

Withdrawing politically motivated cases

Stop the bad practice

REVIEWING the so-called politically motivated cases to recommend withdrawal of charges against criminals is itself a bad practice. Worse still, for clearing some 30 such cases, the national committee for the task has even bypassed the mandatory provision that district committees concerned would first select the cases before forwarding those to it. This has made the move even more questionable.

Regrettably, through the process, the government is in practice politicising the rule of law as well as circumventing its due procedure.

We do not discount that some of the cases might have really been lodged out of political intent by the erstwhile government. Unfortunately, this has become a common practice during all the political governments. And what is being lost sight of through this is that they are doing more wrong in the name of righting a wrong.

Recently, cases have been recommended involving persons who are accused in several murder cases and many of them do not even belong to the ruling party. Such recommendations compel us to speculate that a good deal of money may have changed hands.

This should not happen, and we urge that good sense would prevail, because such actions hit at the very fundamentals of governance by the rule of law. Unless the government stays away from such practice, it may ultimately come back to haunt it.

Should the government decide to go ahead with its decision it can be only at the cost of whatever is left of its image.

Ruinous housing project

Development not at the cost of ecology

THE Purbachal Township being built in Gazipur district has led to the destruction of nearly 1,600 acres of cropland, filling up of wetlands, fruit orchards and forestry. Allegations of violation of laws and a deviation from the original plan have been levelled against Rajdhani Unnayan Katiripakkha (Raujuk) authorities. Whereas the original plan envisaged land to be filled up to six feet, local residents claim that Rajuk has wilfully filled up wetlands and water bodies up to a depth of 15 feet.

The razing of forest land, which according to Rajuk's own survey in 2010 constituted nearly 43 per cent of the land acquired is what has environmentalists up in arms. These claims are supported by a study done in the same year by the Department of Environment which found the area in question to have denser foliage than Bhawal national park and making room for a housing project would upset the ecological balance. That Rajuk authorities made false statements to the High Court about preserving the ecology of the area while indulging in activities to usher in the massive destruction of greenery and upsetting the ecology in the surrounding areas is unjustifiable. As a government institution, Rajuk must be held to account to preserve the environment and natural habitats, not to destroy them in the name of development.

Rajuk is in violation of the High Court directive for the preservation of forests, wetlands and orchards. It is hoped the highest court's injunction on further development work remains in force and we strongly urge for a review of what has been done so far by Rajuk.

INSTANT COMMENTS

Losing the war against al-Qaeda?

SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

IT is a pity that even after twelve years of the so-called war on terror the al-Qaeda continues to call the shots. And this has been attested once again by the heightened alert that the US was forced to adopt, eventuating in the prolonged closure of its embassies in 18 countries, mainly in Africa and the Middle East. The US feared that al-Qaeda might target its interest in some parts of the world by going after its embassies, and thus the closures.

That the war against al-Qaeda has not been successful is not a secret but this has been reconfirmed in the testimony of Frederick W. Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute before the US House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism hearing on "Global al Qaeda: Affiliates, Objectives, and Future Challenges" on July 13.

The prospect of combating the outfit successfully is gradually receding as the following excerpt of the statement to the House Committee shows: "Current trends point to continued expansion of al-Qaeda affiliates and their capabilities, and it is difficult to see how current or proposed American and international policies are likely to contain that expansion, let alone reduce it to 2009 levels or below. Americans must seriously consider the possibility that we are, in fact, starting to lose the war against al-Qaeda."

While that is not a happy state of affairs, I am sure many like me in Bangladesh would have been surprised to see the name of Bangladesh appear in the list of countries where the US chose to close its embassy fearing a potential al-Qaeda attack, all the more so when it is the only other country in South Asia apart from Afghanistan where such security precaution has been taken. Not even in Pakistan, where the al-Qaeda festers in its splendour, was such a precaution felt necessary.

This is a matter of concern because one is not aware of the existence of any al-Qaeda affiliate in the country, because to the credit of the government it has been able to stymie the religious extremists in the last five years. It is of concern more because there has not been single terrorist incident in the country to suggest that affiliate of any international terror outfit has been active here. Is there a sleeper cell here that we do not know of? The US intelligence can put us wise.

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Pakistan and our buzurg war criminal

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

HAMID Mir's is one of the more respectable and liberal voices in Pakistan these days. He has always been regarded as a friend of Bangladesh, naturally, because he has publicly made it clear that his country needs to offer an apology to ours over the genocide committed by the Pakistan army in former East Pakistan. His sympathies for Bangladesh have earned him quite a good deal of criticism in his country, where rabid Pakistanis are always fond of labeling fellow citizens drawn to truth and justice as *ghaddar* or traitors. Individuals like Mir, Asma Jehangir and the poet Ahmad Salim have regularly waged a hard battle in Pakistan over the Bangladesh question.

Given such realities, Hamid Mir springs quite a surprise on us when he attempts a study of the Ghulam Azam case in Bangladesh. In a recent write-up in Pakistan's Urdu-language daily *Jang*, Mir makes little attempt to conceal his concern over the judgment delivered against the pro-Pakistani Bengali Jamaat leader by a war crimes tribunal in Dhaka. Mir refers to the ninety-plus Ghulam Azam as a *buzurg*, Urdu for respected elder. He also notes that Bangladesh has not been able to emerge free of its 1971 fixation, which is indeed surprising seeing that the columnist knows only too well why 1971 takes up so expansive a slice of the Bengali psyche.

Incomplete details of Ghulam Azam's political career have been disseminated in Pakistan by his friends there, the clear objective of which is to demonstrate before the international community that the Bangladesh leadership is determined to make a scapegoat of an individual known for Islamic scholarly pursuits. Mir appears to have been taken in by such a white-washed presentation of the Azam case. He makes little mention of the Jamaat leader's active role in augmenting the strength and reach of the Pakistan army in occupied Bangladesh through playing a pivotal role in the formation of the Razakar, al Badr and al Shams forces in Bangladesh.

But why put the burden of blame on Mir only? A vast majority of Pakistanis have remained in denial mode about the acts committed by their army and its local collaborators in Bangladesh forty two years ago. Not long ago, the vice chancellor of Hamdard University in Sind, a retired High Court judge, informed a team of visiting Bengali journalists that it was India's Hindus who were behind Pakistan's break-up in 1971. And he had been a judge! General Tikka Khan never acknowledged the murder of Bengali academics and students his soldiers committed on the night between March 25-26, 1971, at Dhaka University, save only to say that two citizens had been killed by stray bullets. Benazir Bhutto believed what her father told her in his letters to her in 1971. At Harvard, she considered news of the crisis in 'East Pakistan' a concerted campaign against her country.

Where the Ghulam Azam case is the issue, Hamid Mir skips across some necessary details of the Jamaat politician's

career and seems unable to believe a ninety-year prison term has been imposed on the man. Mir does not remember or does not know of the perfidious role Azam played before and after 1971. In 1972, he went touring the Middle East on Z.A. Bhutto's instructions to inform governments in the region of how 'East Pakistan' had been 'occupied' by the Indian army, how Muslims were being decimated, how Hindus were dominating social life. Mir does not speak of the scores of intellectuals Azam's goon squads in the Jamaat-e-Islami picked up and murdered in the three days before Bangladesh's liberation. Of course, Azam is *buzurg*. The men he and his friends killed are but a footnote in history.

And history of course was denied, even repudiated, by other Bengali quislings of the Pakistan army. Syed Sajjad Husain, passionately fond of western table manners and a correct British pronunciation of English, decided in 1971 to save Pakistan and Islam in the face of the Bengali struggle for liberty. He did that through blatant lies. No academic, he noted with a straight face, had been killed in 'East Pakistan' by the army. He knew, even as he spoke, that G.C. Deb and Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta had been bloodied to death by the army. Perhaps Hamid Mir knows of all these gory details of 1971? Perhaps he knows too that the Biharis who he thinks waged a brave war for Pakistan in 1971 are guilty of some of the most atrocious criminality in history? They willingly aided the army in its missions of murder and rape and pillage.

The Pakistani journalist M.B. Naqvi told yours truly more than a decade ago that, like the ancient mariner, he needed to unburden himself of guilt planted in his soul in 1971, when a tour of 'East Pakistan' by newsmen from West Pakistan, arranged by the Yahya Khan regime, revealed to him the enormity of the crime the army was cheerily engaged in. He is dead, though his book is in the Pakistani market. You wonder if he did manage to reveal what the world knew forty two years ago. Two decades ago, Mubashir Hasan, friend and colleague of Z.A. Bhutto, was asked if he planned to put his experience of the war to pen and paper. He looked sad. "What can I write?" He asked plaintively, did not seem to know the answer, and slowly shuffled off.

History textbooks in Pakistani schools do not enlighten the young on how and why East Pakistan broke away from the rest of the country, save only to point the finger at Indian and other 'conspiracy' to explain things away. Ask the writer Yasmin Saikia. She will tell you how the Pakistan army officers who murdered and raped Bengalis in 1971 today look away from uncomfortable questions and instead draw attention to the flowers in their gardens.

That Ghulam Azam and the likes of him assisted the Pakistan army, that they went looking after Bengali freedom fighters to kill with the help of Yahya Khan's hordes, that in the interest of Pakistan's unity they let the blood flow from Bengali men and women are truths men like Hamid Mir should be popularising in Pakistan.

Men like Abul A'ala Maududi and Ghulam Azam grow bitterly into old age. Their parochial, sectarian and murderous politics prevents them from claiming the high places that are the natural calling of *buzurg*, of respected elders.

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Not by growth alone

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

JAGDISH Natwarlal Bhagwati, Professor of Economics at Columbia University in New York, isn't self-effacing or modest. In 2004, he got a chair created in Indian political economy at Columbia, named after himself. Its occupant is Arvind Panagaria, Bhagwati's co-author!

In 2010, Bhagwati had a fellowship named after himself established at Columbia Law School to coincide with the creation of a chair named after alumnus and India's main Constitution-drafter, Ambedkar. The fellowship is financed by the Indian taxpayer!

Bhagwati and Panagaria are dyed-in-the-wool neoliberals and apologists for now-discredited liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation policies. Bhagwati has championed free (as opposed to fair) trade as key to development. Panagaria has been Asian Development Bank's chief economist.

Both root for "second-generation reforms" and oppose food security, employment guarantee and other welfare measures.

Bhagwati ridicules those who disagree with him, in particular Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen. Bhagwati's books, including the latest *"Why Growth Matters"* (with Panagaria), are replete with vicious comments on Sen.

For years Bhagwati would throw a party each time Sen missed the Nobel Prize. He called for a second "Swadeshi" movement -- a bonfire of India's regulations -- without the faintest irony of advocating this from abroad!

Yet, many were shocked when Bhagwati stooped to launching abusive personal attacks while commenting on Jean Dreze and Sen's new book *"An Uncertain Glory: India and Its Contradictions"*. Sen responded soberly, largely without mentioning Bhagwati.

What seems to have "provoked" Bhagwati is Sen's defence of food security, his endorsement of Bihar's social welfare measures, and his opposition to Mr. Narendra Modi as prime minister.

Many described this exchange as a shouting match or slugfest. But the aggression comes from one side, with Bhagwati unfairly accusing Sen of being anti-growth.

The exchange highlights the polar opposition between the GDPists, or worshippers of GDP growth as an end-in-itself, and those who emphasise social progress and welfare, which requires more than growth.

The GDPists' critics are vindicated by India's experience over the last two decades, the fastest-growth period in recent history. This has seen very little improvement in the living standards of the majority, or in reduction of poverty, income inequalities and regional disparities -- the real measures of progress.

Progress requires balanced growth with equitable distribution. India's growth is severely unbalanced: with services expanding rapidly, industry growing too sluggishly to absorb labour, and agriculture -- on which 60% of people depend -- growing at two percent.

India's recent growth has wrought enormous environmental destruction. The World Bank estimates that environmental degradation annually costs India a horrific 5.7% of GDP. This shaves off almost all of the annual 6% per capita GDP growth recorded between 2000-01 and 2010-11!

Income disparities in India are growing obscenely. According to the latest National Sample Survey, per capita

spending of the richest 5% of urban Indians in 2011-12 was 15 times higher than that of the poorest 5%. Twelve years ago, the ratio was 12. In rural India, the top-bottom disparity grew from 7 to 9 multiples.

Even going by official poverty estimates -- which very few buy -- the annual pace of poverty reduction is just 2.2%, a fraction of the 7.6% GDP growth. There's no "trickle-down." Rather, growth enriches the already affluent.

Bhagwati-Panagaria have no answer as to how this growth process, into which imbalances and disparities are built, can reduce them by itself. Their book contains no serious analysis. It merely regurgitates shop-worn clichés.

Bhagwati-Panagaria abuse Sen as a misguided "Mother Teresa of economics," whose prescriptions have done "huge damage." They rail against food subsidies for the poor, which are under Rs.1 lakh crores, as a "fiscal threat" and waste, but are silent on the much larger fuel subsidies or the annual Rs.5-lakh-crores budget giveaways to the rich.

Dreze and Sen lay out a persuasive case for state intervention in their sober (and sobering) discussion of India's dismal performance in healthcare, literacy, education, poverty reduction, social assistance, etc. They aim at "integrating growth with development" within a democratic and participatory framework.

They highlight India's persistent social pathologies. Thus, 43% of India's under-five children remain undernourished, and 48% stunted. Almost half the women of childbearing age are anaemic.

These ratios have remained unchanged over two decades. As has the proportion of Indians who defecate in the open -- still over 50%.

India, despite high growth, remains a social development laggard in South Asia barring Pakistan. The contrast with Bangladesh is revealing. Bangladesh's per capita income is half that of India's. But it has overtaken India in life expectancy (four years higher), infant-mortality decrease (25% lower), and child immunisation (82 vs 44%).

India performs disgracefully even in comparison to the world's poorest 16 countries outside sub-Saharan Africa. It ranks as low as 11 (literacy), 13 (improved sanitation) and 15 (underweight children). India is a disaster zone -- little islands like California amidst a sea of social deprivation, economic bondage and human misery.

In Asia's lower-middle income countries, to which India belongs, spending on social insurance, social assistance, and labour market programmes averages 3.4% of GDP. India's spending is one-half of this. Even that low level is reached largely because of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Dreze and Sen powerfully argue for corrective measures to empower the poor and enhance their capabilities. They address not just economics, but issues such as corruption, accountability, ethics, public reasoning about equality justice, and opportunities made available by India's relatively robust democracy despite its faults.

One wishes Dreze and Sen had delved deeper into the root-causes of India's social development failures -- class, caste and gender biases, themselves embedded in India's severely unequal society, its policymakers' elitism, its rulers' misanthropic nature, recent distortions in public discourse, and increasing demonisation and repression of popular protests.

Dreze and Sen's passion for justice is expressed in the book's final chapter, "The Need for Impatience." This exhorts us to become intolerant of our policymakers' criminal indifference to justice and equality, and mobilise energies on these issues.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Risky mobile banking service

We all know about the immense importance of mobile banking. It is the easier and quicker way to transfer money across the country. There's been a report in this daily about how easily kidnappers and extortionists get their demanded ransom by using mobile money transfer system (bKash, DBBL mobile banking and others). It is surprising that law enforcers find it difficult to trace these people. We draw the attention of the authorities concerned to catch these criminals.

Mohammad Anisuzzaman
Bangladesh Agricultural University

Killing two birds with one stone

AL MP Golam Maula Rony was arrested on July 24, 2013 shortly after a Dhaka court cancelled his bail and ordered his arrest for beating up two TV journalists. Rony participated in many TV talk shows and people liked him because he spoke boldly. So, people have become sympathetic to him and are thinking that he was provoked in a calculative way. The government tried to kill two birds with one stone. It suddenly became very sympathetic to the journalists and tried to establish that no one is above the law.

But we want to know why the murderers of Sagar-Runi are not arrested, why MP Shaon, Kamal Majumdar, and four other MPs, who are guilty of different misdeeds, are not brought to justice.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Unfit vessels being readied for service!

Another Eid is imminent. People from everywhere are rushing to their homes to celebrate this special occasion. We have come to know that like every year, the private launch owners are renovating their old vessels. Actually, they are only colouring the old vessels, not repairing them. So these faulty launches will ply during this Eid season putting the passengers' lives at risk. It is high time the government took action against all types of unfit vessels.

Mohammad Anisuzzaman
Bangladesh Agricultural University
Mymensingh

What happened to lottery draw?

I purchased some lottery tickets of Lion A. Badal Eye Hospital in April 13, 2013. The draw was scheduled on 24th April. Later it was shifted to 22nd May. It was written on the back of the ticket that the names of the lottery winners will be published through newspapers. Though the declared date of draw of the lottery passed long ago, the result is not yet published in any newspaper. I draw the attention of the authorities concerned in this regard.

Khondokar Asaduzzaman
Municipal Tank Cross Road, Khulna

Comments on news report, "Tarek 'underwent' fake surgery," published on August 5, 2013

Nds

What a wonderful culture we have 'developed! In the next stage of development, we may well imagine to have a fake election, a fake transfer of power to a fake winning party with fake pledges so on and so forth.

SM

The old proverb of the futile attempt to cover fish with spinach still holds true.

Ahmed Zakaria

Unfortunately, the bullets fired in the crossfire seem real enough.

Wind

This episode is nothing but the corrupt and idiosyncratic work of Jubo League.

"Most SC judges not interested" (August 3, 2013)

Abu Rifat

But district level judges give their wealth statements every year in their annual confidential reports to the SC, as it is mandatory for them.

Nds

Will submission of a nominal wealth statement serve any meaningful purpose? I don't think so. Who will verify the accuracy of the statement? Nobody. It's a mutually sustaining network of authorities.

Nazmul Haq

These justices are supposed to be honest and discharge justice honestly. If they are clean, then they should not hesitate to publish their wealth statement.

Abu Rifat

Simple, they fear to face transparency.

Abbasuddin

Why are judges now shy of disclosing their wealth like the politicians of the country? People know that politicians are the earner of illegal wealth.

Abu Rifat

Not only politicians, judges too.