

Land grabbed with impunity

Enforce law strictly

WHILE we get to hear, courtesy the media, about big chunks of land being illegally grabbed by big-scale land-grabbers, hardly do we come by news exposing small timers in this regard commandeer small pieces of land that do not belong to them. One such incident has recently come to our knowledge from a report in this newspaper. In this instance a substantial portion of 1.75 acre of public land belonging to government health complex in Patuakhali has been occupied illegally, ostensibly for the purpose of constructing markets.

What surprises us is not only the display of arrogance but also the scant respect for the law that these people have demonstrated, and that perhaps because they are linked to the politically powerful. Two of three alleged grabbers, reportedly, belong to the Awami League. They have pulled down the wall of the complex that houses the health complex staff, dismissing even the need for obtaining official sanction allotting them not only that piece of khas land but also the permission to construct markets there.

We are even more surprised at the reaction of the police who did not take action on grounds of technicality, that the health complex authorities filed a GD only and not a case accusing anyone. One wonders whether the police cannot take suo moto cognizance of a case that involves demolition of structures and illegal occupation of a piece of khas land.

The attitude that all that belongs to the government belongs to me automatically has influenced the psyche of some cadres of the ruling party. And regrettably, the administration seems either unable or is unwilling to act as per law fearing political wrath. While the local administration should proceed under the law against these land-grabbers, the party must prevail on its workers to desist from activities that undermine party and government credibility.

Road safety in a tumble

Broad-based approach needed

IN line with the United Nations Decade of Action on Road Safety 2011-2022, 18 ministries of the government are to work in tandem to reduce road collision casualties within the next 10 years. The initiative, prompted by a foreign body, comes better late than never.

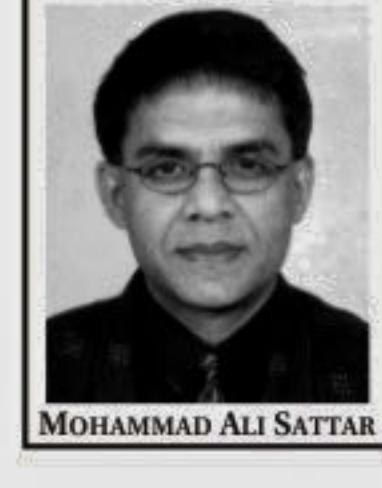
The frequency as well as fatality rate of road accidents have seen a steady rise in Bangladesh over the last several years. The government statistic is 5,000 deaths per year and a cost to the nation of Tk. 3,800 crore annually. The causes identified are manifold, ranging from poorly planned urbanisation and roads and a rapid increase in the number of motorised vehicles, to poor traffic-control law enforcement and inadequate post-crash response. The number of recommendations is even greater and include speed reduction, use of seat belts, child seats in cars, helmets for motorbike riders, etc.

The battle against road accidents is not a new one. The National Road Safety Council established in 1995 and the Road Safety Strategic Plan of 1997, among other programmes, however, have yielded few results. The key, as is often the case, remains in the proper implementation of programmes and strict enforcement of laws.

Where injury and death are not strong enough deterrents, however, the law in itself cannot be the only solution. A holistic approach is necessary for raising awareness about road safety where responsibility lies not only with the government for providing safe vehicles, safe roads, medical care, etc., but where drivers and passengers must also be made aware of their role on the roads, calling for a comprehensive media/communication campaign. The UN-led programme involving multiple wings of the government including the home, health, education and information ministries, seems to be such a broad-based approach and we hope that it will be an effective means of reducing preventable injuries and

ENIGMATTERS

The scourge of price hike



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

THE government has once again raised the price of the compressed natural gas (CNG). Last time, it was in April 2008 that the caretaker

government doubled the price from Taka 8.50 to Taka 16.75 per cubic metre. There were reasons galore for the raise. No serious challenge was noticed against the decision for obvious reasons. People took it in their strides.

This time round the raise is by 50% from Taka 16.75 to Taka 25 per cubic metre. Now it's an elected government that took the decision.

When the government and its concerned departments decide to make changes or amendments to any regulation, they are believed to have studied the entire gamut of the issue, especially if it has got to do something with price adjustments of essentials. Principle concern of any policy-decision ought to be the immediate public reaction and its long-term effect.

The reason cited by the government for the price hike is to reduce the disparity between the prices of other fuels and that of CNG. Although there is indeed a difference in prices of CNG and other fuels (kerosene sells at Taka 46 per litre, petrol at Taka 46 per litre, octane at Taka 79 per litre and furnace oil at Taka 42 per litre at retail level) but that doesn't legitimise the idea that we ought to pay more for the CNG just because other fuels are selling at higher prices. Authorities cited another reason for the increase -- that is for developing the gas sector.

The government would have done better if it raised prices of octane and petrol instead of CNG. People who can afford to pay for luxury and comfort should be taxed appropriately. They are the pressure group that works as the determining force in the corridors of the government quarters. Hitting the common product used by the common populace is not a good idea.

Let us consider the move from overall economic standpoint. The upward price adjustment was mainly to cut back on subsidies. But the point remains as to what extent and with what frequency the price adjustment

An elected government cannot afford to ignore people's plight. The deciding bodies or individuals of the government tend to overlook finer issues that are so closely linked with people's welfare. They forget that people sometimes deserve the privilege of enjoying something convenient. Now is the time we need an overhaul of our thoughts and outlook. Out in the street or in a one room apartment the gullible commoner bears the brunt in more ways than one.

The trouble does not end with enhancing or settling of CNG price. It goes on. We are now left to face the

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should be brought about. We should not forget that this is the second upward adjustment, a 50% raise, in only three years time. This, by all means, is rather a quick maneuver. An element of abruptness was there about it. The government should devise a mechanism to get the right kind of feedback from the departments concerned before embarking on such an exercise.

Since finance is the lifeline of economy the government is expected to act with utmost seriousness ensuring the highest security to the people's money, which in most cases is hard earned.

fallout of the government action. No sooner the authorities made the price hike effective (May 12, midnight Thursday) all manner of CNG using transports have immediately raised their fare. As though it was the prerogative of the transport owners to preside over the fare hike decision.

The ugly tendency of raising prices of any product or essential by the traders or owners of all businesses has assumed a dangerous proportion. In this instance, there is again the perverted excitement to enhance fares out of proportion to increase in CNG price. The agonies of the major-

ity of commuters are beyond description. On the one hand they face the crises of shortages of public transports on the other they are regularly subjected to pay through their nose the fare charged by the transport staff or the drivers.

The government was aware of the fact that to appease the transport owners there will have to be a "fare hike" to reward them. As though the price hike of gas has handed them (the owners) the automatic right to an enhanced rate of fare in place to make up for the extra dime that they will have to pay for the gas. Mind you, it will be extracted from the hapless million who remains at the mercy of the government authorities, transport owners and workers.

One can only hope against hope that the government this time round will act with more wisdom and keep in mind that people's interest comes first. It will have to make sure that the increase in transport fares is strictly proportionate to the increase in the CNG price. It is the sole responsibility of the government to make things work in a manner that serves the people who will pay the extra buck imposed on them in the wake of the fare hike.

Postscript: The law enforcing authorities should make sure that the transport workers don't fleece the passengers at their will and charge the exact fare fixed by the government; that the CNG 3-wheel drivers don't demand extra money over the meter fare and don't refuse to carry passengers to their destination. This much for now.

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Osama's death ensures Obama's second term

MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

PRESIDENT Barack Obama declared: "Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama Bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children."

He added: "After a firefight, the US forces killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body."

It seems that the US had been working on tips from bin Laden's "trusted courier" Sheikh Abu Ahmed. Since September 2010, the US had been working with real focus on Osama's possible location in Pakistan though Pakistan had been denying that bin Laden was there.

It is amazing that Osama had chosen a really "safe place" to hide, which was a house in Bilal Town about 700 meters away from the top military academy of Pakistan in Abbottabad, some 75 miles from the capital Islamabad. As the place was near the Garrison Town, the identity of any person entering it was obviously strictly scrutinised and verified.

How did Osama and his family get into the Garrison Town and live there for some 5/6 years? Apparently, Osama's family never came out of the compound. The house had no telephone line or internet connection, though Osama had a computer.

Pakistan's radar system was reportedly jammed by the American forces and as such the entry of US military helicopters could not be detected. If it is true, it indeed raises serious question about Pakistan's defense capabilities.

President Obama's first report to the Americans and to the world says that there were "firefights" and the whole operation was reportedly completed in about 40 minutes. Later reports say that there was only one

gunshot from the outer house when the US forces landed. This was apparently the only firefight apart from the shots fired by the Navy Seals to kill bin Laden and disable his wife who was shot in her leg.

Osama was unarmed, which was confirmed by the US side. An unarmed man was killed, and killed in such a way that the US did not find it safe to show the dead body as the gruesome picture could inflame the passion of his supporters. The body was also dumped, the US says buried, at sea. Many around the world, including some friends of the US, strongly criticised the manner of Osama's killing.

"We might ask ourselves how we would be reacting if Iraqi commandos

down! All these do not support the position that Osama was the mastermind of 9/11, thus his killing was "illegal under international law." Osama's son even threatened to take the US to the ICC for assassination of his unarmed father.

This led to a series of conspiracy theories: was Osama really killed? Some internet reports said that Osama was dead along ago due to his illness. This was set-up to prepare for an exit strategy. One could probably cast doubt on such an operation if it had happened during the time of Bush-Cheney, but apparently not now when President Obama is in charge. Reports say that President Obama watched the entire operation in real time in the White House with his

President George Bush never produced any proof and indeed declared war against Afghanistan. Those who read Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir's personal reports on Osama bin Laden, after a direct interview, would also see that Osama only appreciated the attack on the Twin Towers but never said he ordered it.

Now the world must wait and see how the US deals with its policy on the "war on terror." Afghanistan and Iraq are bleeding and so is the US and, in a way, the rest of the world. Now that Osama bin Laden is no more, is it going to lead to the end of the war that has been going on for over a decade? The following was my remark about Osama bin Laden in August 2009 in my book Promised Land? which was published last August in the USA.

Is bin Laden still alive? Highly doubtful! Even if he is alive, can he, being confined in the caves or secret places somewhere in Afghanistan or Pakistan, really guide the type of wars that are being waged around the world in his name? Obviously, he cannot. Maybe his name is being used as a mythical name or a force that has been galvanising the rebels around the world to fight the agenda holders. These elements are never defeated; they only multiply with every strike.

"Osama bin Laden, if still alive, will die, maybe at the hands of the US and allied forces, which may give them mental satisfaction, but the result may be disastrous as bin Laden would live forever as an ideal to many who decided to fight for a cause -- right for them, wrong for many others -- and no war could end such a force. It's only a direct dialogue that could tell them what is right and what wrong they have been pursuing."

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 17

1940

World War II: Germany occupies Brussels, Belgium.

1940

World War II: the Dutch town of Middelburg is bombed by the German Luftwaffe, to force the surrender of the Dutch armies in Zeeland.

1943

World War II: the Dambuster Raids by No. 617 Squadron RAF on German dams.

1960

East-West summit in tatters after spy plane row. The much-heralded Big Four summit in Paris fails after U2 spy plane recriminations.

1967

Six-Day War: President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt demands dismantling of the peace-keeping UN Emergency Force in Egypt.

1983

Lebanon, Israel, and the United States sign an agreement on Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

1992

Three days of popular protests against the government of Prime Minister of Thailand Suchinda Kraprayoon begin in Bangkok, leading to a military crackdown that results in 52 officially confirmed deaths, many disappearances, hundreds of injuries, and over 3,500 arrests.