

BNP leaders planned to kill people!

SHAKHAWAT LITON

BNP leaders Moudud Ahmed, M.K. Anwar, Rafiqul Islam Mia, Abdul Awami Mintoo and Shimul Biswas have been languishing in jail since a November 8. They were also placed on an eight day remand by a Dhaka court in two cases on November 14 allowing police to quiz them intensively to know about plans to “carry out subversive activities and kill people.”

What offences did they commit?

For that let's go briefly through the remand prayer forwarded by the police to a magistrate court seeking permission to take the detained BNP leaders on remand.

According to the police remand prayer, as per the plans of the five detained BNP leaders, other accused activists in the case along with other 80-90 unidentified people, came out of the AGB Colony Hospital Zone around 12:15 noon and brought out a procession on September 24 protesting the submission of charge sheet against Jatiyatabadi Chhattara Dal's central president and other leaders in connection with a case filed for throwing crude bombs at the information minister's residence. In order to create panic, the police remand prayer stated, they blocked the road in front of Ideal School and College and vandalised seven vehicles. They beat up the drivers and hurled brick chips with the aim of killing them.

According to the remand prayer, as the plaintiff came to the spot after hearing the sound of blasts, the accused barred the police from discharging their duties and attacked them suddenly before fleeing. “It is learnt from the information of the investigation officer that the accused mentioned in the FIR carried out the attack as per their (the five detained BNP leaders) plan. Further evidence and proof to this end are being gathered,” claimed the police in its prayer.

According to the police's remand prayer in the other case, with the plans and directives of the five detained BNP leaders, the FIR named accused along with 80-90 activists of 18-party alliance on November 5 brought out a brisk procession suddenly from Kamalapur bazar area with the view to creating panic. They blocked the road and as the plaintiff with his force tried to calm them down the rowdy mob barred the police and attacked them with 3-4 crude bombs, leaving several policemen injured. And, as the remand prayer submitted, adequate evidence and proof are being collected that the accused in the FIR and unnamed others perpetrated the attacks.

Both the remand prayers claimed that it was necessary to quiz the five BNP leaders to find out the source of the explosives and their stock and supply. According to the remand prayer it was also important to know what plan the 18-party alliance activists had chalked out with the directives, plan and instigation of the accused. It further said that the five detained leaders termed the government illegal and provoked the government employees not to obey law through their statements and talk show comments and in rallies. The prayer submission also said: “Moreover, it is also necessary to quiz them to know what plans they chalked out to carry out sabotage, damage public and private property and to kill people.”

The charges against the five BNP leaders are really interesting.

Moudud, 73, who was deputy prime minister, prime minister, vice-president and also law justice and parliamentary affairs minister, is now a member of BNP national standing committee, the highest policymaking body. His colleague Anwar, 81, a member of the standing committee, was cabinet secretary and minister in the past BNP government. Mintoo, 65, an advisor of the BNP chairperson, is one of the country's top businessmen. But according to the police remand prayers, they were engaged in plans to “carry out subversive activities and kill people.” How funny!

Since 2012, dozens of BNP senior leaders have been detained and put behind bars for months. They all came out later on bail. There were some cases which were also ridiculous in nature. Take the one of garbage truck vandalism case.

According to the case statement, on the evening of December 9, 2012, BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and his party colleague Ruhul Kabir Rizvi led a procession of around 200 to 250 unnamed people armed with sticks that morning. They stopped a Dhaka City Corporation vehicle and forced its driver, Ainal, to get down. The accused then beat the driver mercilessly in an attempt to kill him.

The police did not take time to arrest Fakhrul. They did not need to look for the other unnamed accused either. They arrested Fakhrul on the evening of December 10 as he was leaving his Nayapalton party office.

Fakhrul was first arrested on May 15, 2012 and was charged with planning and provoking the torching of a vehicle on April 29, 2012 in front of Falcon Tower, near the Prime Minister's Office. Party standing committee members M.K. Anwar, Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah and Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, too, were sued over similar charges.

According to the charge sheet of that case, two BNP standing committee members, Mirza Abbas and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, two BNP lawmakers Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anne and Mahbubuddin Khokon and Bangladesh Jatiya Party chief and its lone lawmaker barrister Andaleeb Rahman Partho, went there along with others around 9 pm on April 29 to torch the bus.

All these cases are glaring examples of narrow and sullied politics. These have also exposed the government's political bankruptcy. They mock at the ruling Awami League's electoral pledges, made before 2008 parliamentary polls, that it would inculcate tolerance and decency in the country's political culture.

The government has been nakedly using the law enforcing agencies against the opposition for narrow partisan gains. And the way the senior opposition leaders have been put behind the bars, and bail being denied by the lower courts, create misgivings about our legal system.

This practice will also keep widening the existing gap and animosity between the ruling and opposition camps, making it impossible to reach a consensus on any national issues, including the next general election.

The writer is Senior Reporter, The Daily Star.

BANGLADESH-INDIA RELATIONS

India needs strategic foresight

MANISH VAID and TRIDIVESH SINGH MAINI

INDIA has inherited a legacy of disputed borders with China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The border dispute with Bangladesh, which arose in 1971, the same year the latter came into being, can somehow be resolved relatively easier than that of China and Pakistan.

A serious attempt in this context was made on September 6, 2011, during Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka, where an additional protocol to the agreement concerning the demarcation of land boundary between India and Bangladesh and related matters was signed. The Bangladesh Parliament has ratified this protocol.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Asom Gan Parishad (AGP) had blocked the passage of the same in Indian Parliament, in spite of the fact that India would benefit immensely -- both politically and economical -- besides taking care of the right to livelihood and other fundamental rights of those inhabiting these enclaves. The reason for these parties objecting to the protocol was largely the parting of 10,000 acres of land to Bangladesh, while exchanging enclaves in their territory.

While national parties blame regional parties for short sightedness, the truth is that on issues such as the land boundary agreement even the principal opposition party, the BJP, failed to act in a responsible manner. While initially, the party is supposed to have expressed support, it backed out once it saw AGP rejecting the agreement.

BJP's intransigence on giving assent to the protocol, as also confirmed by Sushma Swaraj, leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha, will considerably weaken the current dispensation led by Sheikh Hasina, which has made earnest attempts to reach out to India. But the BJP seems to be overlooking this important fact.

The BJP could find itself in a difficult situation on mainly two issues, as it expects to come to power next year, if Bangladesh is led by Khaleda Zia. First is the return of insurgency in North East India and second is the effort to revive Myanmar-Bangladesh-India (MBI) gas pipeline. During Khaleda Zia's tenure (2001-2006), Bangladesh played spoil sport in halting MBI pipeline project by setting three conditions, namely; India to provide transit facility for hydroelectricity import from Nepal and Bhutan, Bangladesh to be provided more facilities for trade with the two countries, and measures to be taken for reducing Indo-Bangladesh trade imbalance.

Though all the three issues are crucial, none should be a precondition for trade and commerce. It is during the current tenure of Hasina that the talks of reviving MBI pipeline restarted. Interestingly, Bangladesh, which has witnessed a significant fall in its natural gas reserves in 2012 according to BP Statistics 2013, has shown keenness to join both Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) and Iran-Pakistan-India (API) gas pipeline projects recently.

Another advance made in the energy sphere during the existing tenure of Sheikh Hasina is ONGC Tripura Power Company (OTPC) signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the government of Bangladesh to open a new transport corridor through Bangladesh to facilitate transfer of heavy equipments of OTPC to Tripura. In return Tripura is keen to supply at least 100-MW of electricity to Bangladesh.

Further, ONGC lands two shallow water oil and gas blocks namely, SS-4 and SS09, in Bangladesh for the first time through a joint venture to explore hydrocarbons with Oil India Limited. On the issue of illegal migration BJP has always taken a

hard stand by securitisation of migration issue. For instance, L.K. Advani, the then deputy prime minister of India, on January 7, 2003, said that there were over 15 million illegal Bangladeshi migrants in India, who should be sent back as they were a serious threat to national security. A similar stance was taken by Narendra Modi while delivering his speech on Independence Day in Junagarh, Gujarat, stating illegal migration as a security threat.

It may be noted that India continues to be migration prone country and has witnessed the influx of refugees and migrants from its neighbours ever since it gained independence. Such influx of people included partition refugees, Tibetan refugees, Chakma refugees, Indo-Pak war refugees, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, refugees from Bhutan and Myanmar and economic migrants from Bangladesh. In recent times people displaced due to climate change, largely from Bangladesh, are also flowing in.

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Migrants from Bangladesh have been looked at more harshly by BJP, which at all times advocated for strong measures to deal with them. But it is simply not possible to impeach all migrants under the Foreigners (Amendment) Act, 2004, without ignoring the fact that illegal migration from Bangladesh to India is a reality. The need is to deal with this problem with some foolproof mechanism so that such influx is regulated well and legally acceptable without compromising on mutual security, while first identifying between refugee and migrant and then following the Principle of Non-Refoulement.

Lastly, India needs to act swiftly in resolving its political issues with Bangladesh so as to reap the economic benefits, while taking their bilateral relations to a greater level, otherwise it will again have to face a China wall which has already been firmly placed in Bangladesh, including Export Processing Zone dedicated for Chinese investors for boosting Bangladeshi's export to Chinese market or Chinese investment in Chittagang port.

India too should think of enhancing its trade and commerce in more innovative ways as it has done through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), groupings involving Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation.

Therefore, India would do well if BJP re-evaluates its thought of dissonance for additional protocol for LBA as this will result in multifarious benefits to India in a longer run by improving bilateral relations with Bangladesh. Sorting of political issues with Bangladesh, following the aforesaid model, could provide some sort of template for resolving similar disputes with other neighbours.

Hence, future outcomes of Indo-Bangladesh relations could be significantly influenced by the course of actions taken today by these two countries.

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An enemy of the nation

QUAMRUL HAIDER

BANGLADESHI politicians seem to have a visceral need for enemies. They love enemies because by bashing them, they can stir up public sentiment and distract their attention from the myriad of problems facing the nation. Recently, one of the honourable ministers of the republic identified an eminent citizen as a new enemy of the nation.

The good minister's identification of the enemy is an epigraph of the high-intensity, high-volume drama that has been playing on Bangladesh's political stage since 2010. In this drama, the enemy has been getting an epiphany-generating lesson on patriotism from the wimpy low-level political activists to the big guns up the hierarchy of the minister's political party.

Before declaring this citizen an enemy of the nation, the minister's party used numerous ancillary characters, thinly conceived and at times crudely manipulated, to launch a

vicious campaign of disparaging the citizen with their inflammatory and clownish theatrics.

At a time when Bangladesh's political discourse is reaching a feverish pitch, when the heated debate of just who should control the levers of power in the country, whether the quixotic politicians of BNP or the chauvinists of Awami League, the minister's discovery of a new enemy makes for a savoury topic for the armchair politicians.

The new enemy, albeit an eminent citizen, is not above reproach. Admittedly, the enemy is a shrewd businessperson, a master in the art of self-promotion who loves adulation and is skillful in befriendng the omnipotences of the world. However, the enemy does not steal money from the public coffers; does not plunder and pillage the wealth of the nation, nor kills innocent children and civilians. The enemy may be a Shylock, as deemed by the minister's disciples and colleagues, yet the enemy is working relentlessly to alleviate poverty through microfinance.

Why is this citizen, who has been described by one of the omnipotent as someone working tirelessly to offer to the poor “something far more valuable than a plate of food -- security in its most fundamental form,” is an enemy of the nation, while those who are pushing the country to the edge of the precipice because of their unbridled greed and insatiable lust for wealth and power are patriots? The tragicomic drama that is being staged with absurd histrionics demonstrates the psyche, animosity and hypocrisy of the people in power. It is a polemic about the tyranny of the utterly ruthless politicians and a dark satire of their mindset.

The French fabulist Jean de la Fontaine wrote: “*Je plie, et ne romps pas.*” In plain English -- I bend but do not break. The politicians should know that a person of honour and wisdom, vision and courage is unbreakable. They should also know that only those who lack civility and self-respect could hardly respect others.

Doctor Thomas Stockmann, the people's enemy of Ibsen's play *An enemy of the people*, has so aptly remarked: “The majority has might on its side unfortunately; but right it has not.”

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Floodgates of suspicions

MAHFUZUR RAHMAN

THE enthusiasm for Bangladesh democracy's march forward is set to receive a further blow as the political battle between the ruling and the opposition alliances over the election-time cabinet has taken an uglier turn in recent weeks. If the language of our political leaders is any indication, it can be said for sure that the spread of democracy and the traditional values of Bangladesh society are at stake. It all began with the dumping of the caretaker government system, and then came the blogger-Hefajat issue apart from the high-profile corruption scandals. Nothing more is needed for the incumbents to go further down the hill.

To make matters worse, the government has created an unnecessary controversy over the resignation of its ministers and state ministers, exposing its dysfunctional political strategies. The intention behind the much-hyped but imprudent way of en masse resignation was to create a psychological pressure on the main opposition BNP that ‘you come and join the all-party government or else we will go on our own.’ But that trick

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Another ill-advised decision of the government that has put the opposition on a sympathy wave is the arrest of top BNP leaders. In this case too, the government has failed to achieve its reported goal -- bringing the BNP stalwarts into its fold through negotiations in jail. The ruling party leadership needs to understand that when there is more repression then its losses will be greater in the end as people do not like negative politics. The opposition alliance's last spell of shutdown would have turned out to be a pointless exercise had the government not gone for the mass arrest. In politics, decision making is more important than muscle flexing.

Good leaders are those who can foresee and take strategic decisions. Good leaders can influence and inspire people to achieve a greater goal. If we take a look at our current political landscape, the picture is really pitiable. It has been a long time since we heard a speech that can rouse the nation. Instead, we wake up every day to venomous speeches and character assassination by our leaders. We get frustrated when we see our leaders inaugurating insignificant development projects and then delivering speeches making scathing attacks on their opponents. Things would have been different today had our leaders been able to work together with a greater consensus on national issues. But that is not to be. Ours is a political history that is mired in character assassination and soaked in blood.

After the fall of military ruler H.M. Ershad, it looked as if the country would move towards the right direction. But that hope got dashed before long. Now our much-sought democracy looks damaged as the national politics is poisoned with intolerance.

Now even many ardent Awami League and BNP admirers admit that the country would not have seen this escalation of violence had the leaders of the two major parties not maneuvered to perpetuate their power during their own regimes by manipulating the caretaker government system. The problem with our leaders is rooted in the contradictory nature of their leadership. They say one thing when in power and drum up another when in the opposition. Their contradictory activities only open the floodgates of suspicions.



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By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Swerved off course

6 Ready to hit

11 French academy

12 Pale brown

13 Jazz dance

14 Conductor's need

15 Window type

17 Frank McCourt book

19 None too cordial

20 Funny fellow

23 Musical range

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26 Chef's stirrer

28 Machu Picchu native

29 Informational file name

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32 Used to be

33 Tennis' Graf

35 Bean-bearing tree

38 Cow-hand's place

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42 Provide with a quality

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1 "You bet!"

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17 Namely

18 Smart-phone pictures

20 Flutes and bassoons

21 Kitchen come-on

22 Trait carriers

24 Nabokov novel

25 Relaxing site

27 Liberate

31 Fancy wrap

33 Pretzel topper

34 Summer coolers

35 Fare carrier

36 Piggied out

37 Lynx or lion

39 Pool need

40 Spell

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18 Smart-phone pictures

20 Flutes and bassoons

21 Kitchen come-on

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24 Nabokov novel

25 Relaxing site

27 Liberate

31 Fancy wrap

33 Pretzel topper

34 Summer coolers

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