

Impunity breeds criminality

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

It is widely felt by us, and more so by outsiders, that ours is a corrupt and criminality-plagued society. However, the number of convictions for such crimes hardly reflects the validity of the perception. If one analyses why criminality and corruption are so pervasive in the society, the first and foremost answer would be the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators.

In addition to numerous corruption cases during the 2-year tenure of the last CTG and the last 5 years of the AL-led government, for instance, hundreds of corruption and criminal cases were initiated against opposition politicians. It is dismaying to see that, except for a lone exception, none of those cases saw

opposition. However, the subsequent and ongoing investigation against the alleged unaccountable wealth of the presiding judge (who has gone to Malaysia) has caused irreparable damage to the integrity of the institution, the last hope of the citizens.

We very often quote from the constitution that "all citizens are equal before the law," yet we see that the BNP chairperson was treated above the law when she did not attend court hearings on the stipulated dates over and over again on ridiculous grounds. She was granted deferment 42 times in a single case, surely a record. What could be more of a travesty of the judiciary, the cornerstone of a society envisaging to be run by rule of law?

To further weaken the authority of the ACC, the then government enacted an amendment to a law last November, making it mandatory for the ACC to obtain prior permission for prosecuting public servants on corruption charges. This has only curtailed and weakened the power of the ACC and made it subservient to the executive authority so far as corruption of public servants is concerned. However, the High Court (HC) struck down the controversial amendment on January 30, saying that the incorporation of the new section in the ACC act 2004 contradicted the fundamental rights of citizens guaranteed in the Constitution. It is only natural to expect that the new minister of law, who himself was an ACC lawyer, will see to it that no appeal is made by the government against this highly popular ruling of the HC.

The cases involving the bombing at Udichi function, Ramna Batmul, CPB public meeting, Kibria murder and the August 21 mayhem apparently did not make much headway. These acts targeted the current ruling party adherents and its ideological allies and, as such, politics must not play any part in dispensing justice.

In the midst of all these disappointments, there seems to be a little light at the end of the tunnel. On January 30, a decade after the country's biggest arms haul, a special court in Chittagong handed down death sentence and life term to two former ministers of Khaleda Zia's cabinet, 11 senior civil-military bureaucrats and an Indian separatist

leader in two arms and smuggling cases.

However, whether these two ministers and the officers of intelligence agencies could be involved in the arms smuggling without the approval or instruction of the highest echelon of the government is a question that still remains to be answered. In a furious reaction, the convicted former state minister said: "I want the people who brought the arms to be tried." He was asked to name those people. He, however, set aside the question and instead continued: "I have been wrongly implicated. It was a managed drama."

In her reaction to the judgement BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia alleged that instead of rewarding the officials "who recovered 10 truckloads of arms in Chittagong," the government had punished them. Has she told the truth? Yes, they risked their lives to challenge the people offloading the ammo onto trucks from two trawlers. They were told that the authorities were aware of the "goods" being offloaded and were threatened with dire consequences. But Alauddin and Helal braved the threats and called in security reinforcements to round up the smugglers and the arms stash. However, instead of being rewarded for bravery, these two sergeants were framed in fake arms cases, fired from the force and tortured in custody during the tenure of the BNP-Jamaat-led four-party alliance government. The two policemen were later proved innocent and got back their jobs in 2011.

Law Minister Anisul Huq expressed satisfaction with the judgment. "What will happen through this verdict is that anyone will be very careful not to commit a similar crime in the future," he said while talking to reporters at the Secretariat. "The promise to establish rule of law has been fulfilled through this verdict," he told journalists.

Let the words of the law minister, a seasoned lawyer, be the beginning of the end of impunity, which is the cause of recurrence of criminality and corruption. By the same token, let the investigation of alleged corruption against the six former AL ministers continue without undue meddling to usher in a new beginning and to enhance the badly needed moral boost of the new government.

The writer is the Convenor of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

Our senior moments...

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

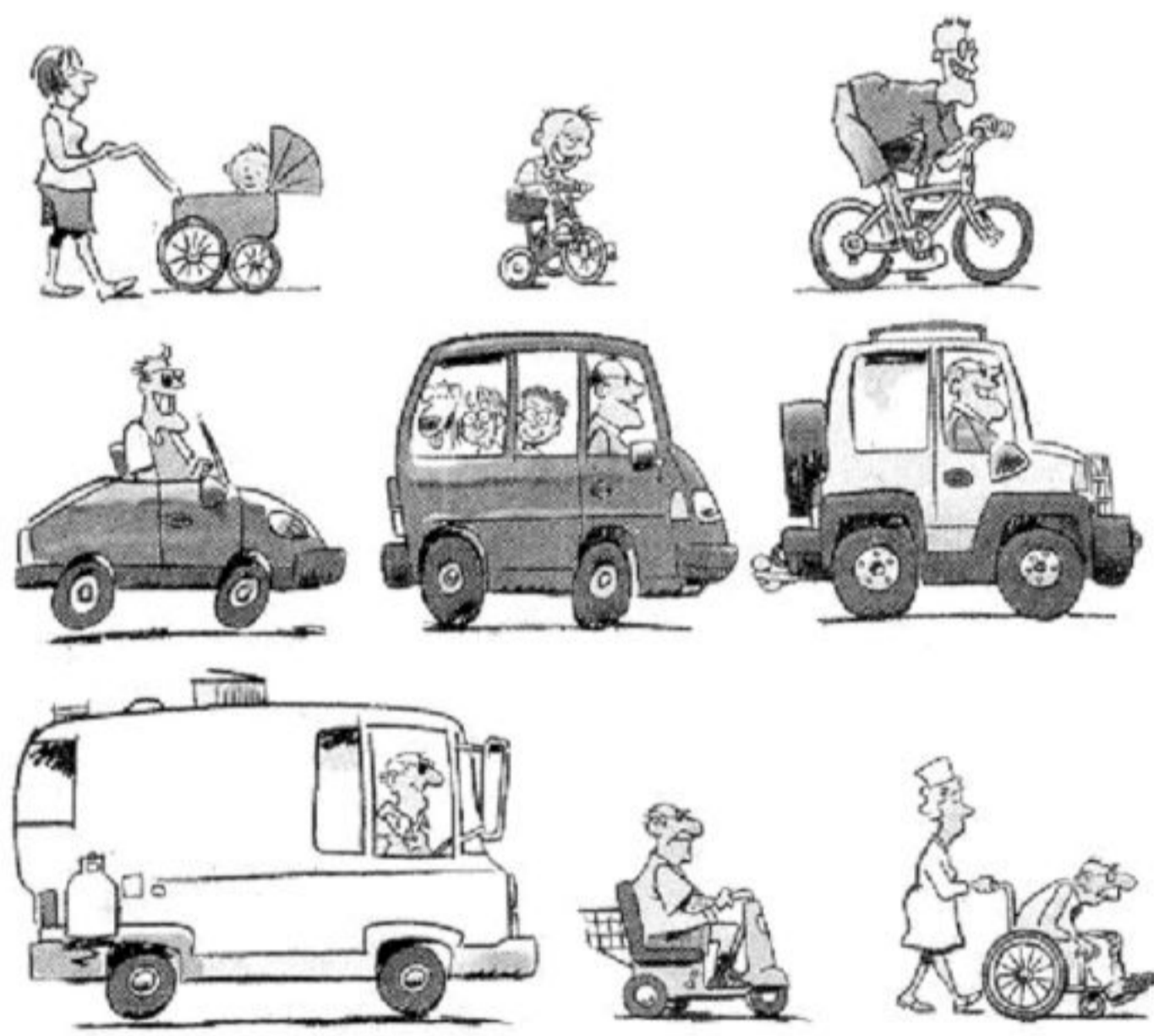
WHILE I was enjoying a leisurely cup of coffee with a close friend her daughter called on her cell phone. The conversation was punctuated by my friend's repeated interjections: "What? Can you say that again? I can't hear..!" Eventually she disconnected the line and vented her frustration about young people speaking in muffled voices and incomplete sentences. "Of course, it's also the bad phone connection," she added. Suddenly she glanced at me and asked: "Do you think I am losing my

hearing?" No sooner had she uttered these words, we both blurted out: "We are getting old!"

Instantly, my mind travelled back to the time when my father had started speaking in an unusually loud pitch. I remember asking him once: "Abbu, why are you shouting? I can hear you." He gave me a startled look and said: "I am not shouting. I am talking in a normal voice." It hit me then that his hearing had been affected by age. I felt sad for him. But now once in a while I find myself screaming even in an intimate conversation. And if five people talk together I can hardly understand what the discussion is about. The cross talk comes across as mere babble. My choice is then restricted to nodding my head (which can be sometimes dangerous since I might end up agreeing to some outrageous proposition) or maintaining a fixed Cheshire cat smile.

With the passing of years many things seem different from what they used to be. Recently I visited my Alma Mater, the Physics Department in Dhaka University. The staircase in the Curzon Hall which looked so regal and inviting when I was a student appeared steep and intimidating. The climb that was an everyday casual activity had now become a real effort. Surprisingly, the distance from the gate to the Hall also seemed longer. In my student days it used to be a walk that I breezed through. But now it had turned into an aerobic exercise nearly as intense as Zumba dancing!

The Wheels of Life



Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of ageing is the sudden lapse of memory one suffers. Often I meet someone who asks: "Remember me? We were together in..." I usually draw a blank and live through what is termed as a "senior moment," trying to make casual conversation by buy time to jog my fading memory. It's even more aggravating when an old acquaintance looks at me and exclaims: "Oh My God! You look so... different. I would never have known you..." This interaction usually results in a depressing few minutes in front of the mirror to reassure myself that this is indeed "me" and the mirror is not distorting the image.

Add to this the hassle of going shopping for clothes. Even after endless searches and trials I find it hard to fit into my regular size and the number always goes up -- never down. I wonder... are the manufacturers only catering to styles suited for young people or have the size specifications changed? Thankfully, the sari is most accommodating to an expanding girth. As for western clothes, the greatest invention in haute couture has been elastic pants! It has spared senior citizens the challenge of matching size to waistline. This exercise could create as much panic as waiting at the doctor's office for test results!

While on the subject of doctors -- if you are on the wrong side of fifty, getting a clean chit on an annual medical checkup is like getting a new lease of life. However, if the doctor suspects something not quite normal -- be prepared for a battery of clinical tests. That is not all. The next few dinner parties you attend, your friends (who are supposedly in the same age group) will present multiple scenarios of what is wrong with you. The related anxiety can sometimes be worse than suffering the pangs of a disease!

If my young readers have been patiently reading this piece, let me clarify that not everything about getting old is awful. There are many positives -- no stress about passing exams, making successful career moves or trying to keep up with the Joneses. And in most countries you earn privileges like discounted cinema tickets, priority seating on buses, and dedicated windows in public offices! As for relationships, we seniors also have our ups and downs, but we can accept human flaws with equanimity. The realisation that time is running out provides us with an appreciation of the present moment and we can let go of past grievances more easily.

By the way, if there are any typos in this article it's really not my fault. For some obscure reason the fonts are getting smaller these days. Must remember to send a complaint to Microsoft! Or is it already time for my next eye exam?

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the light of day. This could be due to one or more of the following reasons. Firstly, all the cases could be politically motivated; secondly, the politicians could be clever enough not to leave any mark of their misdeeds; thirdly, the ACC and the investigating officials could be too ill-trained to investigate properly, resulting in faulty charge sheets; fourthly, there could be too many loopholes in the law; and finally, our judicial procedure takes inordinate time to conclude a case.

The recent acquittal of a corrupt politician in a money-laundering case has further dented the people's trust in our judicial system. Initially, it was widely suspected that it was a government-managed acquittal to pacify the main

New benchmark for democracy and constitutional rule

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

SHEIKH Hasina has defined democracy and constitutional rule in this country in a way that nobody has done before. When ministers of the AL-led government handed over their resignation letters to the PM, most constitutional experts said that they had ceased to hold office the day they handed over their resignation letters to the PM. But Sheikh Hasina ruled that the ministers had merely expressed their desire to resign. They would be deemed to have resigned only when she accepted their resignation and put up their resignation letters to the president. That was that. The media and the people never knew when these ministers ceased to hold their office and stopped drawing their salaries and other state benefits.

Sheikh Hasina offered an all-party poll time government but ultimately settled for the ruling 4-party alliance outfit only when BNP and all other parties refused to take part in the election. She jettisoned JP from the ruling alliance government so that it could play the opposition role in the 10th Parliament. But when Ershad finally decided against JP taking part in the election, he was whisked away to a hospital in Dhaka and detained by state intelligence agencies.

His wife Raushan Ershad suddenly emerged as the de facto chief of JP. Political expediency triumphed over democratic norms and values. The

drama of JP Ministers resigning from the poll time government, the PM's refusal to accept their resignation letters and the dispatching of those to the PM through courier service finally ended in victory for the government. JP took part in the January 5 election under the leadership of Raushan Ershad. The EC also disregarded the letter by Ershad against allotment of plough, the election symbol of JP, to any person not nominated by him.

The election, in which AL and its coalition partners won 153 seats

been sharply critical.

Though the 9th Parliament was active till January 24, the newly elected MPs hastily took oath and a 49-member cabinet was sworn in with all the pomp and regalia.

The country had two parliaments at the same time -- the 9th and the 10th -- and some 638 MPs, of whom 349 MPs belonged to the 9th Parliament and 290 MPs to the 10th. Suranjit Sen Gupta, known as a constitutional expert, said that with the new MPs having taken oath, the 9th

It appears that we now have set a new benchmark for parliamentary democracy, rule of law and constitutional rule in this country. Sheikh Hasina has been brimming with confidence that she could weather any political storm coming her way and stay in power for another term of five years.

uncontested through a bizarre pre-election seat sharing deal among themselves and almost a clean sweep of remaining 147 seats, took a lot of flak at home and abroad. The voters in 153 constituencies (roughly about 55 million) did not have a chance to vote. BNP-led 18 opposition parties, members of civil society and people from all walks rejected this farcical election and urged the government to hold fresh election at the earliest. The EU and the USA in particular have

JS had ceased to exist. But most constitutional experts have maintained that the 9th Parliament would be there until it completed its 5-year term on January 24, unless dissolved earlier by the president.

The new cabinet is now a 5-party alliance with JP playing the dual role of being in the opposition as well as in the government at the same time. Raushan Ershad will sit in the opposition bench in the new JS in her dubious role as the leader of the

Yesterday's answer

Crossword grid with answers: ALAMO, IDEAS, LOPED, TRIAL, CAPED, RANGE, ANAT, DANGLE, PER, POD, SET, PREFACED, SLOT, ONES, PIEFACED, PAW, ELF, LEE, I, THINK, LISP, GRIST, GOPRO, GIRLS, INSET, YALE, NEEDS

CRYPTOQUOTE: DTX EDDM RFNSKXTZ LU CDGZW H ZWDFUHTN WHUZV EDFUXMU. ZWX ZWLTS ZD ND LU ZD VDFQMV MLSWZ HTNTDZWXHZ. -- CDDNGDC CLMUdT

Saturday's Cryptoquote: YOU SEE, GEORGE, YOU'VE REALLY HAD A WONDERFUL LIFE. DON'T YOU SEE WHAT A MISTAKE IT WOULD BE TO JUST THROW IT AWAY? -- CLARENCE THE ANGEL ("IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE")

12-30 A XYDLBAAXR IS LONGFELLOW One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- ACROSS: 1 Accords, 6 Lighting setting, 11 Lusitania sinker, 12 Truism, 13 "Twilight" heroine, 14 One of the Bradys, 15 Wreckage, 17 Shoe hue, 19 Rented out, 20 Lingerie item, 23 Wed in secret, 25 Glided, 26 Investigates, 28 Subsequently, 29 Misplay, 30 Holds, 31 "Yankee Doodle Dandy", 32 Auction signal, 33 Hitchcock classic, 35 Horrible, 38 Puccini opera, 41 American crop, 42 Ryan of "Paper Moon", 43 Firebugs, 44 Takesten
- DOWN: 1 Place for a pint, 2 Tad's dad, 3 Healthy hound features, 4 Yarn, 5 Horse homes, 6 Unspoken, 7 Line of symmetry, 8 Hr. part, 9 Okra unit, 10 One of Jo's sisters, 16 Old Russian force, 17 Decimal fraction, 18 Hilo hello, 20 Puritans, 21 Fab Four drummer, 22 Appended, 24 Signing need, 25 Her, often, 27 Power plant part, 31 Resort spots, 33 "The Godfather" writer, 34 Give an edge, 35 Band blaster, 36 Method, 37 Fragrant tree, 39 Manx, for one, 40 Capp and Capone

QUOTABLE Quote: If you think in terms of a year, plant a seed; if in terms of ten years, plant trees; if in terms of 100 years, teach the people. Confucius

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte

