

Treat graft cases seriously

No one should be above reproach

WE wholeheartedly welcome the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) probe into the wealth statements submitted and income tax statements declared by seven current and former lawmakers of the ruling party. This paper has in the recent past raised the question as to why the graft body was not undertaking serious investigation into the wealth statement affidavits submitted by aspirant members of parliament prior to the last national parliamentary elections. While ACC has begun looking into the activities of some of these seven individuals in an attempt to piece together how they amassed such wealth and whether these monies and assets were earned through legal means, we are equally perplexed at the "go slow" policy with others.

The question begs to be asked as to why the former state minister for housing and public works is let off from quizzing on the grounds of being "sick". Precisely what drove the ACC into giving preferential treatment to this former minister with regards to his being present to answer questions at the anti-graft watchdog body's offices on February 20? We will certainly keep a watch on how the case is treated. However, we would like to see this whole exercise to be a rigorous effort on the part of the ACC. The watch dog body's activities are certainly under the radar and its credibility will be on the line on the way it treats these test cases. Any attempt to deviate from unearthing graft will do little to uplift the government's image in the public eye.

Healthcare for the poor

Shamefully a low priority area

IN addition to a number of impoverishing factors, excessive health costs are making around 6.4 million, or four percent, of the population poorer every year. The supreme irony is that to cater to a pressing basic need like medicare, which should be the obligation of the state to provide, the poor have to foot the bill for it.

This revelation made by an ICDDR,B study makes one sit up and take note of the highly skewed pattern of healthcare dispensation in the country. Clearly, health investment does not go where it is most needed.

In a country where out-of-pocket health expenditure is 64 percent with the rest coming from government and other sources, how much the poor are placed at a disadvantage can be easily imagined!

Interestingly though, our health infrastructure is about the best in the region. But most health complexes are chronically deficient in services as the equipment and appliances rust away without doctors and nurses at their posts. The apathy of doctors towards any so-called compulsory rural stints in no time translates into absenteeism or at best irregular presence. In some extreme cases one might have seen news photos of cattle grazing in the premises and stray dogs sniffing away at littered objects.

Strategies backed by political will and financing will have to be implemented for an optimal use of the health complexes, which hold the key for domiciliary medicare. That way, healthcare can be cost-efficient and affordable.

World's largest weapon of mass destruction

ABDUL MATIN

THE Bush administration of the United States of America invaded Saddam Hussein's Iraq looking for weapons of mass destruction, but didn't find any after winning the war. Finally the US Secretary of State John Kerry found it in climate change. Very recently, he issued a clarion call for nations "to do more to combat climate change," calling it "the world's largest weapon of mass destruction." He warned that the low-lying Asian nations and their rich ecosystems were particularly at risk from rising sea levels.

The US alone produces 5,461 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, amounting to 18% of the global emission. In terms of total emission, it is second only to China, which producing 8,287 million tonnes (26% of the total), whereas 100 least developing countries produce less than 5% of the global emissions. Bangladesh, by the way, produces only 46.5 million tones, which is 0.16 % of the global emission.

The US signed the Kyoto Protocol that binds industrialised countries to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG) but did not ratify it. As such, it is under no legal obligation to reduce emission of GHG. A change of heart in the US policy was expected after the re-election of Barack Obama. He declared in his inaugural address: "We want our children to live in an America that isn't threatened by the destructive power of a warming planet."

The Kyoto Protocol "recognises that developed countries are principally responsible for the current high levels of GHG emissions in the atmosphere as a result of more than 150 years of industrial activity, and places a heavier burden on developed nations under the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities.'" The developed countries must, therefore, thank themselves for creating "the world's largest weapon of mass destruction."

Unfortunately, the developed countries now want all the countries, including the least developed ones, to equally share responsibilities in reducing the emission of GHG. The developed countries must realise that even though the low-lying Asian countries are at the greatest risk from rising sea levels, they too are susceptible to climate variations like severe cyclones, floods and snowstorms frequenting the western countries including the US.

When it comes to climate change, all nations are not equal. Some are obviously more equal than others since the present level of GHG in the atmosphere has been reached mainly because of "more than 150 years of industrial activity" in which the developing countries did not participate. So, it is time for the developed countries "to do more to combat climate change" than the developing countries.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

The extrajudicial blight



ALLEGED extrajudicial killings are once again attracting adverse media attention. Bar council leaders are demanding immediate investigation of such killings by the apex judiciary and have threatened to place the issue on international platform if the government does not act on its recommendation. One needs to know why this recurrent spectre of extrajudicial killing continues to haunt us in a democratic polity.

Upon closer scrutiny one would find that the extrajudicial killings are indicative of the uncontrollable state of crime and the helplessness of the regulatory authority in this regard. Under such circumstances, it would not be improper to say that the failure to lawfully conduct the affairs of public order necessitated those extrajudicial killings. Any farsighted consideration will, however, convince us that such extrajudicial killings could not be an effective and realistic method of crime control. If we fail to protect the legal rights of the accused we will not be able to ensure the rights of the innocent members of the public.

It is not for the ordinary members of the public to take a look at such extra-legal killings because they get immediate relief from the depredations of the local bully or the entrenched tormentor. However, a civilised government cannot be a prisoner of such damaging retrograde thoughts. A very significant aspect, which demands serious attention, is that the so-called terrorists killed in the encounter were in fact politically patronised and blessed. As a result, there is no guarantee that such killings will prove positive, as was implied by the then responsible establishment personalities.

"Operation Clean Heart" in 2002 also resulted in extra-legal killings of identified terrorists and criminals. Law and order or the crime situation did not register much of a change for the better. In fact, extrajudicial killings have not succeeded in controlling crime anywhere in any country. Crime and terrorism do not cross the bearable limit on their own. There are always cogent and credible factors behind such abnormalities. One needs to probe into those with the concern of a protector. Extrajudicial killings cannot be a sensible alternative proposition.

As a civilised nation, if we expect our enforcement institutions including the police to regularly brush up their professional skills, we cannot create a scenario wherein one would be willing to believe that those perpetrators of crime who cannot be brought under the law have to be dealt with beyond the law.

In such an assumption lies the suicidal admission that the criminal justice administration of a democratic polity has failed to act, and the state has forsaken one of its primary functions. Since no right-thinking Bangladeshi would reconcile to a scenario that smacks of a failed government, they have a duty to find out why some organs of the state have to resort to apparent vigilante action. The nation needs to know if law-enforcement personnel are deliberately deviating from the statutory directives in anti-crime operations.

Eulogising the so-called "encounter actions" created an environment wherein result-oriented investigating officers were increasingly getting inclined to resort to short-cut methods to please the boss or the political masters. The worrisome part is the threat to put an alleged criminal or an ordinary suspect under the so-called "encounter" scenario in order to gratify ulterior motives. Since most crossfire deaths were not seriously pursued for establish-

ing the suspected culpability, the culprits in the enforcement and investigative apparatus discovered a macabre win-win situation in such patently illegal acts.

Accountability and fear receded into the background and investigation by the book became a pathetically low priority. Professionally speaking, this was an instance of heightened jeopardy because, in Bangladesh, the crime fighting machinery already stood accused of not cultivating a scientific modus-operandi and quite often relapsed into the untenable third-degree methods.

Do we want sustained laborious action under the law to strengthen our democratic foundation, or do we need rash, desperate action without the cover of law? Extrajudicial killings, undoubtedly, do not fit in with the first proposition. We need to be absolutely clear about that.

The ultimate punishment in the alleged "encounter," about whose credibility many are not convinced, appears as summary response from desperate executives of law enforcement. The legality of actions leading to such extreme action apart, any responsible citizen would like to know if, in our often over-zealous anti-crime operations, we were just treating the symptoms without venturing to study and assess the objective conditions promoting criminality. We do not need sociologists and criminologists to tell us that present-day crime is a complex social phenomenon caused by a multiplicity of factors, and determining culpability is an extremely mind-exacting task.

Everyday experience tells us that quite often the fun-seeking delinquent of yesteryears turns into an uncontrollable don of the day due to the patronage of powerful quarters and the unexplained inaction of the enforcement outfit. Therefore, when deaths occur in "encounter" some myopic elements may be satisfied, but a civilised society which wishes to live by the canons of law cannot but be concerned.

The fact that successive governments have failed to put an effective brake on such unlawful activities in the sensitive sectors raises disturbing doubts about the sworn commitments to control crime and corruption. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for the worried public to believe that the fearsome deaths in "encounter" should be the preferred alternative. Spectacular but dangerous palliatives cannot understandably be substitutes for painful sustained action.

What we need is adequate provision of witness protection and victim support in the criminal justice administration. To make those effective we need large injection of governmental funds. Any further delay will only swell the ranks of summary-justice seekers and the admirers of vigilante action. The decapitating adversity of the victims of crime demand mainstream support of the system.

We now have misguided citizens and law enforcers in our midst who think that if a criminal is known, whatever the process of such identification, there is not much harm in doing him away for the good of the society. Little do they realise that their logic is queer because the worst criminal on earth can also justify the blackest crime on the pretext of good motive.

It needs to be impressed once again that the practice of breaking the law in the name of law enforcement is totally unacceptable and intolerable and has no place in a democratic society governed by the rule of law. It is objectionable because it is arbitrary as a process and random in its effects.

Law enforcement is a field of activity in which interaction between the world of the powerful and the world of the powerless is manifested. Hence, we have to ensure that law enforcement emphasises principles of purpose and principles of values. We must come out of the degrading thought that those who cannot be taken care of within the ambit of law have to be dealt with beyond the law.

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The writer is a columnist of *The Daily Star*.

Upazila elections: The aftermath

ENAM AHMED CHAUDHURY

THE direct involvement of the policemen on duty in snatching ballot boxes and filling them with looted ballot papers was seen on TV. Newspaper pictures showed election officers sealing ballot papers in favour of, obviously, an AL backed candidate. These scenes were incredible.

In some places, AL men snatched away ballot boxes, ballot papers and seals. Khadija Khatun, assistant polling officer of a polling centre at Sonatola, Bogra said that the election officers had been locked up in a room by stick-wielding ruling party men. The photograph came out in a newspaper. In some cases, polling materials were vandalised; and BNP-backed candidates, AL rebels and independent candidates pulled out of the race in seven upazilas. The number is significant. The CEC obviously failed to take adequate action. The local units of BNP called *hartal* in 8 upazilas in protest against vote rigging, violent conduct of AL supporters and the EC's apathy.

However, in spite of all these cases of violation and violence, the BNP emerged as the victor, winning chairmanship of 44 upazilas out of 97. The AL secured 34, Jamaat 13, Jatiya party 1 and others the rest. In the race for vice-chairmanship, BNP got 32, AL 24 and Jamaat a close 23. Even among the victorious women vice-chairman, 10 were from Jamaat. The worst performance was by the Jatiya party, which bagged only one chairmanship and one woman vice-chairmanship.

The AL did a little better in Barisal and Sylhet divisions, and BNP led in the others. Jamaat did well even in JP stronghold. In Golapganj upazila of Sylhet, which is an important upazila and is in the constituency of Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid (and also of this writer), a little known Jamaat candidate fighting against both AL and BNP won convincingly. He defeated the sitting AL chairman whose reputation was rather good. The third and the fourth positions went to two BNP rebel candidates and the fifth position was secured by the official nominee of BNP.

The following points need to be noted in this regard:

(1) The government and the EC should give a better account of themselves in the coming polls, and should be more careful in maintaining election environment, rules and code of conduct. No violation of election rules should be tolerated and government employees, including the police and the election officials, should be strictly warned against taking partisan role;

(2) BNP has emerged as the main political party and the JP has lost all its political appeal. It is likely to become extinct in the future;

(3) Jamaat has proved itself to be a force to reckon with. It appears that the recent governmental actions against the party has contributed to the rise of its popularity. Instead of painting every Islamic organisation with a broad brush as a terrorist group, the government should be more careful and discerning. Harping on the old and stale theme that the JI is synonymous with al-Qaeda and nothing short



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Govt. ploy to appease US?

Shaykh Ayman al Zawahiri was shown in a still photo while someone from the background read out a message on Bangladesh through an audio stream recently. Many government high-ups are giving their reactions to this. To me, the incident seemed like something backed by the government. The present Awami League government is trying to put Jamaat-e-Islami, Hefazat-e-Islam and BNP on one string while appeasing the US administration on the other.

Good play, but to me it seems whatever the government is doing is going against itself. So, better luck next time. People are now more advanced and intelligent.

Iqbal Ali Khan
ON, Canada

Irrational house rent hike

House rent in Dhaka increases every year, but our salary doesn't increase. Common people are suffering a lot due to this irrational hike in house rent. I request the government to formulate a strict law about house rent, implement the law and save us the commoners.

Sumon Corraya
Nodda, Dhaka

Suicidal quarrels on foreign soil

Recently two Bangladeshi workers died in the UAE. I was utterly surprised when I knew the reason behind their deaths: a pair of shoes! How could a group of people quarrel over such a trivial matter in such a devastating way, resulting in two deaths and three severe injuries! This incident will tarnish the image of Bangladeshis all over the Middle East. Moreover, it is due to such incidents of murder, theft and fight over petty matters that there has been a sharp decline in the recruitment of Bangladeshi labourers in Arab countries in the recent past. I am afraid this will make things worse for our labour sector. It might put a damper on the expectations of many poor Bangladeshis who dream to support their families by earning big from abroad.

Rof Ullah
One-e-mail

They learnt nothing from the past

During the second T20 match played against Sri Lanka, I believe the Tigers lost the match purely due to poor decision making. If dew was such a big factor, why didn't they bowl first? If Mashrafe is Bangladesh's best express bowler, then why didn't he take it upon himself to bowl the last over? A good bowler is one who is capable of bowling in any given over. I believe Farhad Reza did not have the experience or pace to bowl the last over. Furthermore, why weren't there any close-in fielders to prevent the boundary when the last ball was bowled? I believe our captains need training on how to make good and correct decisions on the field.

As far as our batting is concerned, I believe they have learned nothing from previous games and past mistakes.

Aminur Rahim
New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Pakistani website first uploaded it," published on February 19, 2014

Turja

Jamaat-Shibir, one way or another, is linked with other terrorist groups across the world. This is well proven through the PTT's threat to BD consulate in Pakistan just after Quader Mollah's execution. The government should strictly handle the matter.

Aasfisarwar

A true story has one version! Something fishy is going on here!

OpeeMonir

Maybe the whole thing is a hoax and the government has possibly planned it to divert people's attention from other issues.

"A response to 'The caravan must move on'" (February 18, 2014)

As-I-See-It

Thank you, Mr. Karim, for your bold write-up. I salute you for your courage and calling a spade a spade without fear or favour.

Sam

I am surprised to see this published; the author makes very compelling points and unveils the intellectual dishonesty of the original article under review. Kudos to The Daily Star for its relative openness in publishing the piece.

Hospital manager performs surgery! (February 19, 2014)

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

Negligence at its worst! It just shows the condition of healthcare system in the rural areas. This man deserves exemplary punishment.