

Using children as courier

Uncover their employers

THESE are very disturbing statistics that the annual report of the Department of Narcotics Control reveals. According to 'Narcotics Report -2013', children below the age of 16 are being used as carriers of drugs and narcotics. This practice had started in the early nineties, but has been growing at an alarmingly galloping rate - from six percent in 2002 when the survey started to 25 percent in 2013.

The data is astounding, and one hopes that the relevant authorities would take note of the implication of the matter. It is not that they are used merely as a mode of delivery. These children at a very impressionable period of their life get embroiled in illegal acts apart from the fact that a good number of them become addicted to drugs and narcotics that they help to carry.

Our concerns also stem from the possibility of these children being used as purveyors of small arms and explosives and other dangerous material on behalf of terrorist and anti-state elements. Use of children in war is not a new thing, and use of children in clandestine and anti-state activities like mentioned above adds a new dimension to the issue.

Admittedly, use of children as courier of illegal things is a clever method to avoid detection since they do not readily arouse suspicion. But it is a new challenge that the law enforcing agencies must address. Given the repercussions of such a practice which is exponentially on the rise new strategies to combat the menace should be devised quickly, first of which would be to identify and arrest the people behind the trade.

Problem of counterfeit notes

Where is the strategy to tackle it?

WITH most persistent problems affecting public interest, the authorities tend to take these in their strides having verbally wrestled with them for a time and then going into a laidback, nothing-doing strategy. And because the heart of the problem is not addressed it keeps growing with impunity and renewed vigour. The handling of fake currency notes is a glaring case in point.

While appreciating the fact that on Saturday, a seminar of policy makers, regulators, bankers and international experts dwelt on the issue at length in the city, we believe a coherent message has been duly derived from the deliberations. They have stressed the need for raising public awareness of counterfeit notes as the country seriously undertake efforts to prevent forgery.

No one will contest such priorities but what is important is to cater for what such objectives would demand. First, the public ought to internalize what distinguishes a genuine note from a fake one. Even experts admit that a sophisticated technology is being used by the clandestine manufacturers. So awareness campaign has to be both intensive, extensive and sustained. Secondly, prevention of forgery should concentrate on striking at the roots, rather than dismantling the cobwebs of manufacture.

In the essence, the focus should be shifted from unsuspecting presenters or purveyors fake currencies on to the criminal dens of note production. They are the saboteurs of national economy must be meted exemplary

I am black: Don't shoot me!

ABDUL MATIN

RESIDENTS of Ferguson, located close to downtown St. Louis, Missouri, in the United States have been protesting against the police for shooting and killing a black teenager, Michael Brown. The incident occurred on Saturday, August 9, while the teenager was walking to his grandmother's house in the predominantly black neighbourhood. He had just graduated high school and hoped to begin college in the fall. Eyewitnesses say he was unarmed and had his hands in the air when he was shot by police.

Hundreds of angry residents gathered in front of the police building soon after the incident. The protests gradually became violent and continued for several days. Many black protesters were carrying placards with the slogans like "Don't shoot me" and "No justice, no peace." President Barack Obama called for calm. Police shot tear gas and smoke canisters at protesters. Two people were shot and at least 47 arrested. President Obama dispatched his non-white Attorney General Eric Holder to Ferguson on Wednesday to reassure the people about the investigation into Michael Brown's death. Holder said he understands why many black Americans do not trust police. He recalled how he was repeatedly stopped by officers who seemed to target him because of his race. He also met with federal officials investigating Michael Brown's death and with Brown's parents. After five nights of protests, the crowds dwindled and became more peaceful on assurances that justice would be done.

In another incident on February 26, 2012 in Sanford, Florida, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African-American high school student, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a 28-year-old mixed-race Hispanic and a neighbourhood watch coordinator. On July 13, 2013, a jury, consisting of five white women and one Hispanic, acquitted him of all the charges. President Obama commented on the trial in a somber mood. He said, "Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago... If a white male teen would have been involved in this scenario, both the outcome and the aftermath might have been different."

Shooting of African-Americans by the predominantly white dominated police in the States is very common. Justice became a mockery in the case of Trayvon Martin. Will Michael Brown get justice? That's the question being asked by thousands of protesters in Ferguson and their sympathizers all over the States.

President Barack Obama's frequent sermons to the outside world on human rights will sound hollow if justice is not dispensed to his own kith and kin who often become victims to racial discrimination which was abolished by the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the US constitution.

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

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

An ill advised step

DRIVEN by the primordial urge to defeat or get the better of their rivals and, once in government, to accumulate as much power as possible in their hands, political parties, more often than not, can't see past the end of their nose. And if there is a political history, legacy, or ideological construct readily available to suit the desire to perpetuate their hold on power, there will also never be a dearth of official ideologues to justify that fancy. Such ideologues are apt to pull the wool over the ruling party's eyes so that the latter sees only good and no wrong in whatever it does in its drive to concentrate all power in its hands.

Pointing to the dangers implicit in the government's move to empower the legislature to impeach Supreme Court judges, many well-meaning jurists, constitutional and legal experts have advised the government against going for the constitutional amendment to that end. Unmoved, the cabinet has already approved the draft of the "The Constitution (16th amendment) Law, 2014" to restore what it said

the parliament's authority to impeach the Supreme Court judges for misconduct or incapacity. It is being said that once passed into law in the next parliamentary session, the apex judges will become accountable to the people, who according to Article 7 of the constitution, are the owners of all power of the Republic. What is more, through this amendment the history, which, the ruling Awami League (AL) thinks, was distorted by post-1975 rulers, will be corrected through restoration of the original spirit of the 1972's constitution. It all sounds so soothing to the ears! But what do some of the jurists and constitutional experts who made major contribution towards framing 1972's constitution think about the government move? Dr Kamal Hossain, for example, who headed the committee that framed 1972's constitution in a recent interview to the media vehemently opposed the government decision saying that it was an attack on the judiciary and its independence. Similarly, barrister Amirul Islam, who was also a member of the committee that conceptualized and wrote 1972's constitution, viewed that if parliament gets the power to impeach judges that would not only curtail the judiciary's independence, but also 'destroy everything'. Here 'everything' perhaps stands for the fundamental ideals on which Bangladesh and its democracy hinge. But why can't these constitutional experts see eye to eye with the government in its present effort that ostensibly promises to restore the spirit of 1972's constitution? Shouldn't

they be rather happy that the nation will get back the original constitution that they took part in making 42 years ago? Seemingly, they are neither convinced of the incumbent government's intent, nor of its arguments in favour of the constitutional amendment. Evidently, they could not have failed to appreciate the transformation that the socio-political landscape of Bangladesh has gone through in the meanwhile rendering the particular provision (Section 96) of 1972's constitution redundant in the present context. Small wonder Barrister Amirul Islam even preferred the existing mechanism in the form of the Supreme Judicial Council to parliament to impeach Supreme Court judges. If it is not pragmatism then what is that has led a veteran Awami Leaguer like him to support a constitutional provision that was introduced by the late president Ziaur Rahman through a martial law proclamation in 1978?

Detractors of the government move could not also be unaware of the nature of the present legislature where the Article 70 of the constitution is hanging like the sword of Damocles over the head of the lawmakers to discourage them from engaging in any enlightened debate, let alone casting vote, against any motion moved by the ruling party.

Neither is the party that likes to call itself opposition in parliament is in a position to effectively oppose any ruling party-backed motion. And the least said about the January 5 polls that went into electing the 10th Jatiya Sangsad and its lawmakers, the better. And to think that such lawmakers from the ruling party enjoys an absolute majority in parliament.

All powers of the state in

the executive's hands, even if that government is an elected one, is not good for democracy. So, it is not simply a matter of whether parliament should have the authority to impeach Supreme Court judges or not. In fact, the issue at hand is far broader in scope than what it appears on the face of it. What will be left of the balance among the three pillars of the state—the executive, the legislature and the judiciary—if all powers flow only to one of the pillars, the executive? Unless we are talking about angels here, there is the serious risk of such power being grossly abused by the government of the day. Even if one assumes that the incumbent government, or parliament for that matter, will not abuse the power, what guarantee is there that any future government won't do so?

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