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FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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Patients held hostage at DMCH

Hospital is no place for clannish brawls

TUESDAY'S violence at the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) over a petty conflict centered around use of a hospital lift has not only caused immense suffering to outdoor patients who were cruelly denied service but also left the citizens shell-shocked. One fails to understand why a mere tiff between some interns and a patient's attendants should trigger a full-scale clannish warfare between doctors and DU students resulting in closure of the hospital for about five hours. Why must a hospital be used as a place for such turf wars?

The DMCH and DU authorities, Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) leaders and police together have reportedly decided to probe the incident so that those involved in the attack on the hospital could be found out and held to account. The DU authority, too, has formed a body to look into the university students' involvement in the incident. Routine steps as these are, one wonders how substantive their outcome would be. It is also important to find out those who denied treatment to critical patients for hours even at the emergency and casualty departments. One cannot be oblivious of the fact that a public hospital like DMCH is dedicated to providing treatment to people who cannot afford the costs of a private hospital. No one has the right to stop its service even for a minute just to settle a score with someone else.

We hope authorities would go to the heart of the matter so that any further repetition of such untoward incident can be averted.

Overflowing prisons

Exacting a heavy cost

IT has been reported that prisons in Bangladesh are now having prisoners double their capacity. Based on the latest prison directorate's estimate, up until March 31 the prison population of the country has been estimated at 65,662 (male 63,451 and female 2,211) against the capacity of 34,167. According to IG, Prisons it is happening because most of them re-engage in criminal activities after they have been released, and consequently find themselves back in jail again. Clearly their rehabilitation needs were overlooked.

Alarming, the number of under trial prisoners is almost double the number of convicts. Moreover, the facts of their languishing many years to see their trials end and some of their pre-trial time in prison exceeding the period of eventual sentence will have to be addressed specifically. Besides the issue of their proper rehabilitation, their frightening numbers also cause concern about jail administration, which needs reform.

A recently held workshop, jointly organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs and a German organisation focused on the need for developing skills of prisoners, so that after their release they can make a living. The recommendations merit implementation with a timeline to go with it. Just because one has landed himself in a jail does not mean he will be denied humane treatment.

'Life always offers you a second chance. It's called tomorrow'

FARRUKH AHMED ALINDO

LIFE is nothing but a bizarre game. It is complex and full of surprises. It will treat you according to the way you play this game. For every man is the architect of his own future. If you can solve the puzzle and win this game your life is full of ecstasy. But what if you lose? It will be a fiasco. Of course you will be the only sufferer of this dreadful pain. Your life will be at sixes and sevens. Everything will deteriorate, each hour will turn into months, each minute will turn into hours, and each second will turn into minutes. All starts to go like a speeding train and then you are lost. Lost in a world where everything is unknown. Your mind gets rusty and at the end it starts flickering, your heart starts beating like a steam hammer and then it shatters into millions of pieces; each and every moment you gasp your body fades, and finally it frees the soul. Suddenly, all ends up in smoke. What a doom.

Finish! Is it? Is this the end?

Definitely not, it certainly cannot be the end of one's life, because life is not a child's play. This is because every cloud has a silver lining. We just cannot waste our life like this, running out of opportunities. Every person in this world has a talent, it's just that some are revealed and some are not. Your trust and self-believe is concealed inside you, bring it to light. Never despair, but always go with the flow and keep trying. Life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance you must keep moving. It is also like a camera ... focus on what's more important, capture the good times, develop from the negatives, and if things don't work out, take another shot. Help yourself, decide your own path and reach the destination. This will be the end of your journey, the journey of your life. Gardens are not made by sitting in the shade, he who wills the end wills the means. Always remember, if life deals you lemons, make lemonade. For sure, divine success will shine upon you and you will come off with flying colours in this bizarre game of life. Winning in this game is a must. In the end, it's not going to matter how many breaths you took, but how many moments took your breath away.

The writer is a teacher.

Rab under the cosh

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)

THE image of the elite force has come under severe battering, more so after the alleged involvement of one of its units in the Narayanganj killings. Regrettably, the very force that is supposed to provide security to the people has become the very cause of people's insecurity.

One could argue that it would be unfair to draw a broad brush of guilt on the entire force and vilify it because of the misdeeds of only a few of its members. While that may be so with any other element of the government, a special force such as Rab stands the risk of being besmirched for committing allegedly the very crimes it is supposed to keep people safe from.

It is a pity that a force which, we would like to believe, was established with honest intentions, and whose appearance on the streets in its seminal stages was welcomed with a sigh of relief by the common man who had had enough of petty crimes like mugging and the local mafias indulging in extortion and rent seeking, have come to be looked upon with trepidation.

Rab has some commendable achievements in the ten years of its existence. If the international community commends the government for effectively tackling the religious terrorists in the country the credit must largely go to Rab for successfully breaking the backbone of these groups. But, regrettably, there is the other side of the picture too which has completely tarnished the image of the force.

A very painful by-product of Rab's activity has been the forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. And many of its actions related to crime busting have been made controversial by its disregard for legal procedures. No civilised society can tolerate a situation where a law enforcing agency becomes the judge, jury and executioner. This view is no longer confined to the realm of people's perception but is a fact.

One doubts whether such illegal activities could have been carried out without the acquiescence of the power that be. And this despicable practice had started with its inception and has continued, perhaps with even greater intensity. The AL, which while in opposition had been very critical of Rab's activities, and had committed before the 2008 elections to ensure a stop to extrajudicial killing, has not delivered on its commitment.

While one cannot attribute all the disappearances and killings to the work of Rab, for the many high profile disappearances and encounter killings the finger has always been pointed towards it. But it had done nothing to disprove the allegations by arresting the culprits or unearthing the facts of any of those cases. This has only reinforced the general view that the force has been complicit in many of these crimes.

One was given to understand at the beginning that Rab would be a special force with the capability to act as a rapid reaction group in anti-terror operations or a hostage situation. On that count one did not find anything wrong with inducting officers from the military to partially man the force. As it turned out, Rab has been used as a police force but with more resources

than the police. Such a situation was bound to create a condition where Rab would step into the territory of the police without very well defined TOR. And it is no wonder that one hears from time to time of tussle between the police and Rab. The force has been invested with unlimited powers that have caused it to become larger than itself. For such a force, unlimited powers with no accountability can be a dangerous mix. Narayanganj has demonstrated the severity of it.

What deflected Rab from its primary task of keeping law and order is its use against the political opponents. Not only that, given the allegations made by the father-in-law of Nurul Islam, it seems that some of them also acted as hired goons of the criminals and influential people belonging to the ruling party.

While much of the credit goes to the military officers for the achievements of the elite force, the secondment of military officers to the force has not been without its unfortunate but inevitable consequences. The worst sufferer has been the army, which is represented in proportionately greater numbers than the other two services. The nature of the job involves chasing criminals, dealing with crimes and other vices, something a soldier is neither expected, nor trained, to do. The

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predictable has happened. And one fears that even many of those officers with a strong moral fibre, and they are the majority, that have not become involved in crimes and illegal activities, will hardly be fit for a long time for proper soldiering.

When the Human Rights Watch termed the force as the "government's death squad" it would have done the government a good deal of good had it taken those comments seriously and inquired into why such a perception existed in the minds of the rights groups. What is it that prevented the government from going into the allegations brought against the force?

It cannot bring comfort to the government when there is call from international human rights watchdogs for disbanding the elite force for its alleged involvement in rights violation. Some sections of the civil society in the country have added their voice to it. And unless the employment of the force in restricted to its main task, crime-busting and anti-terrorism, unless it is de-linked from political influence, unless it is made accountable for transgression of law, one is afraid that the call to do away with it will gain a very strong rationale.

The writer is Editor, Op-ed and Defence & Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Demise of the Left

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

I was in Dhaka a few days ago. Interest in Bangladesh in our Lok Sabha elections is so ardent that it has to be seen and believed. People knew the minutest details about the polls like the palm of their hands. They watch India's television news channels which are banned in Pakistan.

People were, of course, indignant over Narendra Modi's remark that the Bangladeshis should pack up their luggage and leave before May 16, the day when the election results will be announced.

None wants Modi to be India's prime minister. His tirade against Muslims make the Bangladeshis believe that they are in for a rightist Hindu state as their neighbour in place of a secular democratic polity. More than that is their fear that Modi may spoil the proximity the two countries have enjoyed since New Delhi's assistance in their liberation struggle.

The trip to Dhaka also gave me an opportunity to step back and assess our elections. I see the induction of religion in politics. Modi and the BJP have played the Hindu card to polarise the multi-religious and multi-cultural country. The harm they have done may be irreparable. The dream of our forefathers that India after independence would be pluralistic in tone and tenor despite its partition on the basis of religion does not seem to be coming true. Modi has been successful in creating a cleavage between Hindus and Muslims, something which we had successfully thwarted since independence in August 1947.

I have no doubt that the poison injected in the body politics of the country would one day disappear. But in the meanwhile the nation would have to face an environment of mistrust and estrangement. Liberals, declining in numbers in both the communities, have a serious battle ahead of them. They have to work with more vigour to establish the supremacy of secularism.

Modi and the BJP could not have asked for a more propitious time. People want *parivartan* (change) and they have no other option to defeat the Congress which has failed them in every field, whether in economic development or governance. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is only a recent phenomenon, confined to urban areas in the north.

Therefore, the vote polled by Modi and the BJP would be a negative vote. The sterile 10-year rule by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has cost the Congress its election. Various scams which have come to light have harmed the party further.

Modi's irresponsible speeches have helped the Congress to retrieve some ground. But its stand, spelled out by Congress Vice-President Rahul Gandhi, has poured cold water on the possibility of an alternative with the regional parties. He has voiced strong opposition to the Congress leading the third front or supporting it.

The national Election Commission, no doubt independent, has been soft towards those who have violated the poll code. Modi for one has even challenged the EC to try him for the speeches he has been making. By any

yardstick they evoke hatred for Muslims. The Commission's reaction has been only legalistic even though it has the powers to disqualify him. This attitude of the Commission tells upon the independence of polls.

The real bad news about elections is the demise of leftist forces. They could have checked the fundamentalists and enhanced the chances of secular elements. In fact, that is the tragedy of political activity in the entire subcontinent.

During my college days in the forties it was said: if you are not a leftist by the age of 25, you should consult a doctor. This assumption got diluted as years went by. The rightists did not remain isolated. They worked hard and influenced the minds of the youth who are today dazzled by money and whatever promotes their career. Karl Marx is seldom read, much less discussed.

I am not surprised that the ideology of the Left did not figure in the poll campaigns. Even the avowed leftists did not talk of socialism or egalitarianism. They too have come to believe that in the environment of free economy and individual entrepreneurship, buttressed by the Manmohan Singh government during its 10-year regime, there is little room for the Left. The surprising part is the silence of even those committed Marxists.

Still the fact remains that the first general election in 1952 saw the Communists' victory in Kerala. Later, West Bengal and Tripura in the northeast returned the red governments. Today, the Left is confined only to Tripura. Their number in the Lok Sabha has been coming down steadily. Apparently, their hold has gone down drastically.

My reading is that the leftists in India were so dependent on Moscow that they felt orphaned when the citadel of communism, the Soviet Union, caved in. The ideology of the left received a heavy blow. The supporters in India were so disheartened that they practically withdrew from the fold, leaving the entire field to the capitalists.

In fact, the entire effort of the Communist Party of India (CPI) and that of the Marxists (CPI-M) is directed towards stopping the BJP from coming to power. Knowing their own limitations, they are hoping to constitute a federal front of sorts by bringing the non-Congress and non-BJP parties on the same platform.

This is not a bad idea because both the Congress and the BJP are so immersed in corruption and communalism that their defeat is in the interest of India. Maybe, that is the reason why Rahul Gandhi has assailed the formation of the third front. He is hoping that the non-BJP parties will realise that they have no option except to support the Congress in the formation of the government.

But defeating communal and corrupt forces is essential but no less important is the positive approach to push egalitarianism, the promise made during freedom struggle. At present, both communist parties are distant from the basic philosophy of equality. For some reasons, they have come to believe that secularism will ultimately lead to socialism.

How incorrect their assessment is can be seen from the call of chauvinism which the regional parties have articulated. And most of them are so close to the corporate sector that they have not spelled out the role of public sector in the country if and when they share power. The scenario, indeed, is dismal.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Find out and punish abductors, killers

All of a sudden the country is facing rising number of abductions and dreadful killings of commoners at the hands of unknown assailants. Kidnappings in broad daylight have become a routine affair. People are gripped with fear; guardians are worried about sending their children to educational institutions while close ones of office-goers are likewise tense. None is sure whether at day's end one would return home safely or not.

It is our earnest request to the prime minister to urgently find out the masterminds and take stern and effective measures to improve the situation before time runs out.

A worried citizen
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Combat food poison menace

This refers to the alarming news published in TDS on 28th April 2014. We can not let these unscrupulous people destroy our health this way. The government should form a squad comprising members from army, police, magistrates and chemists who will raid the wholesale and retail markets regularly and punish those who are at fault. Consumers should also be careful. It is time for the government and the consumers to be united in order to fight this menace.

Shafkat Rahman
BIAM Laboratory School
New Eskaton, Dhaka

Unregistered SIM cards

Many people of Bangladesh use mobile phones with unregistered SIM cards as they consider registering a trouble. Taking advantage of this situation, some unscrupulous people do illegal activities such as tease and extort people as they know they cannot be traced. Unregistered SIMs are available everywhere. It is solely the cell phone companies' responsibility to bring the subscribers under registration. If everyone has a registered SIM card, eve-teasing, threatening people, extortion using phone, etc. will stop. Recently, around 5000 SIM cards have been dumped in a pond of Joypurhat. It is believed that those SIMs were used for criminal purposes. The government should look into the matter seriously.

Lira
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Obvious result in belated raid," published on May 4, 2014

Shahin Huq

How can Sheikh Hasina evade the responsibility of so many abductions and murders?

Mortuza Huq

Correct. The PM is in charge of the home ministry.

Spiderman

She will say these people are patriots and they have been framed to stop the war crimes trial.

Ibrahim Zaman

When I was watching the news on TV, a question arose in my mind. If Nur Hossain was really involved in the killing, why would he keep the blood-stained microbus in his house for 6/7 days? A professional criminal will never preserve the evidence of his crime on his own premises.

Spiderman

Mr. Zaman, these criminals are above the law and they know that they are immune to punishment. Who will dare to challenge them? The nation lost Padma Bridge even when all the evidences were there. These criminals have blessings from the top bosses and hence they don't care about these small things like blood stains or even dead bodies in their house.

"India set to choke Gidari river" (April 30, 2014)

Deep Purple Blue

In our country, the prime minister must intervene to solve all problems. So, what is she doing to stop the Indian barrage that will prevent the flow of water from entering Bangladesh, a lower riparian? And what is the foreign ministry doing about it? Is the Bangladesh government absolutely helpless when it comes to India? We need a government that can stand up to India and put its foot down to say no when our national interest is compromised.

Mofi

Looks like this is an endless suffering! How long will we have to endure this injustice?

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

If India is being a bad, uncooperative neighbour, then the Bangladesh government is also equally to blame as they are simply sitting idly and doing nothing.

Hardreality

Bilateral relationship should be based on mutual interests. However, because of lack of strong diplomacy from our part, India is getting what it needs and at the same time, depriving us of our fair legitimate right to water and Bangladesh is losing on every front. India will not give us anything if we do not take a strong stance. Then why is our government so submissive to India?