

An apology to Shamim Osman?

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rare and immensely attractive for resource-scarce countries like Bangladesh? That was obviously a small price to pay to protect the honour of a "patriot".

We, in the media, are making a similar mistake once again. The volumes that we have written about Shamim Osman and his family, the numerous investigative exposes that most newspapers have carried have been all wrong, according to our prime minister. She said, in no other place but the sacred floor of parliament, that "Small offences of their families are always magnified, while big offences of others are ignored by the vested quarters." In what can be truly termed as an ironclad defence, she said, "There are few families in the country who are in politics but did not commit any crime." Is the PM implying that some extent of corruption is normal for any politician?

The Osman family has been oppressed from the time of Yahya Khan's regime, back in late 60s, she said. Paying rich tributes to the late Jatiya Party lawmaker Nasim Osman, elder brother of Shamim Osman, the PM said, "Law will take its own course, but the nation will have to be careful so that no family is belittled politically and destroyed by conspiracies." Investigators take note.

If we have understood the prime minister correctly, we owe Shamim Osman and all members of his family

an apology. It took the PM, once again, to direct us to the correct path and to make us realise what a patriot he is. What if people in the know believe otherwise? The Taqi murder of last year, the seven murders in the recent past, the continuous reportage about the Osman family's links with various illegal activities are all part of a conspiracy to malign this famous family from Narayanganj. The fact that Shamim Osman, who was backed by the ruling Awami League, was overwhelmingly defeated by Selina Hayat Ivy, simply because the voters of Narayanganj wanted to be freed from the control of this family is obviously of no consequence.

The voters of Narayanganj en masse fell victim to the conspiracies against the Osman family that the PM alluded to. She has publicly pledged to stand beside this family, knowing full well that there are numerous cases being investigated whose leads run towards this family and their many members. But, of course, law will take its own course.

The PM in her recent post-Japan visit press conference has given some other lessons that the media needs to learn.

About the corruption in making of the gold crests to honour the foreign friends of Bangladesh for their contribution during our Liberation War, she said, "The main thing is that we have honoured them. By writing about the quantity of gold in the medals we are only disgracing ourselves" and ques-

tioned whether or not it had any link with Jamaat. Obviously misuse of public fund and the accompanying corruption are not issues of any concern, according to the PM, and hence should not receive any media focus. So let those who made money out of the "medal scandal" be left alone.

The so-called "Operation Clean Heart" launched by Khaleda Zia, as the AL chief narrated, killed about 150 people. Later the Rab killed more than a thousand people during 2004 and 2005. Why no voices were raised against them at that time, and why voices are being raised now, the PM asked. (Many civil society voices were raised, and this paper and many others extensively published reports about these killings and wrote condemnatory editorials against the Rab). Is the message here that since, according (wrongly) to the PM, no voices were raised then, none should be raised now?

As the PM, on record, said 1,000 people were killed by the Rab in one year during Khaleda Zia's time then shouldn't this government investigate those deaths? After all innocent lives were lost. Also a clear case stands that the Rab had gone berserk at that time. So can't that happen again?

During the press conference, the PM related a phenomenon that she termed as "permanent government party". She said there are people who are always with the government party, regardless of which party is in power. These people

join the ruling party of the day to protect themselves. Citing Nur Hossain, the main suspect in the seven-murder incident in Narayanganj, the PM said he belonged to Jatiya Party, then joined BNP in 1991 and came to AL in 1996. The question is, given his background, why was he allowed a berth in the AL in the first place and then kept for the last 18 years? Was anything done to see that he did not use AL membership as a "licence" for his criminal activities? How many more "permanent ruling party" members are there in the AL? What crimes are they still committing under the protection of the ruling party?

At the press conference the PM neither seemed worried about these possibilities nor did she articulate any plans to purge her party of such elements.

Not only for the media, the PM also had some lessons for the judiciary. Why did a two-member bench of the High Court order the arrest of three "dismissed" Rab officers, she questioned? Even though one of them confessed to his crimes in a court yesterday, which would not have been possible unless they were arrested and taken on remand and questioned? Yet, according to the PM, the judiciary was wrong, and going by the law minister's comments, the judiciary was verging on "anarchy".

We are not sure what we are to make of the messages emanating from the prime minister.

Pran, again!

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Food and Feed, a notification system operated by the European Commission to exchange information on identified hazards in food and feed between the member states.

The EU's Dhaka office also informed the government, the leading trade bodies and Pran on May 25 about the matter and called for measures to avoid repeat of the incident.

Asked, Kamruzzaman Kamal, Pran's director of marketing, said the food processor is yet to receive any such letter from the EU.

"But we have come to know from our importer in Italy that a consignment has been held up at the port after officials saw rat inside the container and sealed it. So, it was the problem of container and not our products," he told The Daily Star over telephone.

"The rat may have entered the container during loading at the port, where we do not have control. But, it has not entered from our factory."

He said the company is trying to get detailed information on the matter, adding that only the contaminated batches would be recalled from the domestic market.

"But it does not mean that we will recall all the products that are being sent abroad."

The incident comes just seven months after the US Food and Drug Administration detected high levels of lead in Pran's packaged turmeric and asked stores to recall the product.

Later, the Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Testing Institution (BSTI) too found lead much higher than the permissible limit of 2.5 parts per million (PPM) in Pran's turmeric.

Subsequently, BSTI temporarily suspended Pran's turmeric processing licence, only to withdraw it after the food processor assured of destruction of the lead-contaminated turmeric batch and fulfilled BSTI's conditions, according to Kamal Prasad Das, BSTI's director for certification mark.

About the latest incident, he said: "Rat excrement is neither an ingredient nor a raw material for any product. We will immediately take action. We will ask Pran about the reasons for contamination and investigate the matter."

When asked if recurrence of detection of health hazardous elements by authorities abroad undermined the BSTI certification, Das said the authority does not give certification to Pran only.

"We issue standardisation certificates to other companies. Unfortunately, the contamination is found in case of Pran products only. So we will look into the matter seriously."

When asked about the reason behind repeated incidence of contamination of Pran's products, Kamal said: "Ultimately, the responsibility is ours -- we will improve ourselves. We will be more careful in future. We will increase checking at every point."

Double trouble

FROM PAGE 1

So when Finance Minister AMA Muhith presents his budget today one of his main challenges will be to jamp up the sagging investment and pump money into private hands.

The figures are already frightening. Of the projected 16.5 percent private credit growth, only 11 percent was achieved through March.

And despite an apparently stable macroeconomic situation, Muhith still has much to worry about.

If he has to create jobs, he has to hike GDP growth rate. For that he has to take steps to increase investment quite considerably from the current 28.7pc of GDP to around 33 percent. For that to happen, political stability -- something beyond his realm -- must prevail. He also needs to keep in mind that capacity utilisation has already touched almost the maximum limit. So growth has to come from incremental investment alone.

What will happen to his large development budget is another big concern for Muhith. A 30 percent bigger ADP is not a child's play to implement.

There are quite a few major vital projects in the ADP. Some of these

schemes such as the widening of Mymensingh and Dhaka-Chittagong highways are limping, causing immense drain on the economy.

Of the total \$65 billion foreign trade, \$50 billion are executed through the Dhaka-Chittagong highway alone. And yet the government could not achieve much headway in its implementation.

Delays would only scotch GDP growth. But with the same arcane bureaucracy how much can he do?

He has to worry about earnings too. This year is a frightening year with revenue falling sharply. So what magic tax reforms he can produce to improve collection remains to be seen. How much he can shift away from indirect tax (read Vat here) to direct taxation is an open question. And for the government the exact opposite of collection -- spending money effectively to provide services to the people -- will be equally vital. People are already fatigued with the deteriorating law and order.

There comes the question of governance which is in a poor state today. Everyone talks about corruption everywhere. Nothing happens without speed money and crony contacts.

One of the touchiest institutions -- bank -- is inflicted with the same malaise today. The latest scandal of Basic Bank is another case. Everybody knew what was happening in that bank and yet nobody took efforts to stop it until the tills were cleaned out.

With all this one can always question how long we should continue recapitalising the state banks and why. Recapitalising is just a synonym to cover up funding the thieves from the tax payers' pocket. Some crooks will come and loot the banks and taxpayers will pay for it.

So Muhith has to think what he can do to better govern the banks.

Yet another big concern is the future of exports and remittance, both of which are sagging. Garment sector, the mainstay of export, is under pressure with a transitional change underway to improve compliance with labour and safety standards.

The current audit will lead to closures of quite a few factories. The units that do the subcontracting will lose orders. There will be job losses. So Muhith needs to think how he will go for inclusive growth by spreading safety net programme for those who will lose.

And more important would be for the government to ensure compliance because Bangladesh garment cannot afford another Rana plaza tragedy or anything near it.

Rural economy will be another choke point because of slowdown in remittance. The village economy is to an important extent fuelled by remittance. Think of the \$14 billion finding its way to the rural and semi-rural areas and the consumption demand this is creating.

A real turmoil will happen if this money flow stops. Already we see a definitive drop in consumption because of the twin pressure of lack of investment and remittance.

So Muhith's job will be to push hard so that ministries will ensure overseas jobs.

But above all he has to think about improving investment climate. He has to think of infrastructures and quickly proceed with setting up the special economic zones, the authority of which is already in place.

It is estimated that 80 million jobs will migrate from China very soon and with these special zones, Bangladesh can easily grab 15 million of them. And this will be a real challenge for

More bunkers

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Altogether nine bunkers have been discovered in the reserve forest in a joint drive carried out by members of the Rab headquarters and Rab-9 with the help of a dog squad and a bomb disposal unit.

The drive has been on for a couple of days, but on Tuesday, law enforcers first laid their hands on 184 rocket shells (40mm) and 153 chargers left in a bunker at a hillock of the forest. Six other bunkers were found empty on the day.

The bunkers looked like tunnels, Rab officials said.

The reserve forest, about three kilometres from the Indian state of Tripura, was used as a route by Indian separatist groups for smuggling arms, according to the investigations conducted after the 2003 arms haul in Bogra.

Sources in the law enforcement agencies said Indian separatist groups, including National Liberation Front of Tripura and All Tripura Tiger Force, used the bordering forest as a shelter and for training camps.

Rab personnel yesterday searched three hillocks and habitats of Tripura families inside the forest, Habibur said.

"We could not ascertain who had kept the arms and ammos [in the bunkers] and the manufacturing country," he told reporters at a briefing at the spot.

The elite force suspects that there may be more storage of arms and ammunition inside the forest, the Rab official said.

Replying to a question, Habibur said the arms and ammos recovered this time were apparently similar to those recovered in Chittagong in 2004 and Bogra in 2003.

"It will be clear during further investigation," he said, adding that Rab would continue the operation.

Amid the operation, male members of the 22 families, including 19 of the Tripura community, living inside the forest for generations went into hiding

in fear of harassment and arrest, forest officials said.

A Daily Star correspondent visited the place. Whoever was seen turned away when he approached them.

Pushpa Rani Deb Barma, a homemaker, did not initially talk to the correspondent but later said people in the forest had been completely unaware of the arms and ammunition inside the bunkers.

A Rab official, who is deputed from the army, said 40mm high-explosive anti-tank (heat) rocket shells are largely used by military forces across the world.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told BBC Bangla service that the arms and ammos recovered from the forest were enough to destabilise a country and for militancy and separatist movements.

"We are looking into it. We will be able to say how these [arms and ammos] came here and what they were intended for," he said.

The Indian newspaper Anandabazar yesterday reported that the huge cache of arms and ammunition recovered in the forest belonged to the United Liberation Front of Asom leader Paresh Barua.

The Bangladesh government recovered those on receiving information gleaned by Indian intelligence agencies from Ranjit Dev Barma, a leader of the separatist group All Tripura Tiger Force.

The state minister for home, however, dismissed the claim.

"The arms haul was based on the intelligence of our local agencies," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Rab Director General Mukhlesur Rahman visited the spot yesterday. He told reporters that two cases under the arms and explosives acts were filed last night with Chunarughat Police Station.

"You will get answers to all the questions after an investigation," he added.

Chunarughat police said they

Maj Arif makes confession

FROM PAGE 16

dismissed army official.

Various sources closely linked with extracting the confessional statement from Arif told our Narayanganj correspondent that Arif admitted the entire operation was carried out on the orders of a top Rab official. The sources wished to remain anonymous on grounds of professional and personal safety.

The Rab official's name is being withheld because The Daily Star could not obtain the copy of the confessional statement to cross-check it.

Arif also gave the names of eight other Rab men, ranging from officers to constables, who were linked with the gruesome murder.

However, he said the entire plan was masterminded by Nur Hossain, according to the sources.

Narayanganj city panel mayor Nazrul Islam and his four associates and senior lawyer Chandan Sarker and his driver were abducted allegedly by some members of the Rapid Action Battalion on April 27. Their bodies were found floating in the Shitalakkhya river a couple of days later.

In his statement, Arif said Chandan had videotaped the abduction of Nazrul and

his men in front of Khan Saheb Osman Ali Stadium at Fatullah on Dhaka-Narayanganj Link Road. So, they picked up Chandan and his driver as well and killed them along with the other five.

The sacked Rab officials are shown arrested in two murder cases filed by Nazrul's wife and the family of Chandan Sarker.

When The Daily Star asked the superintendent of Narayanganj police about Arif's confession, Khandaker Mahid Uddin avoided a direct reply and said, "Since Arif is confessing, the investigators have the responsibility to ensure that the evidence is credible".

During Tareque's remand hearing, advocate Shakhawat Hossain, president of Narayanganj Lawyers' Association and counsel for the investigators, stated, "All the allegations we have made so far have been proved true through Arif's confession".

These Rab officials were acting as hired assassins, he argued.

Despite Arif's confession, none of the progress reports submitted to the High Court by four agencies probing the incident case mentions the former Rab officials' involvement in the abductions and murders.

"I have read out the important portions of four progress reports on the investigations into the incidents before the High Court, but I have not found any mention that any Rab official is involved in the incidents," Attorney General (AG) Mahubey Alam said this at a press briefing at his office yesterday.

Earlier, he submitted before the HC the reports prepared by the inspector general of police (IGP), the director general (DG) of the Rab, the Criminal Investigation Department of police and the seven-member committee headed by an additional secretary of the public administration ministry.

After accepting the reports, the HC bench of Justice Md Rezaul Haque and Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore directed the probe committees to submit reports on further progress before it on July 9.

Citing from the CID report, the AG told the HC that the CID officials have recorded statements from two witnesses in connection with the alleged involvement of the Rab officials in the incidents, and they are now scrutinizing their statements.

The CID also said in its report that 13 persons, including three former Rab officials, have been detained and are being

interrogated in connection with the incident.

The Rab DG said 56 Rab and police personnel have been interrogated to find out whether they had any negligence in discharging their duties or any link with the incident.

The report of the IGP said the members of the victims' families are being given full-time police protection, and the investigation officer of the case is continuing investigation into the incident.

The seven-member committee said in its report that the committee members are recording statements from the witnesses of the incidents.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal yesterday said, "There has been progress in the investigation of the Narayanganj seven-murder incident. You will soon get to know who did it. The culprits will not be able to get away."

He was speaking at a

Jubo League

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the attackers, Md Sumon, 30, while he was fleeing the spot. Sumon was later handed over to the police.

Locals said there was a conflict between Jasim and Delwar Hossain Babul, general secretary of Adarshagram ward unit Awami League, over occupying a local fish market and establishing supremacy in the area.

They suspect Jasim might have been murdered following the dispute with Delwar.

Police arrested four people, including Delwar and Sumon, in this connection.

A case was filed.

NK NUCLEAR TEST EU 'deeply concerned'

AFP, Vienna

The EU said yesterday it was "deeply concerned" about the threat of a new nuclear test by North Korea, which has stepped up activity at one of its main test sites.

Pyeongyang said earlier this year that it did not rule out a fourth nuclear test, to counter what it described as US provocations in Asia.

Satellite imagery also confirmed continued activity at North Korea's main nuclear test site of Punggye-ri that was consistent with preparations for an atomic detonation.

Construction work meanwhile continues at the light water reactor at Yongbyon, which was initially shut down in July 2007 but which Pyongyang said last year it would restart to bolster its atomic arsenal.

"The EU is deeply concerned about reports that the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) may be preparing the fourth nuclear test," EU states said in a joint statement to a meeting of the UN watchdog IAEA's board of governors in Vienna.

One more

FROM PAGE 2

At the meeting last night, all the representatives of the alliance components backed Khaleda's recent demand for disbanding the Rapid Action Battalion.

Wishing anonymity, the chief of an alliance component told this newspaper that leaders at the meeting asked Maulana Abdul Halim, Dhaka city Nayeb-e-Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, if his party was developing any relationship with the government.

Rejecting the notion of the alliance leaders, Halim said they were with the 19-party alliance.

Border forces

FROM PAGE 2

gunshots in Myanmar across the border in Naikkhangchhari.

They are not feeling safe, said local union parishad member Ali Hossain yesterday.

The shooting, however, took place inside the Myanmar territory and it did not affect Bangladeshis in the bordering areas.

Request for Expression of Interest

A Leading private commercial bank of Bangladesh is willing to procure AML (Anti-Money Laundering) Screening Software. The Competent Vendors are invited to take part in this process and provide a proposal that satisfies the requirements of the bank. To collect the RFP electronically, please email to eeoi2014@gmail.com by June 11, 2014 containing following information: Name of company, contact person, mailing address, Telephone No., Fax No., email address, Mobile No. etc. The sealed proposal (technical and financial) in response to the RFP can be submitted on or before June 12, 2014 12:00 am at the address mentioned in the RFP Document.

CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (Eoi) from Professional Conference Organizer (PCO) to host 12th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (12th ICAAP) Dhaka, Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the host of the 12th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (12th ICAAP). The Government of Bangladesh, Partners in Population and Development (PPD) (an Inter-Governmental Organization of 26 developing countries) and the Civil Society Organizations along with the support of UNAIDS, Academic Institutions and various International Agencies have been working together to host 12th ICAAP in Bangladesh. The 12th ICAAP will be held in Bangladesh International Conference Center (BICC) in November 2015 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. ICAAP is expected to bring together approximately 4,500-5,000 international delegates from community, academia, local and international agencies and institutions, activists and civil society organizations.

The Executive Committee of the 12th ICAAP is inviting expression of interest from experienced Professional Conference Organizer (PCO) to assist in hosting 12th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (12th ICAAP) in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Interested PCO/Conference & exhibition management companies are requested to click the link to find the application details: The dead line for submission of Eoi is 10 days from the date of publication of this advertisement.

<http://www.partners-popdev.org/EOI>

The Secretary General

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