

State of human rights in the country

Address the concerns

THIS is an issue to which we have repeatedly drawn the attention of the government. Our fears and concerns have once again been reflected by Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK), the leading human rights watchdog in the country. The figures are dismal, those being worse than the previous year's. It is even more perturbing when we see that it is the state agencies which are the greatest threat to human security in the country, when the contrary should be the case. The obvious consequence is the sapping of confidence in the state.

The most vital areas of concern are 'enforced disappearances' 'crossfire and custodial' deaths. We feel that both are avoidable and preventable. And it will be possible if the law enforcing agencies, particularly the Rab, on whom fingers have been pointed for a long time, are strongly monitored and their transgressions severely dealt with and the perpetrators made examples of.

It is a sad reflection on the state of governance in the country when international HR watchdogs excoriate our elite force with routine regularity. We endorse the remarks of the Executive Director of Ask that the elite force must operate within their terms of reference. It is our contention too that there has been lax oversight as well as partisan use of force that have given them a sense of impunity.

The first step to good governance is the rule of law and accountability of the state agencies. If the government is serious about delivering good governance then it must address the situation in earnest.

Repair embankment-cum-road immediately

End suffering of 5000 families

WE are concerned to note that more than 5,000 families of Sehakathi, Balaikathi and Badura villages in Patuakhali Sadar upazila are undergoing tremendous hardships as a dyke damaged by tide almost six months ago is yet to be repaired. Over a 500 feet long flood control embankment cum road at Balaikathi village collapsed in July last year, obstructing communications of the villages from the Sadar upazila parishad and district headquarters. The school children of the two areas are also suffering as a result.

The damage to the river embankment has also affected over 500 acres of cultivable land, which is now under saline water, negatively impacting aman cultivation.

Despite repeated pleas to the upazila development committee, Water Development Board (WDB) and Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), bureaucracy and inefficiency on the part of the authorities are stalling the much-needed repair process. This unwarranted delay also highlights the authorities' lack of concern for the plight of the common people in the villages of this country.

We urge the government to treat the issue as a matter of urgency. If the repair work is not completed during this dry season, the difficulties of villagers, who already lead vulnerable lives because of river erosion and salinity in the area, will be compounded in the next season.

Instead of pointing the finger at other departments and shirking responsibility, the relevant authorities must work in coordination with each other to solve the looming crises in the area.

EDITORIAL: *The Hindu* (India)

Disquieting developments

THE new Ukrainian Parliament's overwhelming vote last week in favour of the country opting for membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato) is a contentious signal from a pro-western government to further cement Kiev's strategic ties with the West. The decision reverses the country's policy of non-alignment with any political and military grouping, codified under former President Viktor F. Yanukovich in 2010. Instead, it paves the way for Ukraine's strong military and strategic engagement with European powers and the United States. Eventual entry into the military alliance may still take years. But the current context of the continuing separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine lends the legislative step a provocative edge, from a Russian standpoint. Moscow has characterised Ukraine's move as confrontationalist; one that is consistent with its decade-long and stout opposition to the eastward extension of the military alliance. The Russian stance is also in sync with influential thinking in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union that grew sceptical of the relevance of Nato in a post-Cold War scenario. Whereas the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact followed the emergence of the new democracies in the former Eastern Europe, Nato has continued to expand in the more than two decades since.

Clearly, Kiev's latest move cannot be viewed in isolation. Earlier in December, both Houses of the Congress adopted the Ukraine Freedom Support Act with the avowed objective of countering threats from Moscow to the territorial integrity of the Slavic nation. The Russian response has been the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to promote regional trade. The Kremlin came under criticism for the annexation of Crimea following a referendum earlier this year. Its alleged role in aiding Ukrainian separatist groups with military equipment has since remained in the spotlight. Meanwhile, the United Nations said last month that nearly a thousand people have been killed since September 2014 when the ceasefire between the Ukrainian forces and separatist rebels came into force. Besides, the months-long conflict has claimed a few thousand lives. Moreover, the number of people who have registered as displaced by the conflict has risen by over 50 per cent to 460,000 in the same period. In the absence of swift and concerted diplomatic initiatives to address the scale of the humanitarian tragedy, the region runs the risk of prolonged instability. That is in the interest of neither Russia nor the western powers. Kiev's overtures at this juncture to join Nato would merely raise the rhetoric and deepen mutual suspicion.

Our politics is now a bare-knuckle fight

CROSS TALK



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE invention of boxing gloves is credited to Amycus, son of Poseidon and king of the Bebryces in Anatolia, whose aim was to protect the hands of a striker during a bout. These cushioned gloves result in fewer superficial facial injuries, but they also increase the risk of brain damage because a striker is able to throw stronger punches to the head of his opponent without hurting the hands. Bangladesh

politics has escalated to a boxing match and politicians have abandoned their gloves. Brain damaged already, they are now vowing to strike each other oblivious to hurting their hands.

Politics in Bangladesh has lost its cushion. Awami League has threatened to resist BNP in its attempts to hold rallies and meetings after the BNP leader in London made



disparaging remarks about its founder. BNP has made up its mind to retaliate blow by blow should the ruling party hold steadfast to its decision.

One of the two things is going to happen. Awami League might succeed in covering BNP eventually, thus holding undisputed sway over the political terrains for years to come. The opposite could be a BNP pushed to the wall, fighting back in its desperate bid to come out of the straightjacket. That either side will come back to its senses anytime soon isn't a possibility that could defuse the tension.

Meanwhile, politics is being stripped of its polish, gloves giving way to bare knuckles. Niccolo Machiavelli warned hundreds of years ago that politics have no relation to morals. Yet mankind has spent hundreds of years to hide the fangs and talons of power and greed to moralise

politics with the benign face of this civilisation. Constitutions have been written to set the rules of the game. Parliaments have been created to accommodate dissenting views. Elections have been devised to negotiate how to share power.

All the modern trappings, however, have failed to civilise the politics of this nation. Politicians bellow at each other at the slightest provocation. They aren't even capable of carrying out a sensible conversation. They howl at their opponents in the manner roar of the wild shakes up a forest. Devoid of all its finesse, politics has been reduced to a mortal combat. The only way to survive is no longer to defeat the opponents, but destroy them for all practical reasons.

Francis Fukuyama once argued that the world had reached the 'end of history' in a Hegelian sense. But Samuel P. Huntington differed with his former student. He believed that while the age of ideology had ended, the world had only reverted to a normal state of affairs characterised by cultural conflict. He also argued that the primary axis of conflict in the future will be along cultural and religious lines.

That global scene has its local application. The age of ideology has definitely ended in our politics as politicians are driven by their passion for power and money, the upliftment of the masses coming more as a byproduct of their ambitions than the ultimate goal of their noble profession. So, politics has reverted to its basic condition where force is the primary axis in the fight to conquer the throne instead of earning it by popular choice. And in our context it has sharpened to the point of that absurd contention. If two parties are now locked in an apocalyptic encounter, it's because both sides have become drained and hollow and neither side has anything to offer other than intimidating each other with threats of showdown.

We are now at a critical juncture of our history where politics has been condemned to the fate of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Many of us would know the story of these characters from Robert Louis Stevenson novella that depicts the rare mental condition often called "split personality." It's also referred to in psychiatry as dissociative identity disorder, where more than one distinct personality exists within the same body.

It's jokingly said that politics itself has been infected by politics in this country. Bereft of the science of governance, it has been turned into an art of manipulation. Our politics is deceptive for the very same reason con games are effective amongst credulous people. Never before has this nation stood on the brink of such a conflict, one half of the country pitted against the other.

Much of the discussions revolve around who is going to win in this standoff. But does it really matter? Awami League has ruled this country before as it does now. BNP also ruled for many years, if it must do again. Arrogance of power has changed hands and powerful hands have become more arrogant. A practice of the distribution of power and resources, politics has been debased. While it looks like gang fights, political parties look like neighbourhood gangs.

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Arming to disturb federalism

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

SOME 19 years ago, Danish national Kim Peter Davy dropped arms over Purulia, West Bengal, at the instance of the government of India. New Delhi's reported purpose was to arm the Naxalites, a militant fringe of leftists, to oust the communist government in West Bengal that had been ruling for more than two decades.

Davy has admitted in a recorded interview that he did so at the instance of a Member of Indian Parliament. He still has not disclosed the name of the MP. Joginder Singh, the retired director of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), has confirmed the report. But he too has refused to name the MP who was apparently a Congressman because the Narasimha Rao government was in power at that time.

This disclosure made by the intrepid Arnab Goswami on the Times Now channel has not been carried by the print media, including the *Times of India*, which owns the channel. "The central government saw

Though the true motive is shrouded in mystery and conjecture, the BBC after investigation, alleged that the arms were intended for the so-called socio-spiritual organization Ananda Marga. This has been disputed by Kim Davy who claimed the central government itself was behind the arms drop to counter the CPI (M) cadres.

An Indian court in 1977 determined that the Ananda Marga group was indeed the intended recipient of the guns and ammunition. Based on the pilot's testimony, along with other evidence such as a photograph of the Ananda Margaa headquarters on the aircraft, the judge ruled: "As per the materials available on record, I hold that it has been established that the places where the arms were targeted to be dropped were of Ananda Margis and precisely three storied white building was the target point and at that target point the arms were tried to be dropped from a flying aircraft and the aircraft has been pin pointed as per the evidence and materials on record."

One thing which is not yet understandable is the reluctance of New Delhi to find out the truth now that Kim Davy has now recorded his confession. At what level was the government at the Centre involved? Was it a bureaucratic conspiracy or was the Congress party's considered thinking? Whatever the case, it is still not too late to get at the bottom of the truth. The very credibility of the Centre is at stake.

New Delhi owes an explanation on another issue and needs to come clean. A well-educated Muslim lady has appealed to me to give her the India that we inherited from the British. That is some 68 years ago. The scenario has changed from a liberal democracy to a religious-driven polity.

The government may not be an active participant in effecting the change but Prime Minister Narendra Modi's blessings are there. His inclusive growth slogan appears to be only a cover for his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), to destroy the pluralistic fabric of the country.

I wish I could help bring back the ethos of our national struggle, that is, secularism. But the militant fringe of the BJP, if not the party itself, has come to develop reverence even for Nathu Ram Godse, who killed Mahatma Gandhi. Some have even proposed installation of his statue.

This kind of thinking is making inroads in our pluralistic ideology because the faith in secularism has weakened. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain vandalism against even a film that exposed the god men.

I concede that Modi had no clue of communalism that has been sought to be injected into the whole incident. But he has not condemned, much less arrested those who indulged in the hooliganism. He dare not take action against the RSS which is now part of politics, instead of being a mere guide.

What has shocked me is that the government has not prepared to take action against the extreme elements which may not be saffronising the atmosphere, but definitely polarising the society to an extent which was never seen before. Therefore, the only answer to the question raised by the Muslim lady is to unite the disparate forces to re-enunciate the values which motivated us to pursue the core of the national movement.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"Somewhere someone should resign"

This refers to an article entitled "Somewhere someone should resign" (TDS, December 29). The writer correctly highlighted an important aspect of our poor political culture that in all civilised countries people at the helm take the blame of a man-made disaster in areas under their watch and resign. Ministers in many countries have resigned following train accidents or ship disaster. There is no such example in Bangladesh.

While I agree with most of the writer's conclusions, I would like to point out that A.M. Zahiruddin Khan resigned voluntarily while he was the minister of industry during the BNP-led government of 1991-1996 taking responsibility for a temporary shortage of fertilizer. It so happened that the government reduced the price of fertilizer to make it more affordable to the farmers while it was being sold at a higher price in neighbouring India. The price difference prompted some unscrupulous traders to smuggle fertilizer to India creating a scarcity in Bangladesh. The minister resigned even though his ministry was not responsible for the crisis as there was no shortage of production of fertilizer in Bangladesh. He thus set a lone example in Bangladesh.

Abdul Matin
Dhaka

Will peace remain elusive?

In 1972 the people of a victorious nation were celebrating, their eyes sparkling with joy and happiness, hearts filled with the vision of a prosperous and peaceful country. But now everything has changed, the sparkle has gone out, hearts have become filled with fear and anxiety. People do not deserve this. They have the right to live in peace.

The January 5 general election, in which people did not participate, is at the root of all our miseries. An inclusive election must be held to bring stability in society. Otherwise, peace will remain elusive.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

The sick bridge!

The photograph and the accompanying report by your Lalmonirhat correspondent published on December 16 represents the usual and sad saga of



the authorities. The report said, "The bridge collapsed at least 40 times snapping road link in the last five years," as stated to the reporter by some R&H officials. Can we not set up a parallel temporary Bailey bridge by army engineers and then thoroughly redo the steel superstructure over a period of say one year or even more, so that it becomes fit for regular traffic movement? Will this not be economic, rather than repeatedly fiddling with it, eight times per year on an average?

From your photograph, it appears that the main supporting structure is all right but the steel bridge deck superstructure is damaged. Will the relevant authorities look into the matter and ensure that the job is completed quickly?

Engr. S. A. Mansoor
Dhaka

Comments on news report, "Police enter New Age office premises for 'search'," published on December 29, 2014

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

AL government is becoming impatient day by day. Police action seemed to be unlawful because police failed to show any valid document for searching the New Age office.

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

This is another example of how conceited the police force has become. Action must be taken against the OC who was so audacious that he could threaten the journalists of a leading English daily.

"Group of youths showed the way" (December 28, 2014)

OpeeMonir

The young generation can bring hope to this nation; politicians should make way for them. I think we have a better chance to excel.

Bappi Tsangma

The government should award them.

Nawfal Talukdhara

May Allah give his parents the strength to bear the loss.

"Aborted Khaleda Zia rally in Gazipur" (December 28, 2014)

Kabir

BNP should call for non-stop hartal.

New Generation

People believe that fanatic AL activists have successfully forced BNP Chairperson's rally in Gazipur with the direct order of the AL high command.

Saleh Tanveer

I am sure they must be planning to stay in power in perpetuity.