

Independent commission against corruption

How we would like it to be

AT the outset, let's welcome the draft bill to form an independent anti-graft commission which has received cabinet approval for an onward transmission to the parliament for consideration and eventual adoption. Admittedly though, it comes under process after a good deal of foot-dragging on the issue. We don't want to speculate about whether it is coming about under donor pressure or by virtue of a self-willed decision, although we would very much like to believe the latter held sway. Whatever may be the trigger point, needless to say, we take heart in the emerging prospect of an independent anti-corruption commission being in sight.

That said, we have three sets of comments to offer pertaining to the status, structure and functioning aspects of the proposed anti-graft commission. In the first place, what will be its *locus standi*? The consensual answer in a full-throated chorus to this vital question would be that inasmuch as the body needs to be status-wise independent giving it an in-built autonomous character, it ought to be a constitutional or statutory authority. The draft in its present form, gives the president the power to select the chairman and two members of the commission from amongst a panel of six prepared by a select committee comprising six members. Under the Constitution, the president is required to consult the prime minister before any appointment, except the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. In other words, the head of the state would not be free to choose the chairman and members of the commission. There has to be a constitutional amendment empowering the president by way of a waiver on 'consulting' the prime minister in this particular case.

The whole point about constituting such a body is to keep all kinds of executive leverages at bay and this better be provided for at the formation stage itself. It is also in the fitness of things that this is done because all executive functionaries, including the head of the government ought to come under its purview. In the USA, India, and even in Thailand, heads of government have and do come under the scrutiny of independent investigation agencies. The bill in its present form, includes two ministers in the six-member selection committee. There have been allegations of corruption against ministers. So they better remain out of the committee. In fact, every single minister should come under the purview of the anti-graft commission's writ.

What is fundamentally missing from the draft bill is bipartisan representation in the selection committee. Without the Opposition's involvement in it, an essential and vital part of the consultative process is made a short shrift of. There must be an adequate slot for the opposition in the selection process. Furthermore, we have learnt the hard way that the line between the government and the ruling party is usually blurred with a partisan attitude getting the better of any administration's best judgement. This has happened in a cyclic order, regardless of which party came to power. A robust opposition presence in the process, duly reflected on the final selection of the chairman and members to the anti-graft body would introduce the much-needed political neutrality into the system.

We have found that the working of even statutory bodies is dependent on the will of the executive which keeps the purse and establishment-related strings to itself. The anti-graft commission shouldn't be an appendage of any ministry. Physically also, it should have an independent location. Not merely structurally, it has to be also functionally independent and self-contained with delegated financial authority and the powers to investigate and grant sanction of trial. It should be able to select its own manpower and the careers of its different functionaries should be protected from the likely wrath of any quarters. Unless they are fearless in the performance of their duties, no matter how appropriately the commission is otherwise equipped, no good would come of it.

So, it's a good move, but a lot of questions remain unanswered. That's why there should be a full and fair debate in parliament on the question with the opposition inputs reflected on the final outcome.

Facing flood



HASNAT ABDUL HYE

ACCORDING to newspaper reports flood is just around the corner. It has been forecast that if water levels in Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna continue to rise these will very soon cross the high water mark. Districts in the middle of the country are likely to be submerged under severe flood. After several years' respite Bangladesh will once more face one of its oldest adversary: flood.

There is a regularity in the visitation of natural disasters in Bangladesh. In terms of cycles, the incidence of floods and cyclones can be predicted with more or less certainty. This is the only redeeming feature of these climatic banes. The chronic nature of natural disasters, however disastrous for millions, at least gives advance notice to make preparations to cope with the havoc that may be created by them. Fortunately, cyclones and floods don't come together to aggravate the situation. These two have different impacts and call for different ways of addressing them. Simultaneous attention to both is likely to strain all available resources, including manpower. So it is just as well that nature mercifully throws one challenge at a time to be met by the people and the government of Bangladesh.

In view of the predictability of the two main natural disasters, flood and cyclone, the element of surprise or, to be more up-to-date, shock and awe, should not play any significant role. The magnitude may vary from one natural disaster, in a particular year to another in future. But in terms of basic problems like shelter for people, food, potable water, medicine, shelter for cattle etc. they remain the same. The common requirements lend themselves to standardised relief and rehabilitation measures that

can be kept ready well in advance. In fact, like Famine Code, there is now a similar guideline, Disaster Manual for use in times of natural disasters. It gives details of the steps and measures to be taken by various authorities from national to local level for disaster management.

In view of the existing manual to cope with disasters like flood, the apprehension of flood this year should not set disaster management in disarray or out on a limb.

these facilities down to the Union level. The Union Complex should be seen as a multi-purpose infrastructure for all types of development activities in normal times and for relief in times of disasters like flood. The writer of this column takes satisfaction that he could sell the idea of Union Complex and had a prototype ready by the LGED. Though some complexes have been built many more remains to be undertaken. It should not be seen as a brick and mortar program as some donors have indicated. The

(shelter) and resources (transport, food, water, and medicine) are made available at union level. The Upazilas can be the major supply point for resources in addition to providing shelter at their level. More decentralised is flood relief operation (the same is true for cyclone), the more immediate and effective will be the impact on affected people. They don't have to travel far and wait long to reach places of safety and receive succour like drinking water and food. In the present disaster manage-

and Upazilas. Hopefully, very soon this will be further decentralised with direct communication established between the national government and the Union Parishad for disaster management.

There should be a relief warehouse in each Upazila where a minimum level of relief materials should be kept in stock. These may include speedboats, medicines, canned food, jerry cans, clothes, etc. If medicines and canned food are about to cross expiry date before

ernment and the NGOs in planning for the future and making adequate preparations. It should be built into the overall programme.

Relief work during flood is to be undertaken on the basis of emergency, rehabilitation activities after the flood waters recede assume ever greater importance. The whole purpose of assistance given during this phase is to restore normal life to the affected people. For some it may involve giving seedling to sow, for some help needed may take the form of small loan to buy cattle and other inputs of production. Here a family-specific rehabilitation plan will have to be drawn up which is painstaking and requires direct contact with the clientele. For this work the NGOs are eminently suitable, who should be assisted by Union Parishad members.

For the flood affected people, immediately available source of income are crucial. Even landowners may need temporary wage employment. Test Relief programme and Food for Works Programme should be drawn up even before flood water starts to recede so that actual work can start as soon as people return to their homes. The overall plan to address flood thus has to be comprehensive and properly sequenced. Again, this is not an area that is unfamiliar to Government Departments and NGOs. But it helps to think about and plan in advance.

Alongside short-term emergency plan, there has to be a long-term plan for flood protection or training of flood. This seized the attention of our authorities and donors long ago. Multi-million dollar has been spent to devise a workable strategy. Though foreign and local consultants have gleefully battened on this nothing concrete has come out of their exercises. The tiresome controversy between embankment and free flow of flood water erupts from time to time, as if to keep the problem alive. Flood Action Plan prepared with generous donor fund, most of which have gone back to the countries of origin via consulting firms, are now gathering dust. A new case may be made out soon for further studies. There should be an early end to this disgusting charade.

Hasnat Abdul Hye is a former secretary, novelist and economist.

IN MY VIEW

Alongside short-term emergency plan, there has to be a long-term plan for flood protection or training of flood... The tiresome controversy between embankment and free flow of flood water erupts from time to time, as if to keep the problem alive. Flood Action Plan prepared with generous donor fund, most of which have gone back to the countries of origin via consulting firms, are now gathering dust.

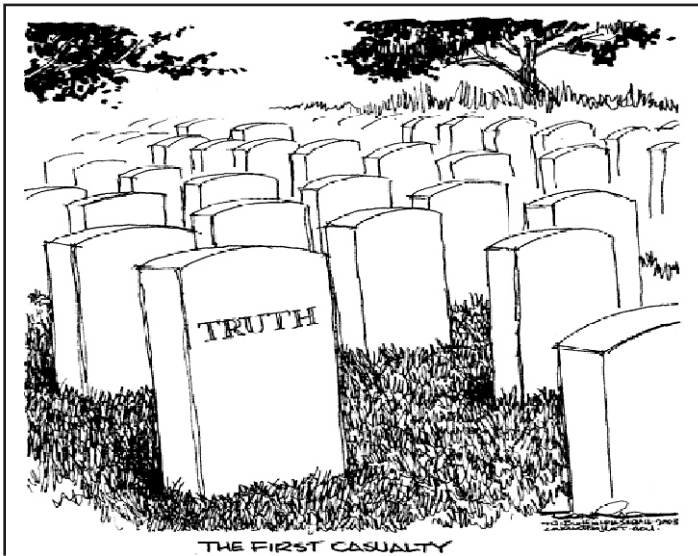
uses to which Union Complex can be put are wide ranging, each having direct impact on the lives of local people. Nothing will make decentralisation at the grassroots level more manifest than the presence of this infrastructure accommodating multifarious activities. Use as flood shelter is just one vindication of this role in decentralisation.

Coping with flood, for that matter any natural disaster, is best achieved when infrastructures

ment the focus is still more on Upazila which in turn looks upto districts for instructions, help and relief materials. For the purpose of disaster management the district administration should be kept out of the loop to save time. Their role should be to monitor and report to the government. In respect of all other activities relating to relief and rehabilitation there should be direct communication between the national government at Dhaka

they can be distributed in times of natural disasters, these can be distributed among the members enlisted under VGF programme. Annual inspection and audit should significantly will reduce the risk of pilferage and misuse. In times of disasters the bench mark stock can be augmented from Dhaka or district level warehouse. These steps are not new or unknown. But they need to be reinforced or refreshed in memory.

Government has the primary responsibility in disaster management, both during relief and rehabilitation stages. But considering the magnitude of the problems its efforts may not suffice and often do not. They have to be complemented by NGOs and other community organisations. To streamline this activity in a coordinated manner particular NGOs should be tagged to specific Upazilas, depending on their presence in the area or their willingness to participate in relief work there. This type of collaboration will save time and optimise the use of resources available for relief. Both the government and NGOs have rich experiences in flood relief over a long period of time. In view of this it is surprising that no or very limited evaluation of relief work has been done at the end of the operation to learn from experiences. Such evaluation can help both the gov-



Freedom and virtue



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IF life is compared to a river, then its two streams are named freedom and virtue. Analyse the evolution of human society, and these are the two phenomena, which dominated history. The great conflicts of life are nothing but the tension between rectitude and restraint. The revolutions, wars, inquisitions, crusades, blasphemy, protests, all things, which have ruffled the river since the time immemorial, are results of contradiction between freedom and virtue.

From the Initial Fall to the Final Redemption, the human destiny has unfolded in that contradiction. Adam abused his freedom and transgressed virtue by eating the forbidden fruit. His expulsion from heaven marked the beginning of a catharsis for the entire human race. If man wants to return to heaven, he has the freedom to become virtuous again.

Plutarch tells us that the Spartans were abstemious in public but privately coveted wealth and luxury. Virtue is to abstain but freedom is to covet, one is denial and the other is desire, the two fringes of mind, which contract and expand. Freedom is the surging tide, while virtue is its under-

tow. Virtue is like frugality, while freedom is like extravagance.

The conflicts arise from the clash of these two ideals. Sayyid Qutb, who has been called "the brain behind bin Laden", argues that the West is a society based on freedom while the Islamic world is based on virtue. According to him, virtue is a higher principle than freedom. The scholars of the American society would react to it, extolling the virtues of a free and prosperous pluralistic culture where women are given the same rights as men, and even men are

must tolerate the Christians, the rich must tolerate the poor, and the beautiful must tolerate the ugly, so forth and so on. Freedom treats society like a highway, where every individual is free to drive within the speed limit so long as he keeps an eye on the blind spot and avoids collision.

Freedom is therefore the absence of hindrance, when interference, intimidation and intersection don't disturb the momentum of life gathered in passion. It's like the free fall of an object in an air-tight room, where friction with air

undesirable like coerced virtue, because freedom is necessary in virtue as much as virtue is necessary in freedom. Consider a man who is compelled to say his prayers, whether he is a Christian, Muslim or Jew. Or, consider those untouchables in India who are coerced to carry their own spittoons around the neck so that they would not spit and defile the ground. These are but extreme measures, which violate the rights of an individual in his freedom to be virtuous and in his virtue to be free.

and the West is a conflict between freedom and virtue. The Eastern religions go as far as preaching that one cannot find *moksha* until one breaks the cycle of *karma*. Freedom from the repetitive agonies of this world doesn't come unless one has performed virtues. At times the sacrifice of human lives before deities was considered an act of virtue, which could bring freedom of the multitude from the wrath or curse of gods.

In the West, freedom is the big thing. The American soldiers die in faraway countries for the sake of

CROSS TALK

If life is compared to a river, it's constrained by its two banks called birth and death. The stream of freedom starts with birth and ends with death. But what happens to the other stream, the virtue? It grows as long as the river flows, and then takes an elusive turn into the grave. Whether you believe it emerges on the other side or not is the crux of the dispute.

allowed to consummate marriage between them.

The classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle believed that virtue, not freedom, was the ultimate goal of a good society. Freedom generates materialism, triviality, vulgarity and sexual promiscuity. Freedom gives an option of evil for every good, but human flaws and weaknesses ultimately exacerbate it. Freedom becomes its own limitation as high crime rates, violence, corruption and licence become restrictive.

The finest virtue of freedom, however, is tolerance. People must tolerate each other if freedom has to translate into action. The Hindu must tolerate the Muslim, the Jews

doesn't slow it down. Freedom is absence of barriers, restrictions, compulsions, impediments, and exclusions. Freedom is when one follows one's heart and doesn't need to worry about consequences so long as one doesn't infringe upon the freedom of another individual.

This is where freedom has a string of virtue attached to it. Virtue after all is conformity of one's life and conduct to moral and ethical principles. This is where freedom overlaps with virtue. The threshold of freedom is virtue because one can be carefree if one isn't careless. Freedom lasts only when there is consideration for others.

Thus inconsiderate freedom is

freedom and virtue, if stifled, destroy each other. Religious arrogance and political audacity deflect life as the crumbling banks deflect the course of a river. The purpose of religion is salvation of the soul, the ultimate freedom ensured through the rituals of virtue. Politics does the opposite, its ultimate goal being to ensure virtue through the rituals of freedom. To die for one's country is martyrdom, which is political freedom.

anointed with religious virtue. Martyrs are promised heaven, which still finds recruits for suicide bombing from Palestine to Moscow.

The conflict between the East

freedom. Many of them carry the Bible and they certainly cherish the hope to enter the heaven. But that is not what puts the fire in their veins. They don't die to defend any virtue unless freedom is virtue unto itself.

If you closely look at it, virtue is a kind of freedom, the freedom from vices. Similarly, freedom is a kind of virtue, the virtue of being freed from bondage. A born-again believer, for example, would know what it means by the freedom of virtue, and an indentured labour would know what is the virtue of freedom. Osama Bin Laden and his warriors are fighting for virtue. They are fighting a "holy war" against the "infidels" of the West.

Lest we forget

Humayun Rasheed Choudhury

NASRINE R KARIM

HE was a senior diplomat, international personality, held posts such as Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Speaker of the Bangladesh National Assembly. He was elected to the Parliament thrice. His credentials were impeccable:

Born on the 11th September 1926, eldest son of Late Abdur Rasheed Choudhury and Begum Serajunnessa Choudhury of Sylhet. He was educated in St. Edmunds in Shillong. At the time his father was a Member of the Indian Provincial Assembly (Assam) and later to become a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Delhi. He was given his first insights into politics by being encouraged to attend Legislative Assembly debates during his school holidays. His mother Begum Serajunnessa Choudhury was elected a Member of Pakistan National Assembly and was one of

the most outstanding woman entrepreneurs and philanthropists of her time. Humayun Rasheed Choudhury graduated from Aligarh Muslim University, studied for the Bar at the Lincoln's Inn, London. After entering the Diplomatic Service, he did his post-graduate studies at the famed Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, USA and trained at the British Foreign Office, Quai D'Orsay in Paris. His first posting was in Rome, Italy.

A career diplomat turned politician, Minister of Foreign Affairs for six years, 41st President of UNGA, recipient of Gandhi Peace Prize, recipient of U-Thant Peace Prize (only four people have received this award -- Mr. Nelson Mandela, Mr. Gorbachev, Mother Theresa and Humayun Rasheed Choudhury of Bangladesh). He was Member of the World Council of Foreign Ministers (along with luminaries such as: Dr. Henry Kissinger, George Schulz, Cyrus Vance, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, I.K. Gujral, Edward Schevardnaze,



James Baker, Jean-Francois Ponchet, Siddi Santshila, Vahit Halefogly, and other distinguished names that headed the international diplomacies -- considered a "think tank" in searching for global solutions to problems affecting peace, security, human rights and environ-

mental protection). Founding President of the Commonwealth Association of Bangladesh and Member of the working committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Special Member of the Millennium Preparations Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Union, Founding Member of the World Council of UNGA Presidents, Founder of Asian Parliaments for Peace (now presided by China and soon to be handed over to Turkey).

Humayun Rasheed Choudhury was a national and international personality, who brought accolade for his country and people. He loved his birthplace Sylhet and the Sylheti people. He joined politics to assist in development of the area. His first "success" to Sylhet was the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. He has made innumerable roads, highways, bridges, health centers, schools, colleges and brought electricity, telephone exchanges to all of his constituencies. The last

remnant of his love for Sylhet is the railway station, which he insisted upon and now is in the process of being constructed.

Had he lived, Sylhet would have been turned into a garden city...He turned Companyganj, a cluster of villages with no electricity or roads under his constituency, into a small town with all the amenities including a small digital phone exchange.

He was the Bangladesh candidate for the post of SG of OIC (Organization Of Islamic Conference). Due to complex reasons, the post was retained by Morocco for the second term. However, the post was assured to Bangladesh and Humayun Rasheed Choudhury. But he is no more.

Humayun Rasheed Choudhury died on the 10th of July 2001 very suddenly leaving his wife and daughter to mourn the vacuum in their life...

Nasrine R. Karim is daughter of late Humayun Rasheed Choudhury.

OPINION

Accurate printing of Holy Quran

DR. M. S. HAQ writes from New York

HOLY Quran should be printed, as far as humanly possible, with 100 percent precision and care. There must not be any printing mistake whatsoever in the Holy Book. Because typographical and other errors have, among other things, implications of both spiritual and inter-generational characters.

At present, it is difficult to say with a 100 percent certainty that the Book is being printed fool proof throughout the world. To explore the matter, several questions need to be answered. Some of them are: What are the current nature and dimension of inaccurate printing cases at local, national and global levels? What kind of in-country mechanism is in use (where applicable) to detect and deal with the above case(s)? How much productive are the in-country statutory requirement and regulatory body (where applicable) when it comes to ensuring the accuracy and the quality of the proof of the Book (before printing) and the eventually

printed Book? What is the current global rate of technology use involved in the printing of the Book and what kind of technology is being used? Is there any public communication, as well as reward system at local and national levels for encouraging the users of the Book to correctly detect and report any error to the authorities concerned, per se? What is the present role of religious institutions, as well as scholars in protecting the Book from inaccurate printing? How can OIC and other relevant world institutions support world countries and people in their effort to ensure and sustain error free Holy Quran? How to harness an optimal media support (both print and electronic) in pertinent areas?

Taking cognisance of the above and other related matters, relevant countries and institutions (as applicable) should take stock of their present status in pertinent areas and ensure remedial measure(s), as required. The representatives of our government ministries (like religious affairs and information), mass media, political parties, universities, religious institutions and civil

society may jointly deliberate on the matters with a view to preparing a draft national strategy on error free Holy Quran. The strategy should focus on the areas like, institution (including legislations), structure, capacity, resources, implementation modalities, mechanisms for the resolution of differences of opinion, rewards and controls in the pursuit of achieving error free Holy Quran on a continuing basis. For the resolution of differences of opinion on, let us say, the spelling of Holy Word(s), Bangladesh may, if needed, seek the advice of relevant institutions in Saudi Arabia and other countries. The strategy should also identify the ways and means for enhancing Bangladesh's contribution to pertinent world bodies like, OIC in the pursuit of promoting Error free Holy Quran world-wide.

The strategy, prior to its implementation, should be vetted by our parliament. Besides, it is expected that OIC would take necessary steps, among other things, towards devising and enforcing (in the form of support to countries) a global standard for the accurate printing of Holy Quran.

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