leadership and strong civil society, the popular anti-government movement in Libya, which has left hundreds of people dead, is being tackled strongly by Gaddafi and his followers.

The ultimate fall of the Gaddafi regime is unambiguous. Ironically Gaddafi, similar to all other autocrats, has failed to understand the obsolescence of his regime and hence has preferred the policy of coercion instead of compromise, which will only prolong the miseries of the Libyans.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 3

1575
Indian Mughal Emperor Akbar defeats Bengali army at the Battle of Tukaroi.

1923
TIME magazine is published for the first time.

1924
The 1400-year-old Islamic caliphate is abolished when Caliph Abdul Mejid II of the Ottoman Empire is deposed. The last remnant of the old regime gives way to the reformed Turkey of Kemal Atatürk.

1938
Oil is discovered in Saudi Arabia.

1971
In the face of agitation in East Pakistan President Yahya Khan calls all political parties for a Round Table Conference on Mar. 10. Bhutto accepts the invitation but Sheikh Mujib rejects it, calling for sitting of the National Assembly instead.

2009
The Sri Lankan cricket team is attacked by gunmen while on their way to the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore for a Test match against Pakistan.