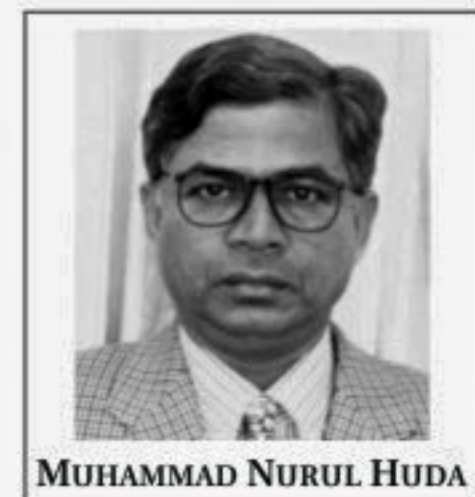


## STRAIGHT LINE

# Sweeping condemnation of RAB



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

**B**ANGLA DESHIS could perhaps be forgiven for being verbose and rhetorical and at times pompous in

their behaviour and mode of expressions, for Bangla has been viewed as a language of over-statement. It is thus no wonder that the Bengali speaking people are sensitive and sentimental in social transactions. However, when a supposedly phlegmatic and responsible gentleman of the western world who speaks in English, understandably a language of understatement, indulges in hyperbole, it causes uneasiness.

The reference is to the recent utterance of a very high functionary of a U.S based human rights organization that reportedly branded the RAB, an elite law enforcement wing, as a murderous outfit. The remarks that were severely condemnatory observe that unless the outfit mended its actions and corrected attitude towards human rights within six months it should be disbanded. It also recommended the stoppage of capacity building support from UK, Australia and other countries for RAB in the event of lack of desirable response.

While the concern of the human rights organization could be appreciated it could not be understood as to how a seven year old law enforcement unit that has many laurels in its bag and is manifestly popular in public

estimation, be characterized as a murderous outfit, always on the prowl? This is, without doubt, a dangerously damaging projection with morale shattering ramifications. One might be misled to believe that the RAB has a mischievous mission. The reality on ground is different.

Delving into the multiple segments of that different scenario one would come across significant events like huge caches of unauthorized firearms and ammunitions recovered from

effort worth admirable recognition.

According to public opinion survey on perception of security providers conducted by a UK based firm the RAB was rated at the top. The hapless members of public who do not see the criminal justice administration work effectively in their favour view RAB as relief-providers. This is natural because they found respite and relief from the depredations of the entrenched bully only after RAB intervened.

*Discerning observers have to appreciate the delicate co-existence between ensuring civil liberties and law enforcement efficiency in a democratic society. A lawful society is often constrained to sacrifice enforcement effectiveness at the altar of civil liberties.*

criminal elements, the busting of dreaded terror gangs, recovery of dangerous narcotics and stimulant drugs etc. If one were to only take into account the seizure of psychotropic substances that itself would be a hugely commendable achievement because we all know that these drugs destroy an entire generation.

RAB's outstanding achievement in substantially de-activating the so-called religiously motivated extremists does not require authentication from any quarter. The outfit has been distinctively successful in capturing six dreaded extremists and was instrumental in their subsequent trial and execution. Regionally and internationally speaking, this was an exemplary

The list of RAB's achievements could be further extended. However, the point to note is the apparently ill-conceived effort to portray a publicly funded organization as an all-purpose villain. Blowing the dark spots out of proportion and totally ignoring the points of excellence while pronouncing on a vital regulatory organ cannot be construed as responsible actions.

One may also question the propriety of a human rights organization passing judgment on the question of retention of a law-enforcement unit based on its own evaluation criteria. Quite clearly, in the instant case the arrogation by the rights body does not find favour with many.

It is time to think on positive course of action that should include legally correct alternatives to rash action. The defence and security adviser's pertinent comment on strengthening of substantive law enforcement ventures needs to be heeded. The passionate human rights defenders should be able to appreciate the strains and pains of real-life policing.

The need for creating an over all environment in which lawmen can perform their legal duties with a sense of pride and fulfilment without feeling hamstrung on account of administrative, financial or political encumbrances can hardly be overemphasized.

While accusing RAB of being irreverent to law we have to remind ourselves that we cannot defend the liberal principles of a democratic society by cultivating and encouraging medieval prejudice. The causative factors promoting a regressive mindset along with the reality of misplaced political direction need to be studied seriously.

Discerning observers have to appreciate the delicate co-existence between ensuring civil liberties and law enforcement efficiency in a democratic society. A lawful society is often constrained to sacrifice enforcement effectiveness at the altar of civil liberties. The question is one of desirable reconciliation between safety and liberty.

The writer is a columnist for The Daily Star.

## Public hospitals shorthanded

### Urgent action called for

**T**HE health sector is facing an acute crisis of physicians due to brain drain of specialist doctors from public to private hospitals. An exclusive report in a popular Bangla Daily has narrated how the doctors who earned their degrees from government medical colleges are leaving their jobs to work in the private hospitals for higher salaries. And this constant drain is telling upon the state of public health of the country. This is in addition to the doctors posted at district levels and rural stations preferring to move to the capital city.

At present half of the around four and a half thousand specialist doctors' posts have fallen vacant. The poor are the ultimate victim of this situation. Though it is the lure of the city and of better prospect that have drawn them out of their previously assigned locations, some of their grievances cannot also be dismissed out of hand. Apart from the common resentments about poor pay, lack of necessary infrastructure to accommodate their families at their places of posting in rural areas, many raised other concerns having to do with their career advancement. Postings and promotions, more often than not, are allegedly awarded more on partisan considerations than on merit. The situation has aggravated after the year 2000, many of the doctors complained. Transfers also follow the same rule.

In view of the realities on the ground, one cannot lay the blame entirely at the specialist physicians' doorsteps.

Does it then imply that the public hospitals where the poor patients can afford to get some treatment will continue to suffer from paucity of expert doctors? But we cannot hope to resolve the crisis through exhortations or giving the doctors a good talking-to. The situation needs addressing with pragmatism and prudence. While the doctors' genuine problems have to be solved, they must also be reminded of their sacred duty to the people.

In fine, the government needs to go all-out to take urgent action in the matter.

## Fruits gone lethally toxic

### Compelling HC directives

**T**HIS is the second time in a year that the High Court has issued directives to a number of authorities to eliminate fruit contamination by injection of chemicals. It is to be noted that a previous set of directives for punishing traders guilty of the murderous offence had a short-lived effect.

What the court interventions go to show is the flagrant nature of violation of law in the public health domain. On the one hand, those dealing in fruits ranging from gathering through transporting and storing at wholesale points to releasing for retail selling, are either active players or abettors in the crime. Carbide is used to ripen fruits prematurely and formalin for a longer shelf-life.

The malady of treating human life as a plaything is widespread, well-networked and entrenched. This is fuelled by a ravenous appetite for quick buck and lucre of profit margins at every step of the marketing process. So much so that those practitioners brazenly go about the business without the slightest prick in their conscience. They seem to have gone beyond the pale of moral counseling. Indeed they need to be made into examples of severe punishment.

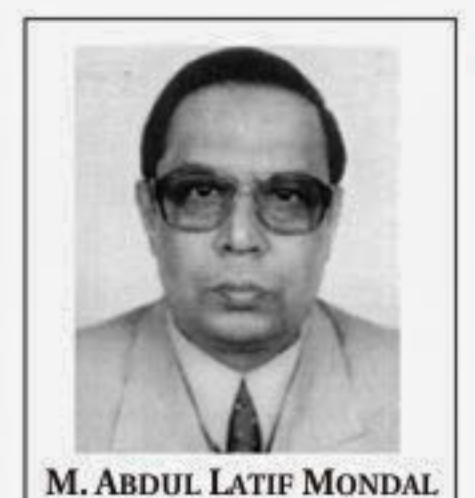
If we delve into why the high judiciary felt the need to intervene, the government agencies responsible for food safety are only left to be hanging their faces in shame. It's an administrative failure in the basics interspersed with corruption. This is a collective dysfunction on the part a plethora of government agencies. Everybody's business is an orphan.

This impels a designated authority to be the nodal agency to ensure compliance with the court directives. There should be a composite oversight committee at the apex with representatives from agencies responsible for safety of edibles. The HC has suggested as much.

The lethal range of health complications created by contaminated foods, fruits being currently under spotlight because this is season for them, gives rise to an issue of building consumer resistance against buying contami-

## BARE FACTS

# Why BNP should join budget session



M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

**T**HERE is uncertainty about BNP's joining the Parliament's budget session which began on May 22. Sources

in the BNP's Parliamentary Party said on May 22 that the decision as to whether BNP would join the budget session or not would be taken after the party Chairperson Khaleda Zia's return from abroad.

Meanwhile, senior leaders of BNP are making contradictory statements regarding joining the budget session. Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farroque said on May 20 that that they would return to the House only when the government accepted their demand for holding a mid-term election.

BNP's acting Secretary-General Mirza Fakhru Islam said on May 21 that it was not clear to them as to why the session was convened and that's why BNP wouldn't attend it. On the other hand, Moudud Ahmed, a standing committee member of BNP, said the same day that they would join the session if the four cases against Khaleda Zia were withdrawn immediately.

Let's agree that BNP has some genuine grievances, which should be redressed by the ruling AL. But that shouldn't prevent BNP from attending the parliament session in its own interest as well as in public interest.

BNP knows it well that the government feels comfortable with the absence of the opposition in the House. Then, why should BNP give this opportunity to the ruling AL?

More importantly, in a parliamentary system of government, the opposition refers to itself as a shadow government. Therefore, BNP should not only attend the parliament sessions but also conduct itself in the House in such a manner that would persuade the people that it could be an improvement upon the AL-led government.

Keeping the above in view as well

as to raise, amongst others, the following issues in the House, BNP should attend the ongoing budget session.

The House is at liberty to discuss the budget as a whole or any question of principle involved in it. By attending the budget session, BNP may see whether "the politics of vote" has influenced the formulation of next year's annual development programme and pinpoint whether necessary funds were allocated for the vital sectors of the economy such

the budget session.

Apart from passing the budget for the fiscal year 2011-12, this session is likely to deal with a constitutional amendment bill which might propose changes to various aspects of the Constitution, including changes to the crucial non-party caretaker government system. Although BNP chose not to nominate its representative to the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Amendments (PCCA) and the BNP high-ups didn't turn up to give their views on the proposed

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as agriculture, infrastructure development, education, health, etc.

BNP has demanded mid-term election, although it is yet to detail the reasons for that. BNP chief Khaleda Zia raised the demand for mid-term elections in early November last year, citing the government's "complete failure to meet people's expectations." The opposition chief whip reiterated the demand for mid-term polls, as according to him, "the present parliament has failed to meet public expectations."

AL presidium member Obaidul Qader said that BNP could raise its demand for mid-term elections only in the House, which is the appropriate forum for taking decision on the issue. The House will deliberate on the issue and decide its fate.

Speaker Abdul Hamid has urged the opposition lawmakers to join the parliament, and to speak about political issues for strengthening parliamentary democracy.

Therefore, BNP can do the homework and raise the demand for mid-term elections in the House during

constitutional amendments to the PCCA, BNP can present its views in the House on constitutional matters including the caretaker government system. Even if the treasury bench does not accept any of their views and suggestions, BNP can go back to the people and tell them everything in detail. This will be appreciated by the people.

The increase in the price of compressed natural gas (CNG) by Tk.8 per unit, and of diesel, petrol, octane, kerosene and furnace oil by Tk.2 a litre, has brought sufferings for the people due to the increase in transportation cost. The price hike of CNG by 49.25% has particularly come as a shock to the residents of Dhaka city who mostly avail public transports that use CNG.

Some transport owners are not willing to accept the bus fares fixed by the government following the increase in CNG price. The charging of higher fares by some transport operators has led to scuffles between them and bus passengers. The situation came to such a pass that, upon a

writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, a High Court bench had to issue directives on May 23 to enforce government-fixed fare, display fare charts in buses and counters and set up more mobile courts.

The increase in transportation cost has led to the increase in prices of essential commodities, which has made the lives of the poor and low income groups miserable. BNP may raise the issue in the House. Even though the decision for increasing the prices may not be reversed, the discussion on the matter in the House will generate people's sympathy for BNP.

BNP's absence from the budget session will substantiate the government view that BNP lawmakers attended the eighth session for a few days only to save their membership.

BNP may also raise some other issues of public interest such as, share market scam, politicisation of administration, violation of human rights, and shortage of electricity and gas to discuss in the House.

Last but not the least, BNP's policy for generally not resorting to strikes, road blockade and other programmes and activities that bring sufferings for the common people has earned appreciation of the people. BNP's regular participation in the activities of the House will further enhance its image.

The AL-led government and the speaker can't avoid the responsibility for creating a congenial environment that would make the House fully functional with the participation of both treasury and opposition bench members. The speaker should assure the BNP leadership, preferably in writing, that if they joined and stayed in the House, he would accept their proposals for discussion. For the successful functioning of democracy, the BNP-led opposition should recognise the right of the AL-led alliance to rule the country for the period granted by the Constitution.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

May 28

**1940**  
World War II: Belgium surrenders to Germany to end the Battle of Belgium.

**1964**  
The Palestine Liberation Organization is formed.

**1982**  
Falklands War: British forces defeat the Argentines at the Battle of Goose Green.

**1998**  
Nuclear testing: Pakistan responds to a series of nuclear tests by India with five of its own, prompting the United States, Japan, and other nations to impose economic sanctions.

**2002**  
NATO declares Russia a limited partner in the Western alliance.

**2008**  
The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal formally declares Nepal a republic, ending the 240-year reign of the Shah dynasty.