

CROSS TALK

Eviction drive must have a humanitarian dimension

Relocate the residents first

NEARLY 2,000 illegal shops and shanties at Korail near Gulshan were bulldozed in a drive conducted by Bangladesh Telecommunications Company Limited (BTCL) on Wednesday following a High Court order that had asked the concerned authorities to rid the Gulshan Lake and its adjacent areas of all illegal structures by the end of March. Although the drive falls well within the ambit of law, we cannot help express our worries at the miseries and uncertainties that the evicted people are going to face. In fact, there are two ways of looking at it. One is the legal aspect and the other human aspect.

As far the legal provision goes, the 170-acre land stretch between the Gulshan lake and the Banani T & T pond belongs to BTCL and Rajuk and has been illegally occupied by vested quarters for over the past two decades. During this time, the illegal occupants have put up shops, garages, shanties and rented those for business purposes. Therefore, the drive was necessary to recover government property and save the lake. But we are yet to hear anything about the masterminds who allegedly have turned this huge stretch of land into a hub of illegal activities right under the nose of law enforcers as well as concerned government authorities.

However, in an over-populated country like Bangladesh where urbanization has grown tremendously in the most unplanned way possible, existence of slums is no news. The demolished slum at Korail, which is home to several thousand people, has existed there for nearly two decades. Evicting thousands of people without having had any rehabilitation plan will not only render them homeless but also will create an acute humanitarian crisis. With this abrupt demolition, they will be deprived of basic education and healthcare facilities that they, as a community, used to receive from NGO-based schools and healthcare centres in the slum.

While we accept the High Court directive to protect government properties, especially the shrinking water bodies from encroachers, we urge the government to immediately stop demolition of the slums considering the impending humanitarian crisis. We believe it is also within the government's ambit to protect the fundamental rights of its citizens. Therefore, the already evicted people should be rehabilitated sooner rather than later and the residents of the existing slums which are yet to be demolished should be relocated first, before the rest of the slum is demolished.

Rising threat of diarrhoea

Start awareness campaign to check its further spread

RAPID rise in the incidence of severe diarrhoea and cholera in the city and its surrounding areas is alarming. Records of the International Cholera and Diarrhoeal Diseases Research, Bangladesh) ICDDR, B hospital show that the epidemic has taken a serious turn. Since March 24, the hospital has been witnessing a sudden rise in the number of admissions infected by these epidemics.

Understandably, the ongoing drinking water crisis in the city has played a major role in the spread of the disease and the severe hot spell of the last few days has compounded the situation further. Those most at risk in this condition are the old people and children residing in the city's slums as well as its adjacent areas.

The ICDDR, B sources have also stated that most patients who have been admitted there are from the slum areas within the city and its outlying areas like Tongi, in Gazipur. What is further alarming is that some 48 per cent of the patients already admitted are children below the age of five.

Reassuringly, the director general of health services, who has also attributed the epidemic's high incidence to the city's present water crisis, has set up a number of centres to test water quality at different spots in the city as well as directed all the city's hospitals to open diarrhoea units. Admittedly, the decision to provide the slum areas with tanks where Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) will supply drinking water is also a useful step.

More importantly, prevention of the infectious disease is better than treating after the disease has struck. At the same time, creating awareness among the people about taking primary health care measures such as avoiding stale and rotten food and refraining from using non-supply water for drinking and washing purposes, where possible taking boiled water, and so on are also important.

The DG health services should also take immediate measures to make water-purifying tablets available everywhere and supply those to the slum-dwellers for free. The government immediately also start an awareness campaign including advice from experts on the primary steps to be



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SIX years after Adam Smith published *The Wealth of Nations* in 1777, Whig leader Charles James Fox

was the first to mention it in the British Parliament. He mentioned it because he was impressed by a maxim laid down in that book, which stated that the only way to become rich was when income exceeded expenses. More than two centuries later the Destiny Group in Bangladesh added a twist to that game. Another way to get rich is to steal from others. All income and no expenses in this Disneyland of deceit!

They sold fifty million trees to unsuspecting people who didn't see through MLM (or multi-level mischief). This large number of trees would have required at least two hundred thousand acres of land but many of those trees were never actually planted on the ground. Investors who craved for a proof of their investment were shown pictures of trees taken from the Sunderbans mangrove forest. The demo performed better than the real.

This one deception has been a cross between the Ponzi scheme and the Potemkin Village. The Ponzi scheme, named after Charles Ponzi, usually entices new investors by offering higher returns than other investments, in the form of short-

term returns that are either abnormally high or unusually consistent. The Potemkin Village was even more deceitful. In 1787, when Russian Empress Catherine II visited Crimea, her minister Grigory Potemkin purportedly erected fake settlements to give her a false impression of prosperity and happiness.

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In a nutshell, the Destiny Group has been an alleged scheme of scammers that created illusions to inveigle investors. Yet only last year it was a major advertiser of the 40th anniversary celebration of Bangladesh's independence. Billboards and banners were everywhere, in some cases publicities were co-branded with the government. Now we know it was not celebrating the country's independence but that of its own. It was freely and openly taking this country for a ride and doing the fish in its own oil.

The company owns a newspaper, a television channel and God knows what else, although not all the trees it has sold. It rapidly expanded its footprints across the country because it knew people were waiting out there to be fooled. But how can we blame those victims for not being careful about the mischievous

layers of Destiny's devious activities? They couldn't possibly know more than the finance minister of this country, who has famously claimed that his only knowledge of Destiny Group was that a former army general worked for it.

Fifty million trees can hide lot of space, and those trees might have pulled the wool over the minister's

eyes as well. Yet when the man at the helm of our finances doesn't know enough about the fastest growing business house in this country, it's only fair to ask how many other things he doesn't know about. Newly surfaced evidence has contradicted his claim, because it appears that his ministry was in the loop all along. Once again, it cooked the goose for the incredibly shrinking credibility of this minstrel of excuses.

While the finance minister is a leading contender for this century's Rip Van Winkle title, the involvement of the retired general baffles us more. He is the former army chief, a stalwart of the Sector Commanders Forum, a vociferous voice of the pro-liberation forces and a conscience keeper of this nation. How could he allow his righteous fingers get so clumsily buried

in such an infamous mess? Was he also suckered into a confidence game that layered him into the deception of millions of his countrymen? Then we also hear about an advisor to the prime minister, whose name like a flickering apparition, hovers around this scandal. It can be said without insulting one's intelligence that a multi-billion taka scam involving millions of people carried out in broad daylight ought to have the blessings of a number of powerful people. We shall never know all the names, because cockroaches run and hide when the lights come on.

What will happen now? Yes, the Destiny Group has been at the forefront of many fraudulent propositions. But what will happen to the general who has let us down? What will happen to the shadowy advisor since now we see him and now we don't? What will happen to the minister who is famous for his ignorance? And, above all, what will happen to millions of people who have paid for the trees that are never going to grow?

Nothing happened to the stock market manipulators. Nothing happened to the syndicate in the commodity market. Nothing happened to those who killed the journalist couple. The MLM house has carefully chosen its name. Destiny is the word, mark it. It took us for many a ride, being right or wrong was irrelevant.

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Al-Qaeda's tactical creed

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IDEOLOGY may have been the forte of al-Qaeda ideologues promoting global jihad, but it has also combined with a military tactical doctrine to make it look more pragmatic to millions of "jihobbyists" around the world.

Since this becomes a conflict between good and bad, good has to necessarily triumph over bad, since without an alternative vision for the future, no ideology can hope to succeed.

The faithful are implored to shun inertia and spring into action, since only from action can that alternative vision for future be achieved. The vision that inspires al-Qaeda is the ouster of foreign occupiers in Muslim lands, the removal of all vestiges of cultural pollution that violate the laws of God and the application of laws that are informed solely by the Holy Quran.

The US is the main antagonist, one against whom al-Qaeda ideologues have laid out an ideological strategy. As a typical example, Abu Ubayd al-Qurashi has tended to argue in his works that the US is weakening, while the jihadi movement led by al-Qaeda is on the rise around the world.

For example, in a 2002 article "A Lesson in War," he performs a nuanced distillation of Carl von Clausewitz, a pioneer of war studies and tactics. Qurashi postulates that Americans are too entrenched in Clausewitz's "centre of gravity" doctrine, which emphasises fighting a centralised hostile adversary with a unified command structure, which becomes redundant when fighting a fluid organisation like al-Qaeda.

Qurashi argues that Americans are totally inept when it comes to understanding al-Qaeda's tactics, and deconstructs Ray Cline's arguments about power.

Qurashi interpolates variables that Cline argues are vital for any entity to acquire power, within which territoriality, economic capability, military ability, strategic purpose and a will to accomplish that purpose are essential elements.

Qurashi argues al-Qaeda has significant potential power and territorial bases in the shape of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. It has the will, and territory will be hugely helpful for acquiring economic capability.

Qurashi interpolates research by another American military strategist T.N. Dupuy, who identifies fighting power (P) as being constituted of the number of troops (N), multiplied by variable factors (V), multiplied by the quality (Q) of those troops: P, in fact, is equal to NVQ.

That the qualities of Islamist warrior (jihadis) are undeniably higher, since they fight out of conviction, not monetary gains, and live hard lives and thus are inherently conditioned for war.

He says that even though the US may have a central pool of troops, the jihadis can recruit Muslims from all over the world, offsetting the numerical ratios of American troops. He also postulates that the qualities of Islamist warrior (jihadis) are undeniably higher, since they fight out of conviction, not monetary gains, and live hard lives and thus are inherently conditioned for war.

Abu Musab al-Suri also stresses on Islam being under attack by the establishment of the "new world order" comprising the Jews and "Crusaders," spearheaded by America, with France, Britain and Nato, and the "apostate" Arab regimes. Suri has also equated Islamic scholars who denounce

jihadism with the enemy within, who lead Muslims astray under the guise of Islamic injunctions.

The need for edifying action is also demonstrable in his Call for Islamic Global Resistance. Suri has laid out a "battle doctrine" against primarily America, which stipulates that mere words will not save the ummah in the face of the enemy's "machineguns, flogging, rape and defamation." Suri's emphasis at all times is on the fact that jihad against the US cannot be waged through words and non-violent means, and only this philosophy is the way forward.

As regarding asymmetric warfare, for Qurashi the asymmetrical con-fabulation of jihadi vs US forces is not such a bad thing since the fluid

images of the subsequent stock exchange crashes were transmitted by the enemy's own media centres.

He then posits the largest fissure in the American armour -- America is seeking to protect the narrow ideal of a state while al-Qaeda is fighting for the people; America is trying to uphold democracy while al-Qaeda espouses a higher divine cause which gives it the leverage to operate throughout the world, while the US is limited by its territorial imperatives.

Qurashi tries to show that America is still reliving the Cold War military doctrine when engaging al-Qaeda, which is ineffective against the entity's cell-based, fluid and constantly morphing tactics. For al-Qaeda, the scatter of forces created by engaging in Iraq at the same time as in Afghanistan shows the lack of creativity of American thinking.

On the other hand, the jihadis gain their strength from the same troop diffusion process by opening up too many fronts for Americans to handle at one time. This "too much everywhere -- too little effectiveness" theme also resonates with another top al-Qaeda strategist and ideologue, Abu Bakr Naji, who argues that even though US has the capability to crush jihadism and al-Qaeda, only hegemony will not be enough.

Remote countries will become graveyards for the Americans unless the US legitimises itself in the eyes of the people of those countries. This would mean a reversal of its foreign policy in some cases.

Reliance on proxy regimes, Naji argues, will not work since they in turn lose legitimacy by allying with the Great Satan.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 6

1453 Mehmed II begins his siege of Constantinople (Istanbul), which falls on May 29.

1919 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi orders a general strike.

1930 Gandhi raises a lump of mud and salt and declares, "With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire." beginning the Salt Satyagraha.

2005 Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani becomes Iraqi president; Shiite Arab Ibrahim al-Jaafari is named premier the next day.