

BCL crosses the line

Rein them in now

BY stopping a masters course examination at the Islamic History and Culture department through vandalism and intimidation on Tuesday, BCL members of Rajshahi University (RU) have only demonstrated their disregard for authority.

Clearly, the ease with which they have been getting away with committing every type of offence under the sun ranging from gangland type brawls to tender and appointment business to alleged links to abductions has signaled the message that they are above law. It is hardly surprising that they have used violent means so that the RU administration may bend rules and reset the timing of the exam in question to suit their whims and caprices.

Like in the cases of Sylhet Shahjalal University, Bangladesh Agricultural University and Chittagong University among others, the RU administration also became a hostage to the acts of rowdy BCL members.

It is unfortunate that the AL has not yet taken any effective and deterrent action against the excesses being committed by BCL men, who are exploiting its name. Merely expelling them from the party or rustivating them from the university are not strong enough measures against these types of offences, which are criminal in nature.

The correction process must begin somewhere. The RU authorities should not succumb to the nefarious methods of BCL cadres, but take exemplary action against those unruly elements.

Streets in Chittagong under water

City corporation's incompetence glaring

ANY time a medium to heavy rainfall descends upon Chittagong city; rest assured that two thirds of it will face severe water logging. Precisely why the city must put up with such misfortune, especially after Tk. 15 million of public money has been spent by the city corporation to alleviate the problem remains unexplained. It is not just the hardship of having to wade through stagnant knee-deep water but the prospect of dying due to electrocution cannot be ruled out, let alone contracting waterborne diseases. Indeed, two individuals died a few days ago having been entangled in live electric wires dislodged after a heavy shower.

This is hardly comforting news for the millions who call the city their home. As water levels measure anywhere between knee deep to chest deep, depending on the locality, it has made movement of vehicles near impossible. Hardest hit remain the thousands of secondary school students whose examinations are on. Four years into a renovation project aimed at rescuing city dwellers from the curse of incessant water logging and millions spent, it is obvious that the drainage system has not been upgraded to desired levels.

What is apparent is that city authorities' capacity to drain out excess water is sorely lacking. The monsoon is a regular feature and there is really no excuse for not taking advance measures to mitigate the problem. At the very least, the city corporation could make an attempt to keep drains from clogging up.

Heaven may not fall on May 16

ABDUL MATIN

FROM street side tea shops to posh living rooms in Dhaka, almost everyone is asking the same question: "What will happen on May 16?" Sometimes, I try to be sarcastic and ask a counter question: "Why? Is there any depression in the Bay of Bengal?" It does not help. All attention is now focused on the results of the Indian general election due to be announced on May 16. The election started on April 7 and ended on May 12. It was the longest election in the country's history.

So, the suspense is too much and, at the same time, there are worries too. Narendra Modi, an aspirant to become the next prime minister, asked all migrants from Bangladesh to pack up and leave India on or before May 16. He also promised to build Ram Mandir on the remnants of the Babri Mosque. Leaders say many things before elections without realising the consequences. They face the reality only when they come to power. It is not, therefore, always possible for them to strictly implement all what they promise before elections.

First of all, no single party in India is likely to get an absolute majority. When alliances are formed, no individual party can implement its own manifesto only. It has to make compromises to accommodate others' programmes.

Secondly, no government in India can go beyond the provisions of the constitution, which is based on secularism. India has an independent judiciary which has the will and authority to uphold the constitution which clearly states: "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them."

Thirdly, India has a matured foreign policy which cannot change with every change of the government. To maintain credibility of a government, it is not possible to change foreign policies overnight. We have seen governments come and go but their foreign policies remain more or less the same. This, however, does not mean that life will be the same for us as it is today. If India takes any decision, in its own interest, which does not favour us, we have to deal with it appropriately in our interest.

Lastly, we should remember what Pierre Trudeau, former prime minister of Canada said about living beside the USA, "...is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly or temperate the beast, one is affected by every twitch and grunt." There is no reason to worry too much but we should stay alert and carefully watch the movement of the elephant.

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

Rab is not the real problem



force.

I have been motivated to write on the issue again by comments on one of the editorial pieces that excoriated the elite force for the recent incident. And no one can take issue with the suggestion that in taking on Rab we are actually missing the wood for the trees.

And in reaffirming my agreement with that view I would like to reiterate -- Rab is not the problem. Patronisation of crime, politicisation of the law enforcing agencies, using it against political opponents, and the attempt to combat crime by circumventing the legal and judicial process by successive governments are the real problems that we have to address. Rab is but the manifestation of the larger problem that the nation is beset with.

Extrajudicial killing, which was later replaced by enforced disappearances, demonstrated lack of trust in the judicial system, its long winded process and the legal loopholes were exploited by the criminals to escape punishment or evade it, endlessly. And in the process of combating criminals, the method employed by the agencies replicated that of the criminals. Regrettably, along with the criminals, political opponents were also made victims of the illegal tactic. And the elite force was made to do the grimy task.

When an elite force with fairly defined tasks is employed to circumvent the legal process in administering 'justice' the rule of law becomes rule of men. And in that particular situation, where a law enforcing agency acts on illegal partisan biddings, the moral grip of the government starts to slacken, and command becomes ineffective. And thus from the party musclemans involved in inter-party feud it becomes involved in intra-party feud. Narayanganj

is a classic example of this.

Narayanganj is also a typical case of how the administration becomes a mere tool of patronisation of criminals. Take the case of Noor Hussain. He is quite like the Rana Plaza owner, sponsored by the local MP and existing under his patronage, controlling his turf. And the godfather has been able to kill two birds with one shot, and even the shot was not his. It was, as alleged, and as circumstantial evidence suggests, fired by the elite force.

A good example of state patronage of criminals is the way Noor Hussain carried on with his business in drugs and illegal weapons. The administration has discovered Noor Hussein's drug den from where hundreds of bottles of drugs and many dangerous weapons were seized, and the river bank which he had so long illegally occupied to ply his illegal sand trade have been taken over by the BIWTC, and all these after the allegations of his involvement in the killing. Are we to believe that the police and the BIWTA were not aware of his illegal activities so long?

Shouldn't also the district administration be made to answer how a person with twenty two criminal cases, including six of murder against him, gets not one but nearly a dozen gun licenses? What impression should we get when we see this criminal in the company of the deputy commissioner at public



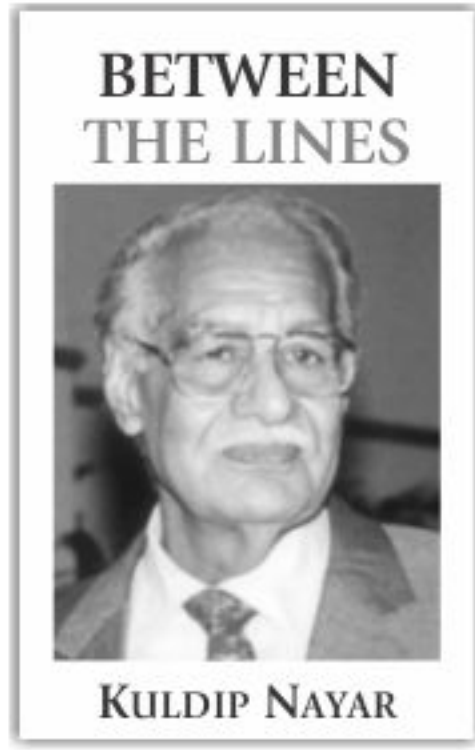
functions?

While the Narayanganj killings are the result of the AL intra-party feud, Narayanganj is fairly representative of the state of affairs all over the country, of the link between the local administration and criminals.

Three officers of Rab -11 have been sent on premature retirement (not dismissed as reported in some section of the media). I, for one, am not prepared to believe that a commanding officer of a battalion would venture into such a scheme without guarantee of sorts. And if he was acting alone, that Rab headquarters did not get a wind of it smacks of poor oversight measure of the elite force. There were more than the three officers, and more powerful, behind the act and it is for the inquiry commission to find out.

Thus doing away with Rab is not the answer. What needs to be done away with is the mindset of the political masters, the brazen politicisation of the force, and the use of the force as the government's instrument to sort out its political opponents.

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



ties, the idea has been mutilated by the party which has come to head every government. The ethos has been pushed aside. The idealism has taken a back seat and even the youth is more interested in jobs than in harking back to a past based on a value system.

New rulers have, no doubt, come through a democratic process, but they have used the Lok Sabha election campaigns to attain power without bothering about the means or methods. One rough estimate is that Rs. 5 lakh crores was spent by the different candidates, financed by people from the corporate sector.

Consequently, there is little that the new prime minister or his colleagues can do because they are beholden to the moneybags for the positions they occupy. Even otherwise, they are far from the ethos of the national struggle. I am not surprised that the new generation is blank about the sacrifices which the nation made to wrest itself free from an unwilling and barbaric Great Britain.

How many remember that the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre represents sheer brutality of the British rulers and the defiance of the ordinary innocent Indians, our ancestors, and who had focused all their attention on independence? One friend of mine, an Indian settled in London, has rightly suggested that there should be a holiday to commemorate the memory of those who jumped into a well to save themselves, as well as others who refused to move even after the British-led soldiers had exhausted their last bullet.

How does the new government clear the debt of their forefathers' sacrifices? We cannot recover from the British authorities in London the money which they took from India through exploitation. But we can at least get the symbols of our heritage which are accumulating dust in the basement of the Victoria and Albert museums. I recall that when the Nehru Centre was opened (the money was spent by New Delhi), I asked the curator how long it would be for the Indians to have access to the relics of the Raj. She said that only 5% of what they have had been put on exhibition after 35 years. The rest would have to wait.

As India's high commissioner in London I took up the issue of returning the Kohinoor diamond to India. This priceless relic was once a part and parcel of the treasury of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and is thought to have originated from the Golconda mines in Hyderabad. The reply of top British officials from the foreign office was that the

The idea of India

THE idea of India is neither territorial, nor ideological. It also has little to do with economics or politics. The idea, the ethos of this country and what we stood for during the freedom struggle, is democracy, pluralism and egalitarianism.

Beginning with India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who stood for a socialistic pattern of society, to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, believing in free market priorities, the idea has been mutilated by the party which has come to head every government. The ethos has been pushed aside. The idealism has taken a back seat and even the youth is more interested in jobs than in harking back to a past based on a value system.

To maintain unity of the country and strengthen the faith of the common man in our political process, we will have to go back to the ethos of our national movement: that is, all communities belonging to different religions and castes are equal in the eyes of the law and as laid down by the Indian constitution.

Kohinoor was now studded in their monarch's crown. I pursued this issue in the Rajya Sabha when I was its member. I was shocked when the then foreign minister of the BJP government, Jaswant Singh, requested me not to press the matter because it would tell upon the relations between India and Great Britain. I am hoping against hope that the new government would rectify the mistake which I committed by keeping quiet.

For the new rulers this is a golden opportunity to revive those prized values of innocence and decency with which India was associated long before the advent of colonial rule. How many remember the notorious Robert Clive, first Governor General of Bengal, and his successor, Warren Hastings, who exploited the country and used their ill-gotten wealth to invest in the UK? The £300,000 that Clive exacted from the rich Bengalis was used to buy his membership of the House of Lords, as well as huge property. The famous Somerset House in London was built with Clive's assets. When impeachment proceedings were launched against him, he was quoted as saying how astounded he was by his own "moderation." Nevertheless, Clive was unable to live with his guilty conscience and committed suicide. Impeachment proceedings were also launched against his successor in India, Hastings.

The most effective weapon the British had to conquer India was to divide communities so that they could act as

arbitrators and justify their rule on the grounds that they were trying to bring peace among people of different religions. In the Lok Sabha elections some political parties have encouraged cleavage between Hindus and Muslims. These political parties should remember that although democracy has taken root in the West, there is more than one foreign government that would love to get its foothold in our country. We represent the rich pickings for one and all. Traditionally, we were known as the *sonay ki chidiya* (golden sparrow).

To maintain unity of the country and strengthen the faith of the common man in our political process, we will have to go back to the ethos of our national movement: that is, all communities belonging to different religions and castes are equal in the eyes of the law and as laid down by the Indian constitution.

I hope the Lokpal Bill, which is pending before parliament, will be passed soon by both the houses of parliament so that even those at the top have to show their accountability. There should be no vindictiveness or harassment of those who have lost.

The top priority of the new government should be how to uplift the 30-crore people who are still wallowing in poverty and hunger. One estimate is that the 30-crore people, equal to the entire population of Europe, go hungry to bed. This defeats the ideal of egalitarianism which was promised after independence. It's up to the new rulers how they rectify it, but their steps should be seen as moving towards that direction. This process cannot tolerate corruption which I find at every tier of the government and political parties.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Reviewing powder milk import policy

Milk is the best source of nutrition, but many people in Bangladesh can't buy it due to low production and supply shortage. One can recall that in the early 1990s, the then government imposed high customs and supplementary duty on import of powder milk on the plea that it would encourage locals to produce more milk and the country would be self-sufficient in milk production. The subsequent governments have followed the same policy in the past 24 years.

But milk production has not increased significantly over the years. Rather milk seems to have become rich people's food owing to its short supply and exorbitant price. Even the middle-class people seldom prepare food with milk. The government needs to review its policy on high customs duty, VAT and other supplementary duties on import of powder milk in order to make it affordable to general people.

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Where poor patients are given short shrift...

The cure of a suffering patient depends not only on the treatment but also on the behaviour of a doctor. But doctors of our country seem to have forgotten this. I am saying this because I recently had some bitter experience with the doctors. Doctors are generally seen in a hasty mood in the public hospital. They have no time to listen to the patient's history. Moreover, poor patients are sometimes advised to meet the doctors in their private chambers.

Patients have to face many challenges before they can finally get into a doctor's room. Most of the doctors' assistants in public hospitals behave rudely towards the patients. They are only interested in maintaining the serial which is actually a game of money. When one's serial finally comes to see the doctor, one is left with utter shock as the moody doctor only asks the main problem and doesn't even care to listen; because they are always in a hurry to attend their private appointments. How can we expect better quality treatment when earning money is the main concern of the doctors?

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Masters or servants of people?

This is in response to the letter titled "Police our masters?" published in The Daily Star on 9th May. Although bitter, this is the reality in Bangladesh where the saying goes: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Genuine guests and their families could not use the swimming pool while 'His Majesty' the SP and his family could only be in the swimming pool. Thanks to the law abiding (!) SP of Bogra; he only reserved the swimming pool, not the restaurant too. Now the question is, will the ACC investigate into this matter? And what has the DIG of Police got to say and do about this matter?

A taxpayer
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Arrest 'dismissed' Rab-11 officials," published on May 11, 2014

Mofi
May we request the government to kindly come forward to help these distressed families?

PlainSpeaker
The first action any civilised government should take is to arrest and put all these criminal officers on trial.

Akhtar Shah
If the investigating authority doesn't arrest these sacked RAB people, then these officers would also disappear into thin air! Their absence would hinder the investigation.

Mumeen
It's evident that Bangladesh does not belong to the people; it belongs to oligarchy and criminals.

"Govt should go, says BNP" (May 11, 2014)

Iftekhar Hassan
It is true that this abhorrent crime of political homicide was carried out by the Awami League affiliated thugs. But if BNP was in power and the same murders were carried out by BNP affiliated thugs, what would have been the reaction of Hawa Bhaban? How can we forget the BNP minister Babar's taking money from Bashundhara group owner's son, who was the prime accused in another murder case?

Molla A. Latif
The government is trying to hush up and you are trying to bubble up, but the victims' near and dear ones only get lip service from you. This is bad politics, Mr. Mirza. Please pursue your politics for the people, not for Khaleda Zia and her sons.