

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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DHAKA SATURDAY MAY 23, 2015

Fake government officials being trafficked abroad Take action to stop this corrupt practice

AMIDST the grisly reports of human trafficking through the seas comes another shocker: Bangladeshis, posing as government officials, entering foreign countries with fake passports. The scam, apparently involving corrupt officials in the bureaucracy and the passport office, was revealed through an embarrassing letter from the Turkish government. This is in complete violation of the bilateral agreement between Bangladesh and Turkey that allows government officials to travel to each other's countries without visas. After reaching Turkey, Bangladeshi government officials can easily get visas to other countries in Europe. It is reprehensible that certain unscrupulous staff of the state have been abusing this agreement, breaching security and maligning the image of Bangladesh internationally.

It is not known how long this practice of smuggling people by passing them off as government staff, has been going on. It may give rise to speculations regarding what other kinds of corrupt activities are going on in the bureaucracy.

That the Department for Immigration and Passports has probed into the matter and suspended a few officials who verified the fake passports with their signatures, is good news. The State Minister for Home has assured the media that stern actions will be taken against those involved, whether they are political leaders or government officials. We have seen from the past, however, that such assurances are not always followed by the kind of vigorous investigation required to bring perpetrators of crime to book.

For the sake of security, the credibility of the bureaucracy and the international image of Bangladesh, we urge the government to act expeditiously and get to the bottom of this scandalous scam.

Earthquake damaged schools Primary education in Pabna hard-hit

THE aftershocks of the massive quakes epicentered in Nepal have resulted in damages to some 61 primary schools in nine upazilas of Pabna district. According to a report in this paper on May 21 some 12,000 students have to attend classes in difficult conditions since the structural integrity of their schools has been compromised. The ministry in charge of primary education has conducted a damage assessment of the schools and found out that most of them were relatively new buildings. Though constructed two decades ago, the shocks have left them in a precarious state.

Apparently many students are either attending school in makeshift arrangements or wholly under the open sky. The fact that so many students are bereft of proper classrooms is a matter of great import and renovation of affected structures must be a priority for both school administration and the ministry concerned.

That three weeks have passed since the appraisal and no financial allocation made to bring the schools back in shape is something that is unacceptable, more so when the rainy season will soon be upon us. What will happen to these children's education in the backdrop of the two sets of circumstances – earthquake induced damage and foot dragging on repairs in the face of the impending rainy season? We urge the authorities to immediately take adequate steps to repair the damaged infrastructure so that the pupils can pursue their studies unhindered.

Excessive use of force - a remnant of colonial rule?

STRAIGHT LINE



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

DISPROPORTIONATE use of force by policemen on protestors and the former's alleged lack of adequate responsiveness to calls of public distress have once again attracted media attention.

While one would agree that making light of a serious public order situation or unconvincingly venturing to defend deviant policemen does not befit the ethos of public service, it is also distressing to see deliberate efforts to demonize the police outfit. Admittedly, none of these would do the public any good and consequently are not in public interest. Public interest, undoubtedly, presupposes public convenience without prejudicing the rights of others. One has to admit moreover, that the rights of citizens as constitutionally incorporated are not absolute and thus subject to conditions. These conditionalities as far as they relate to freedom of movement and have a bearing on public order are usually determined and spelt out by the regulatory body. But sometimes there are difficulties encountered in reconciling freedom of movement with maintenance of public order. In fact, one could see the uneasy balance of law enforcement effectiveness desirably co-existing with civil liberty in a democratic society.

The above stipulations have been made with a view to seeing the undesirable transactions in its broader perspective beyond the immediate imperative of quickly and adequately punishing the bad hats responsible for inexcusable highhandedness. As a democratic polity we must learn to forego police effectiveness at the altar of civil liberties which indeed is as it ought to be.

From a broader perspective, it is worthwhile to recollect that the Bangladesh State was the product of a bitter and violent freedom struggle. The State adopted a written, liberal democratic constitution but retained the colonial administrative, police and judicial structures without recasting them to meet the changed situa-

tion. The repressive character of police emerged when the ruling class of a decolonised society decided to retain the inherited police organisation, ignoring a justified need for change.

Ironically, our political leaders who, since 1947, occupied positions of power, were enamoured by the administrative and police system left behind and enjoyed exercising power and authority. They were thus oblivious of their own demand of yesteryears for far-reaching administrative reforms. The periods of uncon-

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stitutional rule in Bangladesh brought out in full virulence the repressive role of the inherited police system.

The first purpose of our para-military police force is to support the State; and therefore their primary role is a political one. The State, rather than the law, is supreme; and the major enemy of the police is political subversion rather than the ordinary criminal.

The norms of modern progressive police service are, broadly speaking, that the police force should be a body of citizens in uniform, exercising their right to

make arrests, but so far as possible non-military in appearance, local in their origins, and accountable for their actions. The assumption is that the majority of citizens would obey the majority of laws for the majority of the time, and that the police would be operating as far as possible by consent and not by force.

Coming to the aspect of citizens obeying the law, it is not known if the protestors in question that went to the DMP headquarters bypassed the prescribed route of movement and intruded into areas where ingress remains restricted for reasons of order and security. Were they, in exercising their right of protest and movement, causing greater public inconvenience by closing a public thoroughfare? In other words, were they doing the right thing in the wrong way? In the same vein, one could ask, if lawmen were breaking the law by applying disturbingly disproportionate force and also exposing themselves to the charge of harassing a woman?

If indeed we see the incipient signs of dehumanisation in the law enforcement culture, the remedy quite clearly, is a reform strategy. A fundamental prerequisite for success of a reform strategy is publicly demonstrated political will of the top leadership, and an on-going commitment of all stakeholders to support and sustain the expected outcomes of that strategy. When the challenge is to foster democratic governance, rule of law and human security, it is not possible to implement successfully any meaningful reforms without a broad agreement across the political landscape on the future role and responsibilities of the police.

The deviation of policemen in the form of criminal acts and other illegal activities are always deplorable as they shake the foundation of society by eroding faith and trust in the rule of law. The most visible symbol of authority can never escape criticism for malfunctioning of any description. They cannot ignore public opinion. This needs to be constantly impressed upon the rank and file. At the same time we need to create conditions wherein the policemen in our neighbourhood will give us little or no reason to gripe about their performance.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Mortuary Mothers, Funeral Fathers

CHINTITO SINCE 1995



NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

THE mother lies in the mortuary. Her son is trying desperately to get an airline ticket from the States to get home for her janaza. It could take three days. The body is getting colder in the ice box. She wanted an early burial; that was her wish, now disrespected.

For the last five years, he could not come 'home', which is not what her grandchild calls it... his house back in New Jersey needed repair, they installed a new patio too, the garden had to be refurbished with gremlins and all, then there was this very dear friend's daughter's wedding in Texas; he had been real busy over the past eighteen hundred days, not a day was Mother's Day.

Maybe after this time, this one visit, he would not need to go to Bangladesh for a long time, ever. His everything is now in the States.

Nonetheless there was Skype, then also Face Time, WhatsApp. The mother got to talk to her growing grandchild. People who did not know his son even two years back were spending 'her' time with the child, her blood. The mother like all mothers remained content despite the disjunction; at least she got that much of Skype time, or is it Face App?

He assumes his mother died a happy woman; her son (him, that is) tucked away in the comfort and security of the United States. His mother never told him how she could do with a ceiling fan that squeaked a little less; mothers don't complain to a son staying abroad. And how she dreaded the growing violence all around the world. Was her *khoka* safe? Her son perhaps knew that she was not.

The father of another NRB had been ailing for almost two years now. The son at seven, when he broke his arm, would not go to the doctor with just anyone. He wanted to be comforted by his dad. The son now had a career to build. The father was being looked after by a manservant, paid well by the pension he saved. The father wanted to be comforted by his son, but he never said it. Fathers say so little about such important matters.

Work kept him occupied in England. One important assignment even took him to Bangkok via New Delhi. But Dhaka was so far away. Now too far away, as he makes his way to London Heathrow to catch just that one flight to be at his father's funeral. Staring at the TV monitor in his First Class seat, he knows he could have made such a flight to Bangladesh every week. How



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

The wait that never ends.

many weeks must his dad have waited to touch that broken arm, now mended!

A man lived abroad for almost forty years with his mother in Jamalpur alive and well; at least that's what he thought. Ever since he left Bangladesh in the 60's, the son sent not a letter, he did not know what to write. He could not remember if his mother could read. But, she knew some bedtime rhymes. And a phone call till even the 1990s was difficult, and expensive.

He worked for a very big company, so his mother heard. She was a proud woman and did not break down in public even once. Why should she? After all, she bore the gentleman, and no force on earth can break that umbilical tie. Only he could.

His mother died quietly, surrounded by all her other children, but her eyes hovered one last time to see if Bablu had finally made it home. Indeed he was home in some villa in the French Riviera, surrounded by his family on a fine summer afternoon enjoying his pastries and croissants. Thank God! She was spared the distress of the mortuary. They knew he would not come.

Another couple had everything in Bangladesh: good education, great job, respect, enough income to live a

well-heeled life. But they wanted more, whatever that meant, and only the US of A could promise them that, so they calculated. Two plus two did not make four. After three decades they continue to languish, living in worse conditions than they would ever be in Bangladesh. Their parents, all four, waited with hope, schemed to spoil their grandchildren, prayed for their dream return. There were four separate funerals spread over a decade, but the fortune-seekers could never make a trip back home. And home is not always where you live.

What is this enticement that robs the final days of happiness of ageing parents? Why do some people think their life begins with them, and continues with their children? Is it not false security when their parents and siblings are living in the 'unsafe' country they abandoned?

The charm of life is in giving back to our country, our people. There is gratification in fulfilling a debt owed to times gone by, to people that were once as close as our heartbeat. Lest we forget, it takes only a generation to be an ageing parent.

The author is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Multiple Paul Harris Fellow-cum-Benefactor Rotarian.

COMMENTS

"A day to salute our media"
(May 19, 2015)

Toufiqur Rahman

The best salute is yet to come to media. Our print and electronic media should be neutral. It's sad but true that many media do dirty politics in the name of freedom of speech.

Aftab Mohammad Afzalul

Salute to the journalists who risk their lives to bring out true reports.

"Kadar gets justice"
(May 18, 2015)

Hibju Chowdhury

Law should be equal to all.

Hasan Kamal

A good sign for democracy and governance.

"The elections (city corporation polls) can be termed good since there was no bloodshed."

-- Raushan Ershad

Wasiuddin Jahin

Is that the only condition for a free and fair election?

Obaid Ikhtiar

A perfect comment from a domestic opposition leader!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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What's the government doing to prepare for earthquakes?

According to media reports Bangladesh is located in an earthquake-prone area. But so far we haven't noticed any government initiative on this crucial matter. The media needs to follow up on the initiatives the government is taking on earthquake preparedness. We are spending most of the time in fear, observing the movement of water in drinking bottles or filters. Even a minor head spin now feels like earthquake to us. The government should take major steps towards the preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery before and after earthquakes.
Tasnuva
On e-mail

Happy Parents Day

Currently ZEE Bangla is airing a very entertaining and educative reality show- 'Happy Parents Day' hosted by the renowned film and theatre personality Debshankar Haldar. Whenever time permits I watch it because it recognises parents for their unconditional love and sacrifice. This is a programme where children recall their parents' great sacrifices for their happiness and success and try to fulfill some of the many wishes of their parents by taking part in a quiz. Recently celebrated singer Kumar Sanu

came to the show with his parents from old home (as his own parents are no more on this earth). He shared with the audience his memories and hardship they had to pass through due to poverty. The famous singer fulfilled many dreams of his parents and others. But he still felt sad to reckon that he could not save his parents from untimely death due to maltreatment by some reputed hospitals. I look forward to watching this programme for a long time to come.

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