

## Festering criminalisation in ruling party

*A cruel mockery of basics of rule of law*

HOW venal and vicious has become the criminality in ruling party politics is revealing in shocking details with each passing day. Both in the cases of Phulgazi upazilla chairman Ekramul Haq and seven serial murder in Narayanganj this is happening in spite of the diversionary, shielding, sweeping-under-the-carpet and blame-these-on-the-other party attempts by ruling party leaders.

With the opposition crushed through morally and democratically untenable election, law enforcement agencies politicized and used and local support base pampered, satraps for collusive criminalisation have thrived rather seamlessly. In an environment like this each tried to extract a pound of flesh from the other. Basically, internal feuding and simmering rivalries centering around expropriation of public wealth, tender business and rent-seeking were bound to generate fierce forms of clash of interests. And thus were masterminded plots of murder with hired killers to execute these.

Organised crime syndicates are an upshot of criminalisation of party politics. When the line between the ruling party and the government is blurred, criminalisation draws sustenance from it. In the process the state's authority to protect citizens dwindles.

On available evidence, it appears that the AL has been infiltrated by some criminal elements. A party of AL's tradition and history replete with contributions to every stage of the country's journey to freedom cannot afford corrosion of its image through the presence of any malcontent. It must be flushed clean.

## Five years after Aila

*Where is rehabilitation?*

WE go back to our report yesterday on conditions in the Aila-hit zones five years after the destruction. By now, it should have logically been for us to see some real development, or call it rehabilitation, in the region. We do not argue that a certain measure of relief has gone into easing the lives of those affected by the disaster. But it is the bigger picture which matters; and it relates to the continued lack of vegetation in the area in the aftermath of Aila.

It is quite clear that there has been little or no effort to promote new vegetation in the area, unless of course one takes the few coconut, date and palm trees there as proof of vegetation. More to the point, a very large number of the 38,000 people inhabiting the place yet remain deprived of homes and employment.

The question which worries us is why such issues as salinity, the availability of drinking water and, overall, the general rehabilitation of the area --- which encompasses fifteen villages --- have not been dealt with in the seriousness they have deserved. Any visitor to Gabura will be horrified at the sight even after all these five years. A certain primitive or prehistoric taint is perceptible, which is what worries us. Matters are made worse by the prevalence of virus attacks on the few shrimp farms that yet try to stay in tolerable conditions.

The authorities need to revisit all Aila-affected regions in

## Corporate whistleblowers: A call to arms

AHMAD IBRAHIM

IN recent times the allure of potential reward for exposing corporate back dealings and shady business has increased exponentially. In America, the whistleblower stands to claim as much as 30% of the fine imposed on the corrupt corporate houses. It is a move that has created intense internal awareness and has made corrupt executives think twice before making a move. The whistleblower has become a powerful symbol synonymous to that of a vigilante that watches over the workings of an organisation, calling out the farces.

America's Watchdog, a consumer advocacy group, has even taken the initiative to protect the many corporate whistleblowers by granting them anonymity and protection. Their concern, The Corporate Whistleblower Center, is designed to provide assistance to any person willing to come forward to unmask corporate fraud. Doing so without any assistance or protection puts the person at great personal risk and is one of the reasons why potential whistleblowers are often so reluctant to come forward.

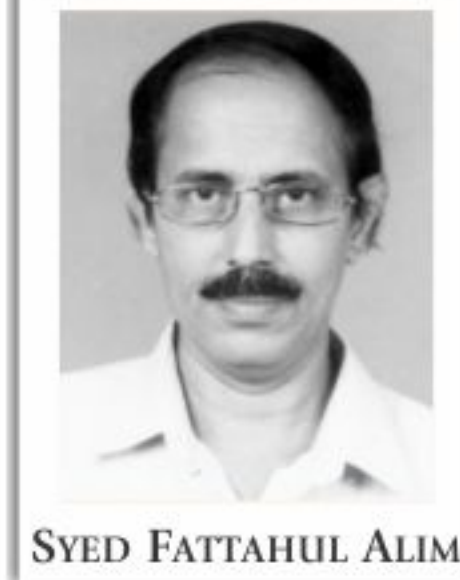
The steady stream of corporate scams being unveiled after their occurrence in Bangladesh hints at the fact that we need to have a system in place to encourage whistleblowers to come out in the open. The Hall-Mark scam and the share market scandal of 2011 are instances that come to mind. Had the proper initiatives been in place, then morally sound employees would have felt secure enough to come forward and unmask the scams. It is up to the regulatory bodies to offer incentives to such people to come forward with their claims. These incentives should not be limited to just monetary gain. The cutthroat world of corporations is one where personal safety of the whistleblower also has to be guaranteed. To make sure that there is a safe and encouraging environment in place, the authorities should be willing to provide safety, anonymity and a cut of the fine being imposed to the whistleblower.

At this moment in time there are many government contracts being lined up, including the Padma Bridge contract, which has been given to the Chinese firm China Major Bridge Engineering Co Ltd, as well as several deals being touted for gas exploration and the metro rail. Such deals have been floated by the government in the past and there have been instances where the deal has turned out to be sour for the people of this country. It is in these instances that whistleblowers are required to point out any possible wrongdoings. As the economy begins to be increasingly reliant on corporations, it is imperative that corruption be stamped out of it.

The writer is Editorial Assistant, The Daily Star.

# Wrong time to be complacent

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

So, the wave of killings from Narayanganj to Feni to Laxmipur to Noakhali were mere 'stray incidents' and hence those should not be an indication of deteriorating law and order! If some were surprised by the first part of the police chief's remark, it should now be their turn to be shocked.

Are these two innocent-sounding words, 'stray incidents', so powerful that they can rob those blood-curdling murders of their potential for leaving a negative impact on the state of law and order? But since it was the police chief who was speaking, the remark was certainly not part of a joke.

True, when the whole issue is about controlling crime and when the success rate of combating it is overwhelmingly high, one can ignore a few cases of crime, the occurrence of which could not be prevented or the perpetrators of which remained beyond the reach of the law. In such a case, any statement claiming that the law and order is under control can hardly be refuted. But can one honestly say that the situation now prevailing on the crime front is 'satisfactory'? Would it be fair to call the incidence of all those ghastly killings within a span of few weeks 'stray' or sporadic? Was the overall crime picture really so agreeable as the IGP would have us believe, especially at that particular time when he was giving his opinion?

The subject of law and order is no rocket science that is inaccessible to common man, nor does information about it require hard research to come by. Even the man in the street will be able to give you a gross picture of the goings-on around, and you can well guess that his version of the reality won't be so hunky-dory as our law enforcement authority would like to portray. The print and the electronic media in their daily reports are dishing out hard information round the clock on the crime situation. So, there is no reason to think members of the public are in the dark about what is going on in the country.

A leading Bangla daily's front page report of last Saturday tells us that Laxmipur alone has been the scene of 34 murders over the past five months and a half. And most of those killings resulted from gunfights between different terrorist gangs. Quoting a former general secretary of the local lawyers' association, the report further says that the number of such terrorist gangs ranges from 20 to 22 in that district. How can one be so complacent about the overall state of law and order, when only a single district of the country is infested with so much violence and terror?

## Terms of endearment and interest

RUBANA HUQ

THE name of the new US ambassador to Bangladesh has just been announced. Almost immediately, many of us tried to look up her background only to understand her engagement in Asia. This curiosity at our end is natural, considering that with every word of caution uttered by a diplomat in town, our hearts sink a little till we eventually muster enough courage to reconcile with our strength and declare that we are a nation that does not give in to external pressure. As a result, every time the issue of GSP suspension by the US comes up, we boldly say: "But we never even got GSP for RMG...so how does it affect us?" And every time the murder of Aminul Islam pops up in a list of US concerns, we stress on the fact that many of us did not even know Aminul Islam. Fine and fair. But at the cost of stating these facts, and at the cost of sounding bold and indifferent to the current reality, are we missing out on economic opportunities? Is it time to realign our interests and strategies as per the need of the economic hour? If so, why?

The answer is pretty simple. East is getting more attention by the minute. According to the Asian Development Bank, the East, before the end of the century will account for half of the world's economic output where India, China, Indonesia and Japan will be the major players. Yes...India is the largest democracy, Japan and China are the third largest economies, Indonesia hosts a large Muslim majority, and many of the armies in the Asia-Pacific are in the list of the largest in the world. Many Asian countries including China, South Korea, Singapore and even India have doubled their foreign direct investment in the United States. Therefore, instead of the Middle East, the US has been turning its focus on Asia, as a part of 'rebalancing' or pivoting initiative. And contrary to what we may like to believe, South Asia too is of intense interest to the US.

While the US begins to pay more attention to Asia, we also need to study a new reality where US may simply pay more attention to driving more global economic opportunities and yet exclude us. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) focuses on Free Trade Agreements with a dozen countries. Malaysia and Singapore are the prime countries for the US, but then again there are Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam who are also part of the US's wish list. Out of all these countries, if the TPP comes into effect with Vietnam, then we may have substantial worries on our platter, as US trade and investment with Vietnam will soar.

The US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) has been in place since December 10, 2001. This 140-page comprehensive document, which covers trade in goods, protection of intellectual property rights, trade in services, investment protection, business facilitation and transparency took almost five years to come into effect. But once it happened, this document started to represent the commitment of both the countries to ensure fair markets to one another. As a result, Vietnamese goods were accessed lower tariffs by the US in comparison to the earlier tariff of 40%. And because the US market represents nearly a third of the world

Human rights bodies, who painstakingly collect media reports on crime, document those and release their reports from time to time, do also provide us regularly with the overall picture on crime in the country. But not a single such report in recent memory did corroborate the police chief's version of the reality. The latest study by the human rights watchdog Ain O Salish Kenfdra (ASK) tells us that this year 16 people have been victims of enforced disappearance and of them seven have been found dead. Over the same period, a total of 53 people were victims of kidnapping.

It is hardly surprising that in an instant reaction to the police chief's perception of the reality, some rights body leaders have criticised him severely. It was really a wrong time for the police boss to have expressed such satisfaction over the law and order situation. But for whatever reason, whether for pleasing the political bosses or for boosting the low morale of his police department, it must have sounded like a cruel joke to families whose members have fallen victim to those gruesome killings

Laxmipur is, as everyone knows, a crime-prone district. But was not that also enough reason for the police to put in additional effort for bringing order and sanity in that area?



Evidently, nothing substantial has been done so far to that end. Small wonder that the situation like in Laxmipur has started to proliferate all over the country. When we are discussing the newspaper report on Laxmipur, the plot over the grisly murder of Phulgazi upazila chairman in Feni is thickening with accusing fingers now being pointed at a powerful lawmaker of the area. Exactly in the same way, the hand of politics is becoming more and more visible in the horrifying Narayanganj multiple murders of April 27 that had benumbed the entire nation. Whether the culprits immediately behind those killings are professional killers, or youth or student cadres of a political party, or members of a law-enforcement agency in increasing number of cases, it is becoming evident that they are just doing the bidding of their political masters.

When crime is thus getting politicised, or politics getting criminalised, one can understand the helplessness of the servants of the Republic working for enforcement of law. But even at such times, the public expects professionalism from the highest placed law-enforcement officials of the state.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Medics' wrath on journalists

We have learnt from newspapers about the recent incidents of assaulting journalists by doctors. Some Rajshahi Medical College doctors refused to give treatment to a journalist. Everybody knows how much suffering the patients had to undergo during the recent strikes by DMCH doctors. Recently a Prothom Alo reporter has fallen victim to the wrath of a Sikder Medical College doctor who swooped on him with his cohorts simply because the reporter went to the physician's office to verify an allegation that the medic, despite being a government employee, has been working at the private medical college fulltime.

Every medical student, at the very beginning of his/her medical profession, has to take oath of serving people, whoever it is. So assaulting and refusing to give treatments to the journalists are incompatible with the oath they take.

Anurag Aronnyo  
On e-mail

### Make verification of driving license hassle-free

I like to draw the attention of BRTA and the ministry concerned regarding the license verification system. If anyone goes overseas from Bangladesh, he needs to undergo that country's new driving license acquiring process: He gets the learner license first, then he has to drive with the instructor for certain hours and then get an exam date for driving test. In the first world countries, this process is pretty long and takes a huge sum of money as learners need to hire instructor for certain hours. But if anyone having driving license from his country is allowed to drive three month and if he passes, then he gets license right away.

The problem is, when we provide them our Bangladeshi license, they become skeptical whether it is genuine or not. They ask for an endorsement from our high commission. Our high commission asks BRTA to provide necessary information about the license and its authenticity. This process takes a long time and BRTA staffs who are supposed to verify the authenticity of license, claim bribe for this service. We would request BRTA to keep a record of authentic license holders' detail on their website, update it on a regular basis and share it with all overseas driving license providing agencies so that genuine license holders' verification process can proceed without any hurdle or waste of time.

Ahmed Saqqaf  
On e-mail

### Comments on news report, "Finger pointed at another Hazari," published on May 22, 2014

Barkat

Hasina was continuously blaming BNP for this murder. But now it seems the killers are her own party people.

Akhtar Shah

Police's action is laughable and the alleged law-maker has a lot to answer.

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### "Failed in road job, trusted in bridge" (May 22, 2014)

S.M.Iftekhara Ahmed

It seems as if being a blacklisted company of ill repute means nothing in Bangladesh. All that matters is how much kickback you give to grease the bureaucrats' palms. This is why I've personally been suspicious of many Chinese firms and their sincerity and professionalism.

Hardreality

Are we seriously expecting a miracle? Otherwise, how come this company is going to complete that high priority mega-project successfully in time, who are not capable of constructing an ordinary road timely? Most importantly, how could this Chinese company become the lone bidder? Is that because we have projected an image of huge corruption to the international community?

Guest

Padma Bridge will cost 45% more than 2009's estimated budget.

Nazmul Haq

Welcome to Bangladesh. To get government contract, efficiency of contractors with respect to their past performance does not matter. In a civilised society, this company would have been barred from bidding straight away.

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### "Modi and the dynasts" (May 21, 2014)

Dev Saha

Good analysis with many great examples! People have got sick and apathetic with these leaders and yet can't do much because there are inner circles of stooges, who have always prevented the real reform within the parties. Nobody dare to say that the emperor does not have the clothes. If Modi can end it, he should be given the opportunity.

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