

BCL gone out of control

Put a cap on its violent activities

THE New Year was greeted by violence of the Chattra League in the public universities and it has, regrettably, continued unabated. It is very difficult to accept the spurt in its violent activities. It is equally difficult to understand the ruling party's lack of response to stop these.

Not only have the BCL indulged in clashes with other students, infightings have resulted in loss of lives, as we witnessed in Jehengir Nagar University very recently. It looks as if the BCL has become an arm of the government in educational institutions to suppress dissent. Otherwise how does one explain their attack on the general students of the JnU who were calling for doing away with extra fees?

Unfortunately, in many of these institutions the administration is known to have sided with the errant BCL activists. It is also disconcerting to see teachers, supporting the legitimate demands of the general students, being set upon by so-called pro-administration teachers.

Admittedly, there are several underlying causes for the way student activism has turned out in recent times, but one of the primary reasons is the partisan university administration and partisan office holders, who forget that they are teachers first and that all students, irrespective of whether they are affiliated to any political party or their student wing or not, deserve to be treated equally. That, regrettably, is not the case in many public universities.

The other reason for the current state of affairs in these educational institutions is the government affiliated student body going completely out of control, so much so that in some cases even the pro-government university administration is unable to control them.

We wonder how many more students' lives, how many more violent incidents, how much more disruption of classes it will take for the AL to realise that the political dividend it had expected by sponsoring the BCL has not paid off, on the contrary, it has only helped to sully the image of the party.

It is time the AL reined in the BCL and cleaned it up of the bad eggs and the deadwoods. We would hope too that the university administration would understand the merit of assuming non-partisan attitude in dealing with student matters.

A shocking tale of slavery

Calls for deterrent punishment

WE are appalled to hear the news of eight workers having been forcibly confined to a small room at a brickfield in Khulna. That this could have happened in a part of Khulna city that too near a police station sends worrying signals across. This might be taking place in remoter locations.

The inhuman tale of torture came to light as local journalists, presumably on a tip-off, visited the spot. The victims aged between 55 and as young as 18 were entrapped through a deal between the owner of a brickfield and a labour leader. The labour leader had taken an advance of Tk 4 lakh from the owner to supply him with workers. What makes one sit up and take note are two horrific facts; first, the men were allegedly confined as they were not working 'as per agreement'. What that agreement was about is unknown, but how could they be detained in a chilly dark room against their wishes for five days? They were held hostage just because somebody had taken Tk 4 lakh in advance in lieu of supplying workers and did not return the money to the management.

Equally, if not more reprehensible is the revelation of the proprietor being a local Awami League leader and former chairman of Phultala upazila. When a public representative turns out to be as cruel as that with no social commitment whatsoever he at once forfeits its credentials. It is surprising, why should the local police have been so oblivious of the surroundings as to overlook such an infringement of human rights in the locality.

The whole incident merits scooping investigation to fix responsibility for this barbaric act and bring those found guilty to book. The victims should also be compensated.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 14

1761

The Third Battle of Panipat is fought in India between the Afghans under Ahmad Shah Durrani and the Marhatas. The Afghan victory changes the course of Indian history.

1967

Counterculture of the 1960s: The Human Be-In, takes place in San Francisco, California's Golden Gate Park, launching the Summer of Love.

2000

A United Nations tribunal sentences five Bosnian Croats to up to 25 years for the 1993 killing of over 100 Muslims in a Bosnian village.

2011

Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, former Tunisian president, fled the country to Saudi Arabia after popular protests (dubbed as Jasmine Revolution) requesting his departure.

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

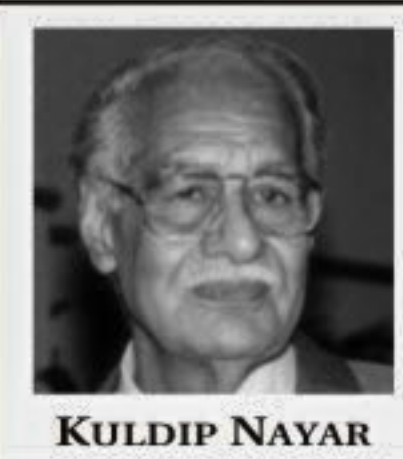
THE apparently clueless murders of a number of persons who remained untraced for good length of time have raised a furore. Some have termed it as secret killings bearing the hallmarks of totalitarian establishment. One rights body has gone to the extreme length of portraying such killings as state sanctioned and is of the view that the same has been resorted to after lessening of extra judicial deaths and so-called crossfire casualties.

In view of the virulently anti-establishment mindset of a section of people, such extreme reactions as above are not unexpected in our parlance. In fact, there is no dearth of opinion-makers in our society who would not wait even a day to confidently sound judgmental on the motive and culpability of clueless gruesome murders.

The lack of clue, however, does not absolve the authority of its onerous responsibilities of seriously and expeditiously investigating the incidents and bringing the guilty to book. This is very urgent because the scary incidents have had an adverse impact and public confidence needs to be maintained.

In a case when the accused is unknown or uncertain the police have to make an effort to locate their man. It may succeed, it may not. Whether the accused is easily known or located after an effort or remains untraced, in any case the police have to enter upon an investigation. The investigator, therefore, must be afforded reasonable time to do his statutory job before one makes definitive comment on the nature and motive of the offence.

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDEEP NAYAR

THE army chief is in the news in India as well as in Pakistan, but for different reasons. In both cases, the Supreme Court of either country is an arbiter. In India, Chief of Army Staff General V.K. Singh claims that his year of birth is 1950 while the Ministry of Defence has recorded it as 1951. If the government sticks to its date, as it is doing, he retires this May, nearly 10 months before his own calculation of birth date. Not General Singh himself, but some retired top brass have made it a point of honour for the armed forces and want him to vindicate it by challenging the government's decision in the Supreme Court.

In Pakistan, Chief of Army Staff General Parvez Kayani has already gone to the Supreme Court, which has set up a commission of nine judges to probe into the charge that the army was contemplating a coup. The matter, called the Memogate, came to light a couple of months ago when the then Pakistan Ambassador to the US, Hussain Haqqani, sent a message to the US through a Pakistani businessman that President Asif Zardari required America's support because he apprehended a takeover by the army. It was October when Haqqani sought the help but he did not make it public till the US did so. The disclosure made General Kayani furious. To lessen his anger, Zardari ordered Haqqani to quit. This was not a fair charge against Kayani because why should he threaten a takeover when the army already has the country under its control?

The argument that the Supreme Court surrendered to the army when it constituted the inquiry commission is churlish. And to make a charge against the Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Choudhary is meaningless. He is the person who suffered at the hands of the

From newspaper reports it appears that persons of different age groups hailing from different areas have been the victims of the alleged secret killings. These victims do not have a particular vocation or occupation to warrant special attention of the investigators. Most of them are neither prominent individuals nor do they have a particular political identity to doubt acts of vengeance.

From available data and information it is very difficult to opine whether there is a pattern in the alleged enforced disappearances and subsequent killing under unexplained circumstances. Whether or not there exists a diabolic scheme to discredit the establishment by resorting to indiscriminate killing, as pointed, the urgency of undertaking

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diligent investigation to unearth the motive and punish the real culprits cannot be overestimated.

There is no denying that the investigation and prosecution of criminal offenders is primarily the responsibility of the executive. In criminal prosecution the state, in effect, is the complainant, according to a considered view. Though unfortunate, many heinous criminal cases involving murder, abduction, grievous hurt, amongst others, were withdrawn by successive political establishments. Do such actions encourage the alleged secret killings?

Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, temporarily, there were some worries about such unsettling crimes but with the

passage of time all concerned chose to forget the dark episodes without displaying the resolve to effectively combat the menace.

Violent incidents that include murder of politicians are outcomes in a society marked by deep polarisation, weak institutions and chronic poverty. The quantity and quality of violence characterising Bangladeshi society at all levels today has an irreducibly political context. Overt and visible violence co-exists with invisible violence that destroys the identity of human beings. The visible violence, being situational and physical, can be dealt through law and order solutions. The invisible violence being structural and requiring radical solutions, however, flows into and deter-

mines physical violence in a bipolar interaction.

Bangladesh today witnesses the politics of violence which means resorting to physical violence to promote a political objective, as well as the violence of politics built into the institutionalised structure of politics.

Sadly, there has been no serious policy discussion of the phenomenon of violence in Bangladeshi society, though there has been plenty of retail discussion in media.

In Bangladesh, unfortunately, we have witnessed violence that has been purposive. In our polity we have seen political motivations ranging from local turf wars to an ugly and vulgar race for quick riches; from teaching a rival

ing his birth date an issue when it was "resolved" between him and the Defence Ministry before he was appointed Eastern Army Commander four years ago and the army chief two years ago. He himself gave in writing to the Ministry of Defence that the matter was "closed."

Good or bad, General Singh should have adhered to what was decided then. It was wrong on his part to have consulted former chief justices of India to bolster his case or to brief persons who came to TV shows -- resembling Kangaroo courts -- to participate in discussions. It can be interpreted as an act of insubordination.

I heard some retired top brass converting the matter into an issue between civil and military. Such irre-

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turn. The Supreme Court still evokes confidence and credibility. In fact, it has already issued a notice to Zardari to which he has replied.

This is the maximum one can achieve in Pakistan. The controversy over the date of birth of the army chief would not have arisen in Pakistan because the conditions prevailing there are quite different from those in India. Yet the embarrassment caused over General Singh's claim could have been avoided if the matter had been handled better and earlier, both by him and the Defence Ministry.

I can appreciate General Kayani making a fuss because he felt that he was being blamed for an act which he had not contemplated. But I fail to understand why General Singh is mak-

sponsible talk, even if allowed in a democratic system, tantamounts to challenging the ethos of our polity. General Douglas MacArthur, hero of the Eastern sector of Second World War, was dismissed by President Henry Truman when he found the general deriding democracy.

Even if the Defence Ministry's decision on his birth date is not to his or some of his ambitious supporters' liking, the buck stops at the table of an elected government. I am disappointed to find Bonapartism taking hold of some top retired military officers. The media itself should have undertaken the matter with care instead of sensationalising it. The Pakistani media in the case of Kayani acted with restraint and responsibility. It has shown guts even

group a "lesson" to polarising communities into voting blocs.

Politics did enter into a situation in which hired thugs who perpetrated violence were assured of protection from prosecution. Very few felt ashamed as politics in our parlance acquired a pejorative connotation by the fact of its manifest association with conflict and violence. The civil society has been undermined by the stimulation of politics based on division and acrimony.

Quite often, the disconcerting socio-political reality is that the source of deterioration in crime and order situations originated in the continuing patronage of criminals and bullies. Practically, what the public see is the end result of cumulative process of patronised crime, practiced over successive regimes.

In our situation the tendency of carving out a niche for self or group in politics often leads to fierce competition, which has linked politics to the criminal world. The interface between the political feuds and intense power struggle, on the one hand, and violence of different intensities on the other is provided by the criminal class to which some political leaders are suspected to be connected in a shady way.

The desired corrective actions cannot be unilaterally taken by the ruling party and quite distinctly calls for a bipartisan approach with active involvement of the civil society. Demobilisation of criminal elements demands concerted efforts by all political parties. The remedy lies in cleaning our politics through its decriminalisation, backed by the depoliticisation of law enforcement as well as the administration.

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when threatened.

Saleem Shezad, for example, was abducted, tortured and killed, reportedly by a state agency last year. A commission of inquiry is still seemingly trying to find the murderer. He had broken the story on the infiltration of the armed forces by elements close to al-Qaeda or the Taliban. Several journalists from Baluchistan have been killed by non-state actors, said to be close to the security forces.

The compromise formula hawked in the case of General Singh is again bad in content and intention. The proposal to appoint him as the chief of joint staff suggests as if there are two parties and an agreement has to be reached so that none loses face. What is not realised is that there is only one party in democracy, the people who elect their representatives who, in turn, constitute the government. In fact, the very proposal to create a post of chief of joint staff is not acceptable. America has such an institution but the democracy there is 150 years old. Democracy knows of no compromise which restricts or impinges on people's say.

The irony is that all military coups in Pakistan have been at the behest of America. The Pakistani military has signed more defence pacts and agreements with America than all civilian governments put together. It is the Pakistan military which joined America in Afghanistan in the eighties and recently leased out Pakistan air bases and air space corridors to America. Still Washington did not trust the army when Osama bin Laden was killed in a house at Abbotabad.

Both generals in Pakistan and India should introspect. General Kayani can get away with his allegation against the civil government and allow President Zardari to say that he is supreme. General V.K. Singh cannot, because in democracy the elected government is supreme. He should have known it before he raised the dust.

The writer is an eminent Indian Columnist.