

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?

AS 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 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.

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KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATAHUL ALAM

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 constriction 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

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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 Amir-ul 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?

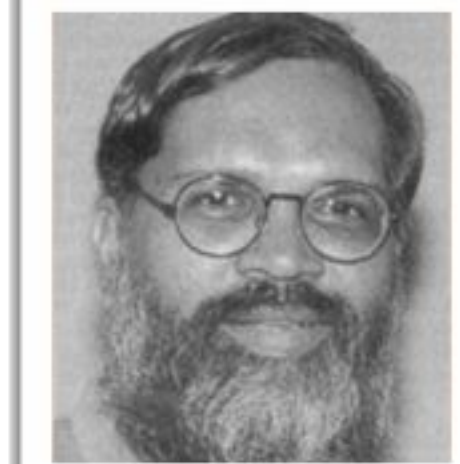
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MYOPIA ON PAKISTAN & PLANNING COMMISSION

Modi's two big blunders

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

by sacrificing foreign policy to narrow political ends.

Modi also stands to lose the goodwill he earned by inviting all South Asian leaders to his swearing-in -- with negative regional consequences.

Modi's decision to scrap the Planning Commission seems intended to convey that he wants to end a "Soviet-era" Nehruvian legacy. This involves a serious misconception. Indian planning was never of the centralised Soviet variety. It was indicative planning, with a big role for the private sector.

Besides allocating resources, India's Planning Commission plays several functions: producing a framework for the economy's orderly development; mediating between various Central ministries and the Centre and states; and evaluating programme implementation.

No other body has these capacities. That's why the Planning Commission has enjoyed unrivalled moral authority since 1950 despite not being a statutory body. Some of its officials have been stellar personalities.

No state has ever rejected a Commission-approved plan. There's no substitute for the wide consultation with NGOs, grassroots-level officials, experts, economists, administrators, and the National Development Council (representing all Chief Ministers), which the Commission undertakes.

The Commission adopts multi-sectoral approaches to water, education, health, nutrition and backward area development. Its state human development reports are of high quality.

Planning Commission-appointed committees have produced thoughtful reports on diverse issues: mal-development-related reasons for the growth of Maoist extremism, equitable sharing of benefits from official schemes, and violence against women.

Such a multi-faceted institution cannot be replaced by a think-tank, which will probably lack the confidence to talk up to powerful ministers. It would be even more undesirable to concentrate powers in the finance ministry, which is much less publicly accountable.

There's a persuasive argument for giving a Constitutional status to the Planning Commission, with a clear mandate for promoting equitable development, which private enterprise cannot deliver. But there's no case for creating "a new body with a new soul and new thinking", which caters to "the aspirations of 21st century India", as Modi wants.

Modi's approach is strongly ideological, and based on aversion to planning per se. But even corporations plan. The government shouldn't fight shy of planning, which is essential for equitable growth in India's skewed economy and unequal society.

The hasty nature of Modi's decision to scrap the Commission comes through in his move to invite public suggestions about what the "new body" should do. He has obviously not thought things through. Yet, he shows a propensity to concentrate powers under himself, as he has done in respect of all senior appointments -- unlike any other PM.

Abolishing the Planning Commission is part of this agenda. It will set the clock back.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.
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LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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Punish carjackers

Recently Rab arrested a 'gang of carjackers'. The news was published in The Daily Star on August 17. The carjackers have been spreading their network and stealing cars for seven years! RAB and police should have arrested them earlier. This sort of crime should be checked once and for all. Exemplary punishment to the gang members is also a must. Car and motorbike owners should remain alert to protect their vehicles.

Nusrat Gulzar

Khilgaon, Dhaka

Indian PM's impromptu speech

Instead of delivering a pre-written speech on the 68th Independence Day on August 15, 2014, Indian PM Narendra Modi spoke extempore, without seeing any notes; and in his hour-long speech he did not falter even once. His speech highlighted an important social problem India is currently passing through.

Modi said that India had been shamed by the recent spate of rapes. He underscored the need for taking societal and family responsibilities in ending rapes. He advised parents to bring up better sons and not just question daughters. In his historic address, Modi spoke about how growing sex crimes against women had left him ashamed and asked Indians to stop discriminating against female children.

True, Indian society needs an overhauling to revive its societal norms and moral values.

Professor M Zahidul Haque

Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System, SAU, Dhaka

Fragile Gaza truce ends in fresh bloodshed

Truce talks are over again as Israeli war planes pounded Gaza, as nine days of calm exploded into bloodshed by killing the wife and infant son of Hamas's top military commander. The death toll now totals over 2047! Durable truce seems to be a distant possibility.

I don't see a solution to Israel and Palestine conflict, as advocated by Rashidul Bari,

CRISP scholar of NY University (TDS, August 21), as long as US hegemony and its dubious role remains supreme. I am, however, willing to accept Yasser Arafat's prophecy that "the children of Arabs and Jews shall play together and compete to pick flowers and they should compete to win math and science competition rather than to kill each other."

Redemption should also come from Menachem Begin's Nobel Peace Prize speech ... "Every child of Arabs and Jewish descent is born free and equal, in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." The sooner the trio -- Benjamin Netanyahu, Barack Obama and Ismail Haniyeh -- realize it, the better it is for the world.

A F Rahman

On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Justice so far away," published on August 21, 2014

Saleh Md. Shahriar

It was one of the saddest tragedies in our national and political life.

Humayun Hyder

The carnage of August 21 is still fresh in the minds of the people who lost their near and dear ones. The massacre was done by Huji, and BNP was then in power. They shouldn't ignore their responsibility but they did.

"Inqilab office raided, news editor held," (August 20, 2014)

Saint

A very good sign for democracy!

"3 Bangladeshi workers killed in Malaysia" (August 20, 2014)

Humayun Hyder

They all were working in a construction site and a parapet of the construction site just fell on them and they died instantly. We don't know how the contractor built the parapet so that it could break and fall.

We expect that our embassy will do their best to protect the interests of our workers.

"Jute growers in trouble" (August 19, 2014)

Humayun Hyder

Jute growers face the same trouble every year when they sell their crops to the BJMC. The state entrepreneur does not have the cash to pay the growers. Therefore, the growers have to sell their produce to the middlemen and thus incur loss.

We appeal to the government to give BJMC the required money so that they can buy jute from the growers. Also, I urge the government to take strict measures so that jute products are made and used as per the directives of the government.