

HC move welcome

Authorities should take heed

THE High Court rule issued on the relevant authorities in connection with some Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) interns' refusal to treat an ailing photojournalist has come as a piece of welcome news. It is also heartening to note that the HC has taken suo moto cognizance of a report in The Daily Star on the issue.

What those interns of RMCH did amounts to punishing a journalist, simply because, previously, there was a face-off between RMCH interns and some journalists who were discharging their professional duties. This is unethical, unprofessional and being insensitive to the right of journalists to perform their duty on one level.

The RMCH doctors by their uncalculated behaviour towards a treatment-seeking journalist have failed to live up to their professional responsibility. It may be recalled that recently, the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) remained closed for hours as a sequel to a clash between some of its interns and the DU students. It seems holding patients hostage to their impulsive reactions has become a pattern. Due to the follies of some impetuous interns, the image of the entire medical profession is tainted, which is very unfortunate.

So, it is in the greater interest of preventing medical colleges from becoming enclaves of clannish interests and restoring sanctity in the medical profession that repetition of such incidents has to be stopped.

Hopefully, the process set in motion by the HC would yield positive results in terms of preventing any disservice to public interest. Patients should be treated on a priority basis regardless of their social or professional identity.

Allocation to local government

A shot in the arm needed

WHILST budgetary allocations have been raised every year for different ministries, regardless of their capacity for utilisation, those for the entire local government system have registered a decline. It may surprise one but that is how it has been with the development budget for union, upazila and zila parishads, municipalities and city corporations. In fiscal 2012-13 it totalled Tk 1,927 crore but in 2013-14 it dropped to Tk 1,712 crore only. Meagre that it is, according to an authentic source, even from that amount 10-20 percent is peeled off under different pretexts by the LGRD ministry.

Measly-minded though it may appear, it very much fits in with the general feature of sidelining of the entire local government structure. Although elected local tier representatives are better acquainted with development needs of their respective areas, yet when it comes to decision making on development programmes the MPs take over.

In this context, an exchange of views meet organised by the Governance Advocacy Forum on Tuesday morning in the city stressed the need for significantly raising allocations in the new budget for the local government system. A local government expert recommended up to 20 percent of the land transfer tax realisation to be given to the local government. Along with a true devolution of authority on them, the local government bodies should be recipients of both locally generated taxes as well as grants from the government by way of financially empowering them.

The bottom line is; participatory and decision making roles of the local bodies will have to be recognised and adequately provided for.

Rewarding democracy

EDITORIAL: THE HINDU (INDIA)

ONE of the most encouraging aspects of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections has been the significantly high voter turnout in areas affected by Left-wing extremism. Bastar in Chhattisgarh, that remains severely affected by Maoist insurgency, saw a voter turnout of almost 60% as opposed to 47.33% in 2009. Here, as well as in other areas, the Maoists had called for a total boycott of elections. But in most areas, in spite of the violence perpetrated by the Maoist rebels, people have come out in large numbers to cast their vote. In Gadchiroli constituency in Maharashtra, that is a part of the Maoists' foremost guerrilla zone, the Dandakaranya Special Zone Committee, over 68% votes were cast as opposed to 65.21% in the 2009 elections. Munger and Jamui in Bihar also saw a 10% increase in voter turnout. The only affected area where the turnout was low is Orissa's Malkangiri that recorded a voting percentage of 48%. One reason attributed to the higher turnout is the enthusiasm of first-time voters who came out in large numbers. Also, in many Maoist-affected areas, people are tired of the long cycle of violence, and want things to change.

The voter turnout in Bastar has left the Maoists worried. After the elections in Bastar on April 10, they have held meetings at several places with Adivasis to understand what prompted this high turnout. Even in the formerly Maoist-hit areas in West Bengal, that went to the polls on May 7, the turnout has been exceptional. West Medinipur, Purulia and Bankura registered a turnout of 81.41, 78.75, 80.55% respectively till 5 p.m. In Jhargram, it was almost 88%. The challenge for the new government would be to focus on the development of the red corridor, especially when people there have expressed their faith in democracy. One major reason why the Maoists were able to entrench themselves in these regions was that the Indian state had completely forsaken its people. The void left by the state was just filled by Maoists. The onus is on whosoever forms the next government in New Delhi to change the equation. In many areas, there is sympathy among the Adivasis for Maoists. Security operations in these areas may have put Maoists on the back foot, but this can only be a temporary trend. In the absence of a real developmental intervention by the new government, there will be no ebb in violence in Bastar and other Maoist-affected areas. One of the biggest challenges before the new government will be to instill a sense of security among the people. That will only happen if the people have confidence in the government -- after which they will reject Maoism.

Crime and confidence

STRAIGHT LINE


 MUHAMMAD
NURUL HUDA

QUITE a number of sensational abductions followed by grisly murders near the capital city have shaken many. Although fearsome crimes of such type including gory murders have taken place in built up areas including the capital city in the preceding years, the most worrying part is now that the accusing finger for complicity is pointed at the very organisation that is supposed to protect the people from fear as also the actual occurrence of crime.

It is also disturbing that many well-meaning decent citizens

along with a sizable segment of the continually suffering common folks have begun to detest the unpalatable but stable relationship of a number of our politicians with the bullies and rogue elements of the society. Looking back, one would find that politics did enter into a situation in which hired thugs who perpetrated violence were assured of protection from criminal prosecution.

A decade back very few felt ashamed as politics acquired a pejorative connotation by the fact of its manifest association with conflict and violence. The civil society stood incapacitated by the stimulation of politics based on division and acrimony. In Bangladesh, unfortunately, we have witnessed violence that has been purposive. In our situation, we have seen political motivations ranging from local turf wars to more ugly and vulgar race for quick riches; from teaching a rival group a "lesson" to dangerously polarising communities into voting blocks.

Against the background of the ghastly incidents at Narayanganj and elsewhere, affecting all segments of our socio-economic existence, could one suspect if our concern for democracy amounts to merely a false consciousness or worse, is it a crude legitimisation of the so-called politically driven conflict? Should we look for the roots of our present predicament in the phenomena of social exclusion, economic marginalisation, contests for power and other contingent factors?

There is no denying that the modern state has to remain prepared to take responsibility for ensuring the safety and security of its citizens. In the modern democratic world police are required to do far more than simply maintain order. They need to maintain order peacefully, remaining answerable to the public for the manner and scope of their actions. The emphasis on crime prevention meaning broadly 'community safety' obliges police to work with local and community groups. Policing is a state run task, and is now overtly concerned with welfare of society.

The police has to remain a 24 hour emergency service, available when all other services are out of hours. The preventive role of police will grow rather than diminish. Since crime occurs at any hour of the day or night and in any place, police are required to be available 24 hours a day everywhere. A modern police service should attempt to fulfill all requirements made of it by the public and others; this includes functions demanded by members of the public in their requests for police attendance at all sorts of incidents.

In the above backdrop, let us recall some unsettling

incidents of the not-too-distant past. One may recall the tragic death of Dr. Milon in late November 1990 in Dhaka. This death was the result of the then government's letting loose of veteran criminals, at times from prison, by means of shady deals executed through so-called political operatives. Although this modus operandi did not succeed in quelling the political movement, it left a deep scar and doubt on the bonafides and propriety of accepted political protests of a constitutional democracy. The sad and bitter memory left behind was one of a government or authority that did not care a bit about legality and civility, and the anaesthetising conviction that organised violent counteraction with readiness to sacrifice life and property, was the only alternative to effect political change.

It does not take a discerning observer of the socio-political scene to be convinced that under circumstances as narrated before, it is quite difficult for the saner and more sensible elements of the young population to join movements for social change. Since nature abhors a vacuum, it is only practical that vacancies resulting from the unwillingness of the desired lot are automatically filled in by the ill-motivated desperados. The situation turns vicious and the training ground for constitutional politics witnesses detestable wheeling-dealing. Brawn takes precedence over brain at the formative years. No wonder, therefore, that our national level politics gets afflicted by this syndrome.

Criminal proceedings under the law against all the culpable individuals need to be initiated and completed in a fast track mode to instill public confidence in the vital state organ and sworn officials of the republic.

In present circumstances, however, we have to admit that the elite law enforcement outfit called Rab, despite grave malfeasances of some of its officials, has served the nation very well. While indulging in institution bashing we must not lose sight of the sterling achievements of Rab in terms of recovery of huge caches of firearms and ammunitions, illicit drugs and substantial busting of terror networks. The prime issue relates to policy goals of law enforcement and subsequent strategies and tactics of operation.

The government has already taken stern disciplinary action against suspected delinquent officials. Criminal proceedings under the law against all the culpable individuals need to be initiated and completed in a fast track mode to instill public confidence in the vital state organ and sworn officials of the republic. There is no virtue in lawless enforcement as the so-called spectacular results finally prove to be illusory and destructive. Elitism that operates within the dictates of law is not likely to breed indefensible arrogance. Law enforcement efficiency must mean the continuous enjoyment of public trust and confidence.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Hefajat's May 5 death claim questionable

SHAHRIAR KABIR

HEFAJAT-e-Islam, an organisation of teachers and students of madrasas emerged in the arena of politics in February 2013 with a 13 point charter of demand. Their objective is to establish a Taliban type government in Bangladesh. To draw attention to their 13-point demand Hefajat arranged a huge gathering with the support of Jamaat and BNP at Shapla Square, the financial district of the country.

Hefajat, Jamaat and BNP claimed that law enforcing agencies killed thousands of 'Alems' to disperse their rally on May 5 night in order to clear the siege laid by them at Shapla Square. By circulating politically motivated and exaggerated news the Hefajat-Jamaat-BNP trio sought to create a smokescreen to cover the violence, destruction and killing resorted to by Jamaat-Hefajat workers and gain sympathy at home and abroad. This move was also intended to malign Bangladesh's image at international level and collect funds from Middle East in the name of so-called martyrs and 'saving Islam.'

As the rally raised various questions including the actual number of casualties in people's mind 'Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee' formed a People's Commission under the leadership of Justice Syed Amirul Islam to find out what actually happened on May 5 evening, how many people were killed, how national security of the country was threatened by the rally, what is the real identity of Hefajat and what they really want.

After carrying out on-the-field investigations for five months and collecting relevant information and data from media reports and testimonies of eye witnesses, members of the victims' families, leaders of different Islamic organisations and human rights bodies, the Commission published a White Paper entitled "400 Days of Fundamentalist and Communal Violence of Hefajat-Jamaat" on November 8, 2013.

The White Paper has brought out facts along with evidence to depict the history of Hefajat, its complicity in militancy and so on. It also throws light on how more than five million Qawmi (private) madrasa students have been held captive by the leaders of militant organisations apart from showing how Qawmi madrasas function.

In order to achieve their goal of communalising politics, Jamaat-Hefajat utilised the media controlled by them to spread rumours, lies and half-truths with the motive of inciting people against the religious minorities. The rumours of the killing of thousands of Islamic scholars on May 5 were well orchestrated. This propaganda helped spread of communal hatred and violence across the country and also tarnished the image of Bangladesh abroad.

Although the Dhaka based national dailies put the number of casualties in clashes with the security forces at less than 50, Hefajat and Jamaat at first claimed that 3,000 of their activists were killed. Later they brought the figure down to 2,500. They also used social networking sites to circulate photographs of Haiti earthquake victims claiming them to be innocent victims of police atrocities at Shapla Square.

To get an exact figure of deaths, the investigating team

of People's Commission established contact with Hefajat. It transpired from Hefajat HQ that the outfit formed a 1,001-member committee to find out how many of its workers were killed during clashes with law enforcing agencies on that day. This committee has not been able to complete the list of persons killed even after two and half months. On August 6, 2013 Hefajat HQ e-mailed to People's Commission a list of 79 'martyrs' killed in police action on May 5 at Shapla Square.

In accordance with Hefajat-provided list along with addresses of persons killed, People's Commission team visited residences of persons killed in areas from Cox Bazar to Dinajpur to verify the information. It was found that 14 names were repeated two to three times. The list also included name of one who died due to heart failure. Even persons who died at Narayanganj and Chittagong on May 6 found place in the list. Five persons who figured in the list were found alive. After thoroughly scanning the list, only 34 out of 79 names mentioned were verified and found genuine. People's Commission team also visited the residence of 4 persons whose names appear in police record but not on Hefajat list. In addition, People's Commission gathered information about some deaths not on police record or Hefajat list.

After carrying out field level investigations and verifying police and Hefajat records, the investigation team confirmed 39 civilians deaths in Dhaka and the rest of the country, in clashes with the police on May 5 and 6. 20 graves have been identified and the whereabouts of the remaining 19 dead bodies is not known.

People's Commission team also recorded statements of eye witnesses and journalists who were on the spot and concluded that no Jamaat or Hefajat worker was killed at Shapla Square on May 5 in clashes with law enforcing forces. But a Hefajat worker who sustained injuries in police attack on that day, succumbed to injuries later.

The final list regarding May 5 and 6 clashes prepared by police puts the number of deaths of Hefajat cadres at 11, others at 11 and law enforcing personnel at 6.

After examining the casualty lists of Hefajat, Odhikar and Home Ministry, People's Commission found that Hefajat and Odhikar's lists are exaggerated and Home Ministry's list is incomplete.

People's Commission's investigation found names of 39 civilian and 6 members of law enforcing agencies who were killed in and outside Dhaka on May 5 and 6 in clashes between Hefajat-Jamaat cadres and the law enforcing agencies. Out of 39 civilians 20 belonged to Hefajat, five to BNP, five to Jamaat, one to Awami League, two to Jatiyo Party, while six did not belong to any political party.

Conducting extensive investigation in more than one thousand madrasas, People's Commission found one Mohammad Suman whose name was not mentioned in Hefajat, Odhikar or Home Ministry's list. Suman was killed in crossfire between Hefajat-Jamaat cadres and law enforcing agencies on May 6 in Narayanganj.

The writer is Executive President, Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Toothless US sanctions over Ukraine

This refers to the report, "Obama announces sanctions on Russia" (April 29). The US has been shrill in its voice over sanctions against Russia. The US sanctions are not going to affect Russia. Obama has said that the US sanctions will also focus on high-tech defence exports to Russia. But the US should first worry about the supply of titanium (a crucial raw material for planes components) from Russia. The US aircraft manufacturer Boeing gets 30 percent of its titanium requirements from Russia. Has the US thought of any alternate source of supply? Moreover, the European Union is not going to act as per the US wishes of imposing sanctions as natural gas supply, vital for heating during the winter, comes from Russia. Also, businessmen in Europe are averse to sanctions on Russia. Germany has already made its intentions clear. The fears of Ukraine government that Russian action may lead to the third world war are unfounded. The US public will not like its president to plunge the nation into an avoidable war as Ukraine crisis is of no concern to them. The US sanctions are empty threats and Russia knows it. The symbolic gesture of sending several hundred US soldiers to Lithuania, is just to reassure the ex-Soviet republic. Russia has already brought out a payment system on a par with Visa and Mastercard. The days of US being the sole superpower are over. Multi-polar world is vital for world peace and Russia has again emerged as superpower, replacing the Soviet Union.

 Deendayal M. Lulla
Mumbai, India

Have the law enforcers fallen into deep slumber?

The abduction of seven people in Narayanganj and dumping of their bodies into Shitalakkhya is the latest most gruesome conflict that shocked the whole nation. It shows that those in charge of the law and order of the state are in slumber or they give a damn about the security of our lives. Men are abducted in broad daylight and the police remain out of sight!

The PM should have gone to the bereaved families to console them and assure them that the killers along with their godfather would be brought to justice. Withdrawing of some key officials may be a step forward. The government must take cognizance of the fact that its image has already been shattered.

 Ahmed Niaz
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Comments on news report, "So easy to be rich," published on May 4, 2014

Hardreality

Wow! This is an amusing story! This guy is virtually unstoppable because he got the backing of Shamim Osman, who got the direct blessing from our prime minister. So, who dares to arrest him?

Shahin Huq

If this is the story of a local Awami League leader Nur Hossain, what can possibly be the amount of wealth in possession of ministers including the PM?

Touchstone

Our political parties have no ethics and so they give shelter to criminals to get their dirty jobs done. Is there any party in Bangladesh which is not corrupt in every sense of the term?

Faisal

It is very hard to understand as to why any political party would choose an uneducated and uncultured person like a truck helper to become a leader when there are so many educated and qualified people in society?

"Cops gag voice" (May 4, 2014)

Anonymous

Why are they surprised? We are in a pseudo democratic state after all.

"Narayanganj restive for Osman brothers" (May 5, 2014)

Abbasuddin

Osman brothers generate the highest amount of illegal funds for AL in the country. So, there is no chance that AL will leave them.

Enayet Mowla

Goons do what they like or want but people don't have to like what they are doing, do they? They did not like what was happening in 1971 and as a result, a new country was born. If necessary, the whole process can be repeated again.

Shahin Huq

Without getting the green signal from the top, Osman brothers would never have been able to commit all these crimes.

Hardreality

Selina Hayat Ivy is the glaring example why good people like her don't want to go to politics as people with huge filthy money and muscle power always get the upper hand and are picked up by the party high-ups. It sounds terrible when the administration ignores the order of the mayor of that same city corporation.