

Ending extrajudicial killings

NHRC should act decisively

ONE could not agree more with the National Human Rights Commission chief that extrajudicial killings must stop immediately. No civilised country can allow such heinous and illegal acts by the custodians of law and order and the protectors of life and property of the people to go on unabated.

In fact the national human rights boss has echoed our sentiments while speaking at a function on February 15 that the explanations offered by the agencies are cooked up fiction. In fact these are so odiously repetitive that the public have now become all too familiar with them. It is difficult to accept the statement of the police and the administration that seem to be in a denial mode regarding these killings. It is difficult to understand how accused in murder cases end up dead with bullet holes in their bodies. At least seven prime suspects of murder cases have died in mysterious circumstances since January 18, according to reports carried in this newspaper yesterday.

While we appreciate the NHRC chairman's sentiments on the matter, we feel he should go beyond merely calling upon the law enforcing agencies to stop the killings. It is his bounden duty to investigate the killings, if the concerned agencies are reluctant to do so, and get to the bottom of the matter. And the government to this end, if it really wants to put a stop to this horrendous practice, must offer all necessary help for the NHRC to investigate into these deaths. The abhorrent practice must stop immediately.

Tree felling goes reckless

Under watch of authorities, pitifully!

MAKING a mockery of seasonal tree plantation drives, and more durable social or community forestry projects with a catchy slogan, 'plant two trees for one lost', trees have been and are being sawn off indiscriminately. Even a tree plantation programme with the assistance of World Food Programme (WFP) under an agreement with LGED at Awliapur union in Thakurgaon has not been spared.

It this particular case of procedural short-circuiting, local leaders of a social welfare organisation and sawmill owners ignored the rules bypassing the UNO, upazila forest department (to determine the maturity of trees and their value) and, finally, the DC's office which approves of auctioneering.

The lure of fast buck is so strong that all environmental concerns are bulldozed by vested quarters for sheer profiteering. In May last year, 500 trees were felled in Lalmonirhat by flouting terms of contract. Usually, powerful quarters in collusion with unscrupulous local administration carry out such misdeeds.

Trees have become a weapon of political agitation lately. Only in December last year and early January this year, several thousand trees have been cut down by Jamaat-Shibir elements to put up road barricades.

In this context, the authorities need to do stocktaking of the affected areas and vigorously plant trees to replace the lost ones, if not exceed them. As against the ideal 25 percent of the land under tree cover, we have only 8 percent -- the deficit will have to be reduced on a priority basis.

Traffic shenanigans at Hatirjheel

RIDWAN QUAIUM

RECENTLY, the number of road accidents has increased tremendously in the Hatirjheel area. An online survey was carried out among road users at Hatirjheel to find out the problems which are causing the road accidents there. About 36% of the respondents believe that traveling in the wrong direction/opposite direction by all kinds of vehicles is the main traffic issue at Hatirjheel. A major portion of the road in Hatirjheel is a one-way road. It basically works as a roundabout where the lake is the circle in the middle. To save time and fuel many road users choose to travel in the wrong direction, risking their lives and lives of other road users. This greatly hampers the traffic flow and increases the chance of accidents, especially head-on collisions.

Another 16% of the respondents said that the presence of rickshaws is another issue. Rickshaws are banned in this area but their presence often surprises other road users who have to slow down suddenly to avoid collisions with them.

Of the respondents, about 16% believe that reckless driving is another cause of concern at Hatirjheel. Since the traffic here is less than most other areas in the capital, drivers use this place to speed up and drive recklessly to make up for the time lost in traffic in other areas.

Motorcycle stunts and motorcycle racing were identified by 10% of the respondents as another traffic issue here. The motorcyclists performing stunts and racing are mostly young and have little consideration for safety of others and also of their own. They do all this disregarding through traffic movement.

Some of the other traffic issues that were identified were pedestrians walking on the road rather than the sidewalk, illegal parking on the road and bicycle stunts.

The Hatirjheel Project is undoubtedly one of the most prestigious, glamorous and attractive projects of recent times. It is also a symbol of modern architecture. It not only improved the access and mobility of the developments in the nearby area but also provided a faster alternative for many other routes. In addition, it gave the residents of the capital a new place to chill and relax with their family and friends.

However, the place may lose its attractiveness if the road safety situation in the area does not improve. The authorities may consider taking necessary measures such as enforcing traffic rules to address the traffic issues that have been identified by road users at Hatirjheel -- especially movement in the wrong direction, movement of rickshaws and reckless driving.



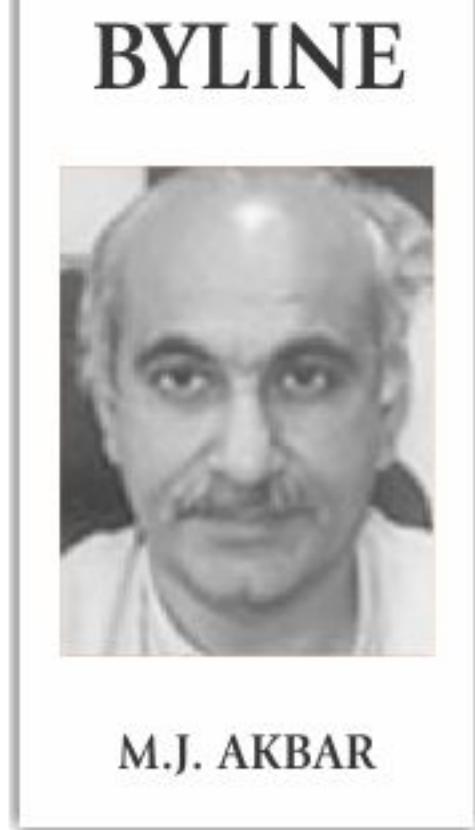
recently, studies have been carried out on the public's views about the January 5 election for the 10th Jatiya Sangsad and its social and political consequences. As expected, the majority of the respondents' opinion about these issues has more or less been in the negative.

The opinion survey by US-based International Republican Institute (IRI) has, for example, found that 62% of the respondents dismissed the election since all the major parties did not participate in it, while 68% of them thought that political instability was a major problem facing the nation.

Similarly, in another study carried out by the Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC), it was revealed that among the different institutions of the government, the public held politicians in the lowest esteem followed by the police.

In fact, the results of the two above mentioned studies, or of similar ones, conducted over the last few years on the public's view of politics and performance of the different branches of the administration hardly ever come up with anything revealing. There is no reason for it to be otherwise when corruption is systemic, when politics is run by the same old breed of leaders whose sole mission is to consolidate their clannish grip on the state and all its resources by flagrant abuse of power, where devilry, chicanery and blind partisan considerations get the better of principles and morality. Is it any wonder that we don't get anything new, but only the obvious, from the studies?

So, one could perhaps also do without conducting the opinion polls to know the real picture of the country, especially the state of its politics and everything that flows from it. For, by keeping all the conditions that ail society, politics and the economy unchanged, we cannot hope to get any qualitatively different results from these experiments, which only look into the symptoms and not the causes of the disease. In consequence, what we get from these studies is only yet larger figures for the identical variables like the magnitude of corruption in administration and society, instances of power abuse, number of people murdered in police custody or the number of enforced disappearances or casualties from banduk juddhas (shootouts), or the number of children and women molested, and so on and so forth.



kitchen that even the indomitable Sheila Dikshit got badly singing. But Ms Dikshit took fifteen years to get burnt. Kejriwal's skin began to peel in just forty-nine days.

A kitchen also needs rules. India's political diet is controlled by specifications laid down in the Constitution. Not everyone likes those provisions, some of which can be opaque, and others disputatious. But as long as they are there, we have to live by them. There is latitude. You can always amend statutes, but there again you have to go by process. You cannot abandon the law simply because it does not fit the schedule of your ambitions.

Some superstar chefs demand the privilege of eccentricity, and people grant it as a tribute to their art. But theatrics cannot substitute for a meal, either. Chaos is not art. It may even be described as an absence of art.

The *Indian Express* headline on Kejriwal's resignation said it all: the first act of his drama was over, and the curtain had risen on Act 2. Generally, by the second act, the audience knows whether they are watching a comedy or tragedy, but this drama will require another denouement before we know.

Kejriwal said recently that he had no desire to contest the coming general elections. For many customers, this was an offering that could only be digested with a pinch of salt. It is clear now that he wanted temporary power in Delhi only as a launching platform for space in the national arena. Delhi is simply too small for any gargantuan dream.

The Lokpal Bill metamorphosed from a cause into an excuse. Moreover, this resignation drama had to be conducted quickly, for within another fortnight the schedule for elections will be announced.

One of Kejriwal's perpetual dilemmas is that he needs to be star on the stage and agitating audience at the same

It's time to act

Small wonder that, through the PPRC's findings, we see that between 2001 and 2010, the number of murders increased by 2.5%, while the figure for rape has shown a slight increase. But the same study also shows an alarming rise in the incidence of child repression, which has actually increased more than 400% within a decade. But again, we have got no insight into the reason for this phenomenal rise in child repression, or what has gone wrong in the social fabric that has been making children so dangerously insecure. Are these related to inheritance of property, or a reflection of increasing violence in the families where the weakest, the children, are at the receiving end? Or has there been an increase in child trafficking? The study does not provide any answer to these questions.

To say that the January 5 general election was not an election at all in the real sense of the term, whatever argument one may place to justify its overriding necessity, is to state the obvious. But the results of the public opinion on other election-related issues, such as the support or otherwise in favour of caretaker arrangement as election-time government, or the respondents' support for either of the two major parties as their favourites in the election, etc., do provide us with answers that hardly look coherent. The reason is that while each of those questions has some relevance to the election, taken in isolation, they have own deeper social roots. Which is why, while the respondents overwhelmingly support (77 %) the opposition BNP's demand for caretaker government (CTG), 52 % of them did not support BNP's decision to boycott the polls. How do we accommodate these two apparently conflicting results? In fact, the respondents' support for CTG has not automatically translated into their support for BNP, or its decision to boycott polls. To them these are separate issues, which is why this disconnect between the two responses. It's not surprising that the study results at times may appear to some extent confusing to the general public.

We have already had a surfeit of these studies. Many of the files are gathering dust. If the main objective of those studies was to change the behaviour of the government or the politicians, they have hardly served the purpose. But, if those were to make the public aware of the issues, then that, too, has hardly been necessary, since the public are already alive to those from their day-to-day experience.

These study results are basically interpretative in character. They only restate what is already there. The ruling political elite and the state bureaucracy are not ashamed of their act in the face of these exposés. To effect a change, the civil society groups need also to go beyond just interpreting things. It is time they acted.

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Ms Dikshit took 15 years to get singed, Kejriwal just 49 days

ARVIND Kejriwal could not stand the heat so he got out of the kitchen. As a means of self-preservation, this is reasonable. But what is feasible for a customer does not necessarily hold good for the chef. When you have acquired, through your own relentless efforts, the responsibility of preparing the meal, heat sounds like an alibi to a hungry voter.

Every kitchen is hot. Food needs fire. The person who should understand this best is Kejriwal. He turned the heat up so sharply in the Congress

time. This dual compulsion of simultaneous roles is creating an aura of schizophrenia around his persona as well as his politics. The mantle of power does not combine easily with a martyr's robes.

Kejriwal succeeded in Delhi because he could convince the voter that it was possible for his incipient Aam Aadmi Party to come to power on its own. The Delhi canvas is small. It represents just seven seats in the Lok Sabha. It will be quite another matter convincing the nation's electorate that he can get 272 seats. Even he cannot believe this.

He can, therefore, only position himself in a general election campaign as a spoiler whose only responsibility in Parliament will be to keep the others honest. As a starting position this has its merits.

But this is not the issue on which the fate of this general election will be determined. The voter wants government, not confusion, after five years of meandering non-performance. This is not going to be a good year for small parties, particularly those who are striking out on their own. Nor has Kejriwal's stint as Chief Minister done him any good in the governance stakes. A few voters might want a Prime Minister who distributes largesse with political cynicism but sneers at everyone else in the business, and tilts continuously at the Constitution if it has the temerity to disagree with his holier-than-thou pronouncements.

This is a year when the country is wrapped in an economic crisis. The most important statistic is not in advertisements issued by UPA through DAVP on shiny hoardings [all paid by your money, incidentally, since your taxes will pick up the bill]. It is a fact which crept into the front page on one recent morning, and disappeared: that jobs had grown by only 2% over the last ten years.

This is what an economic crisis means for the young.

These are the problems thirsting for a solution. Corruption of course is an issue, and an extremely important one; but many states have Chief Ministers who cannot be accused of corruption. Voters want a Union government which can heal the economy as well. It is probably too late for Kejriwal to persuade voters that he has a route map towards more food on the table.

If you think the kitchen of a small state like Delhi was hot, check the temperature of the sauna called a national government. It makes you sweat without pause. History is full of heavyweights who strode into national office and walked sheepishly out as lightweights.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Varsity admin, not BCL, should control student dorms

The expulsion of 97 first year students from Dhaka University's Salimullah Hall by Bangladesh Chhatra League is a perfect example of politicisation of educational institutions.

Many of these students have left home to pursue education and better themselves. Now with nowhere to live in Dhaka, they will probably lose out on education. Universities should expose young people to a variety of ideas to help them mature into independent, critical thinkers. Here differing opinions are being removed which creates people reliant on others for their opinions and thoughts. I was most surprised with the statements from university administrators. They are supportive of the current arrangement and have no issue with students having their education disrupted based on an irrelevant factor like political affiliation.

Student political groups running dorms and deciding who gets accommodation is unbelievable. The universities need to take control of their own residences to eliminate these abuses and fulfil their educational mandates.

Neil Taylor
On e-mail

Stop coaching business

In recent years, coaching business has spread all over the country -- from the urban to the rural areas. The number of coaching centres is more than the number of educational institutions. The schools are facing shortage of teachers, let alone well qualified ones. This forces the students to go to coaching centres or private classes arranged by school teachers. So the expenses of education have become too high for the guardians to bear. The government should take fresh steps to stop coaching business and ensure better teaching at schools.

MA Jabbar
Student of BBA

Comments on post editorial, "The caravan must move on," published on February 12, 2014

Nds

It means, to keep the caravan going undisturbed, people need to stop giving vent to their feelings. What an extraordinary caravan of democracy!

Seraj Islam

The US Assistant Secretary Nisha Desai pretty much said what was discussed at The Dhaka Forum seminar as if she was one of the participants at the event in the Senate briefing today!

A freedom fighter

These so-called intellectuals were never there when the country needed them. These snowbirds are now lecturing the nation. There was no valid reason for the BNP's not participating in the election. The party is now realising it and majority of the people also think that it was a wrong decision.

Akm Bari

Beautifully written, Mr. Ahsan. In my opinion, democracy would have been in trouble if Sheikh Hasina had caved in to the foreign pressure. Democracy would have been dead if the 'Military,' the master of bureaucrats, had taken over the government like the dictators Zia and Ershad did.

Democracy in Bangladesh is well and healthy. Therefore, the foreign ambassadors must stop meddling in the internal affairs of Bangladesh. If any ambassador does interfere, the government of Bangladesh should declare him or her persona non grata.

Plaintruth

I am not affiliated to any party, I am an ordinary man and I say that January 5 election was a farce. TDS editor Mahfuz Anam says so; millions of Bangladeshis say so. How, Mr Ahsan, did you find any sense in this election? Most importantly, you missed the essential rule of democracy. In a democracy people need to arrive at a consensus through an election participated by all, without which democracy is meaningless and can't function.

"Beijing, help build" (February 14, 2014)

Shahin Huq

That means India must share some of its dividends with China. An unpatriotic government will be the sweetheart of foreign powers, but a foe of local people.

"Concern mounts as govt silent" (February 13, 2014)

Aasfisarwar

The government is not silent, they simply denied that any extrajudicial killings happened and now it's your turn to start an investigation and write a "Sorry Hasina" episode.

Mortuza Huq

Civil society must take this matter seriously as something like this is not acceptable in a civilised