

## Lawyers come good on unity

Professionalism triumphant over politics

LAWYERS have found a point of convergence to uphold their professional norms almost lost in the raucous political divisions that cast a shadow in recent times over their ability to work together, even for a common cause.

It is a welcome development that lawyers, irrespective of their political affiliations, have arrived at a set of norms that would help them discharge their duties with greater commitment to society. It was not an unexpected move since lawyers are supposed to allow their professional needs and standards to supersede all other considerations. But what is unique about the latest instance of lawyers rallying behind a common cause is that they have succeeded in casting aside the political currents and cross currents, which greatly blurred their primary identity and focus as legal practitioners in the recent past.

The Bar Council, as the apex body of the lawyers, has adopted a 20-point resolution. The lawyers have collectively identified the problems and have put forward remedial suggestions. For example, political appointment of judges, or politicisation of the process, has for quite some time been a controversial issue which continues to undermine the position of the judiciary. Some cases of judges superseding senior colleagues were reported in recent years and there was a loud outcry against the deviation from professional standards. But it is for the first time that lawyers have spoken collectively against it, rising above political alignments.

The question of separation of the judiciary from the executive branch of the government has been raised once more. It is a demand that successive governments promised to fulfil, but in practice little progress has been made to give the judiciary the freedom it needs to act without being inhibited by extraneous factors.

The lawyers have given a fresh reminder to the government of its obligations as far as separation of the judiciary is concerned. The government, for its part, should heed the suggestions of the Bar Council, which are but the results of a consensus forged by legal practitioners across the board.

## Action against Buriganga grabbers

Demolition should be followed by legal action

WE take heart in the sternness and vigour with which the demolition work on illegal structures on the banks of the river Buriganga is making progress. The flip-side to it, however, is the return of the grabbers in some measure. The fact that 500 such unauthorised structures are being pulled down in a week is a feat by any standard. The authorities' serious bid to evict the encroachers who are doing harm to both the environment and the riverside beauty merits felicitation.

It's worth recalling a drive was determinedly initiated by the caretaker government, but for obvious reasons, it didn't last long. Since then, demolition has been intermittently carried out by authorities, but because of their sporadic nature they failed to make any dent in the situation. Thanks to the law enforcement slack, the encroachers crept back on to the scene rebuilding structures from the rubble. Nevertheless, we now see signs of renewed commitment and determination that were sorely missed in the past.

So far so good; the authorities would do well to remember that their responsibility doesn't end with just the demolition work and eviction of the encroachers. In the past, similar attempts fizzled out because of legal tangles. First, the process of demolition will have to be sustained; secondly, the results of the work done will have to be consolidated; and last but not least, effective legal action must be taken against the land grabbers and environment violators. If legal action is not taken against the encroachers after the demolition work, they would simply return and reclaim the land they had been occupying illegally before being thrown out. After all, there are some government bodies as well on the list of encroachers. No one should be spared.

On top of joining the environmental activists in calling for non-stop demolition along the riverside, we urge the government to take deterrent punitive action against the land grabbers and polluters.

# Mahathir taking the world by storm

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

NEW YORK TIMES (NYT) found Malaysia's Prime Minister's long discourse on the plight of Muslims presented to the OIC Summit at Putrajaya on 16th October as "a toxic statement of hatred of the Jews". And it viewed the EU summit's refusal to condemn Mahathir in its Summit statement as "adding a worry that display of anti-Semitism is being met with inexcusable non-chalance". Italian Foreign Minister, however, (Italy is the current President of the EU) faulted Mahathir for using "gravely offensive expressions, expressions that were strongly anti-Semitic". White House not only denounced the "hateful remarks" but President Bush during APEC meeting in Thailand personally remonstrated with Prime Minister Mahathir for his "wrong and divisive remarks". Mahathir told the *Bangkok Post* that the reaction of the world showed that the Jews do control the world.

One wishes that before jumping to pronounce judgement the pro-Zionists had taken the trouble to go through the text of the speech of Mahathir Mohamad as Paul Krugman advised his readers of the NYT in its 21st October issue. Most of it, he wrote, was criticism directed at other Muslims, clerics in particular, and a lot of the speech sounded as if it had been written by Bernard Lewis who has made a name for himself by writing on Islamic decline. Krugman admonishes the Bush administration that thanks to its war on Iraq and unconditional support to Ariel Sharon, Washington has squandered away the post-nineteen sympathy and brought relations with the Muslims to a new low. Krugman adds "somewhere in Pakistan Osama bin Laden must be enjoying this. The war on terror did not have to be perceived as war on Islam, but we seem to be doing our best to make it look that way".

If anything Prime Minister Mahathir deserves the unqualified appreciation of the Islamic world for identifying "our detractors and oppressors", criticising the harmful and artificial divisions created in the Muslim Ummah by the "new inter-

preters of Islam", and for charting out ways for the Muslims to get out of the quagmire. Mahathir's erudition and intellectual vibrancy in retracing the lessons bequeathed by Prophet Mohammed (SM) of strategic retreat in order to win final victory is truly remarkable. He warned his august gathering of OIC summiteers (freckles' summit meetings in the eyes of NYT-18th October) that "our detractors and enemies" would attack and kill the Muslims, invade their lands and bring down their governments unless the Muslims unite for the defence of the Ummah. He bemoans the failure of the Muslims

the West, so as to bring about enlightened moderation, mutual understanding and increased appreciation of Islam as a religion promoting peace and harmony among mankind.

Putrajaya OIC summit was not a declaration of war by the Muslims on their persecutors. On the contrary it was an appeal of sort to the non-Muslim world inviting their attention to clarify on Islam and also an endeavour to unite Islamic Ummah by ceasing divisional and sectarian strife in order to meet the onslaught on Islam because otherwise, as Mahathir Mohamad warned: "The Muslims will forever be oppressed

(The religious under currents of Muslim economic grievances-Timur Kuran-Social Science Research Council).

An international group of experts deliberating at Oslo in June this year to identify the root causes of terrorism concluded that suicide terrorism is not caused by religion or more specifically Islam. But for one the group had no Muslim scholar. They found that (a) lack of democracy, civil liberties and rule of law; (b) failed or weak states; (c) hegemony and inequality of power; (d) powerful external actors upholding illegitimate governments; (e) repression by foreign occupation; (f) the experi-

1.3 billion Muslims simply cannot be wiped out should be given due consideration. The creation of Israel as atonement for Holocaust and more generally for the persecution of the Jews by the Europeans along with continuing Israeli disregard for UNSC and UNGA resolutions under the pretext of providing security from militants need forensic investigation. Robert Hefner of Boston University holds the view that over the long term, a favourable outcome will require that the US and other countries dedicate themselves to resolving once and for all the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As long as that impasse remains, Muslim demo-

Islamic -- constant struggle with a minority group of neo-fundamentalists who would love to ban female presence from public life, oppose music, arts and entertainment. Bush administration would be compounding its blunders if it assumes the "unanimous applause" given to Mahathir Mohamad by the assembled Heads of State/Government at Putrajaya as reflective of neo-fundamentalism in Islam. Robert Kagan's unflinching confidence in American military pre-eminence in opposition to European aversion to the use of military force as indicative of Europe's weakness has to be left behind. One has to keep reminding that American unipolar moment has come and gone and Joseph Nye's "American Paradox" is a reality where though the US cannot be assailed by any nation-state she cannot resolve transnational problems without multilateral cooperation.

Mahathir's speech to the OIC summit was a reminder to the Bush administration, if any reminder was needed at all, of this American Paradox. Well-wishers have advised the Bush administration to take the Arabs and the Muslims seriously by opening a direct dialogue with them to lessen the deep seated anger over perceived American arrogance and hypocrisy and arrest corrosive skepticism relating to American intentions towards the Muslim world. Efforts should be directed to talk to the Muslims and to engage them rather than to manipulate them. America's image as "arrogant, self-indulgent, hypocritical, inattentive, and unwilling or unable to engage in cross-cultural dialogue" needs immediate repair. The recent Franco-German-British initiative on Iran is a welcome move. One hopes the Bush administration would join the European caravan and eschew its penchant to filter all global problems through its obsessive eyes of war on terrorism.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

to take advantage of the Industrial Revolution thus regressing the Muslim civilisation to the point of weakness which encouraged the Europeans to colonise the Muslim countries and to "excise Muslim land to create the State of Israel to solve their Jewish problem. Divided the Muslims could do nothing effective to stop Balfour and Zionist transgression".

In view of the contemptible and dishonourable state of Islam today Mahathir Mohamad introduces Muslims to the enemy's strategy who "survived 2000 years of pogrom not by hitting back but by thinking. They invented and successfully promoted socialism, communism, human rights and democracy" to avoid persecution and slowly to gain control of the powerful countries of the world. Like Kofi Annan, Mahathir sees no victory in senseless suicidal attacks because "it is winning the struggle that is important, not angry retaliation, not revenge". Putrajaya Declaration issued at the end of the OIC summit of 11-18 October, inter alia, calls for dialogue with other cultures and civilisations, including

and dominated by the Europeans and the Jews. They will forever be poor, backward and weak". One cannot but emphasise the urgent necessity to remove the opaque and obscure vision the West has about Islam. Timur Kuran of the University of Southern California makes the point that as Timothy McVeigh belonged to a small minority of Americans consumed by hatred against their government, so Islamists, whether or not they are prone to violence, differ from most Muslims by a commitment to radical global transformation. Kuran, however, points out that those economic grievances that contribute to Muslim resentment of the global economic order and have unmistakable cultural and religious dimensions have to be addressed. Otherwise catching Osama bin Laden and the destruction of the Talebans will do nothing to alleviate the nightmarish conditions of Afghan countryside or the slums of Cairo nor will it keep Pakistani and Saudi youth from being taught that the West is evil and that oversimplified and grotesque version of Islam is the gateway to ultimate wisdom

of social injustice, among others, contributed to terrorism. One is therefore concerned over the reasserted view of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi that the underlying problem for the West is not terrorism or even Islamic fundamentalism but Islam as "a rival and inferior civilisation." Despite Berlusconi's penchant to raise political storms through irresponsible utterances (one may recall the recent spat with Germany over his comparison of a German Euro parliament member with a Nazi prison guard), one has to take notice of such comments when one fifth of humanity accepts "Islamic" and "Muslim" as self-descriptive. European efforts, particularly those of the French and the Germans, to understand transnational, trans-cultural and trans-religious differences notwithstanding, Berlusconi type expression of aggressive mentality can make Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations" idea a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Western powers could consider undertaking introspective excursion into their conduct both past and present. Mahathir's declaration that

crats' appeal for peace and tolerance across civilisations is likely to receive cool reception even among the moderate and western educated Muslims.

One cannot but be amazed at the tone-deaf style of Bush administration diplomacy which refuses to recognise the political blunder of Iraqi invasion (moral justification of uprooting a despicable dictatorship notwithstanding) and untrammelled support extended to Ariel Sharon as main causes of anti-Americanism in the Muslim world. It would be incredible to assume that suddenly more than a billion people have become Islamists who see Islam not as a mere religion but as a political ideology which should be integrated in all aspects of society. On the other hand credence may be given to the observation of Ibn Khaldun made six hundred years ago that popular religion in Muslim societies tends to oscillate between periods of strict religious observance and others of devotional laxity. The Khaldunian model rings true even today when one observes the different strands in Muslim politics -- neomodernism, Islamic liberalism or democratic

# On borrowed time?

SAGAR CHAUDHURY

HERE is a strong possibility, growing stronger with every passing day, that after the next general election scheduled for 2006 the British Prime Minister's office will have a new incumbent. There is also the strong speculation that it may come sooner than that, basically for two reasons: one is that the election may be held as early as 2004 in case something happens to make the Labour Party hierarchy feel that it will be to their advantage - in the immediate aftermath of the Iraq war they had indeed started harbouring such a feeling; and the other, more imminent reason is that a survey conducted among back-bench Labour MPs on the eve of the annual Labour Party conference held in September revealed that nearly 25 per cent of them would like Tony Blair to leave Downing Street immediately, while a similar proportion were in favour of a peaceful transition either before or after the general election. Although just over a quarter of party backbenchers are believed to be still prepared to stand unconditionally behind Mr Blair, they are an obvious minority. The Chancellor Mr Gordon Brown is an obvious replacement and as this year's Party Conference -- Mr Blair's tenth as Labour leader -- concluded, bookies all over the country were already getting ready to accept bets on either him or his logical successor and the odds at the moment are not really in the PM's favour.

Another thing that must have sent jitters down the spines of the Labour leadership just before the conference began was the result of the Brent East by-election, which saw a relatively unknown Liberal Democrat candidate defeat the Labour candidate by a comfortable margin. The outcome of this by-election is all the more significant because Brent East was considered to be one of the safest electoral areas for the Labour Party and this was the first time in fifteen years that the Party had to face a crisis of this type. Political analysts are viewing this incident as a reflection of the British public's discontent about Mr Blair's stand on Iraq and a sign of the growing disillusionment of the electorate about his government's overall performance. It is also worth noting that Ms Oona King, Labour MP for East London's Tower Hamlets -- a predominantly Asian (Bangalee) area population-wise -- has fallen badly out of favour with

the locals for supporting the war against Iraq, so it would perhaps not come as a really big surprise if she and her party had to bear the brunt of the voters' discontent in a future election.

In an exclusive interview given to a Sunday broadsheet shortly before the crucial Party Conference at Bournemouth, Mr Blair did manage to put forward a semblance of confidence although -- for the first time -- he acknowledged that he was finding it tough going to combat the events of the past few months. He indicated that although reforms such as topping up university tuition fees or establishing foundation

with wary suspicion. This was reflected in the words of someone close to the Chancellor who told BBC's Politics Show programme: "There is a feeling now of disquiet, a sense that we have lost our way and in particular that we are losing the trust of the people that ought to be on our side. We need to find a way to regain that trust."

It is true that when Mr Blair addressed the Conference, he was enthusiastically applauded by members of his cabinet as well as others present among the audience. His 50-minute speech was also greeted with repeated standing ovations. But the next morning all

and the determination and the strategy to turn the Labour Party's weaknesses to their advantage. So while there is a strong chance of a change of leadership in the Labour Party, there is no real chance of a change of government in the foreseeable future -- at least that is how I read the scenario.

### A Reprieved Reformation

If my memory serves me right, that's the name of a short story penned by the American writer O Henry that I read many years ago (do forgive me, if I have got the title wrong). It is the story of a notorious safe-cracker who, trying to avoid being appre-

minutes. The banker, who has the only keys that will open the vault, is away and no one knows what to do. Well, our safe-cracker, who has become a totally reformed character since he met his lady love, knows what he must do in order to prove to her that he is really worthy of her. So he opens his suitcase, takes out his tools and begins to tinker with the locks and in a few minutes succeeds in opening the door and bringing the nearly unconscious child out into the open air. Everybody is jubilant, jostling with one another to shake his hand, clap him on the back etc, when he notices a pair of keen, shrewd eyes

virtually unknown, the Mexican-Australian author DBC Pierre, for his first work "Vernon God Little". It was definitely what is known as an "upset" in betting circles.

But what has DBC Peirre's book got in common with O Henry's story? Nothing, as a matter of fact, but its author has, in my opinion, something intriguingly in common with O Henry's safe-cracker. To elaborate, the safe-cracker took a pseudonym in order to escape the law, and the name of the author of "Vernon God Little" is also a nom de plume -- his real name is Peter Finlay -- and although he is not known to have assumed this name to hide from the law, he is no stranger to unlawful pursuits. In fact, DBC is an acronym for "Dirty But Clean" which is the description of an Australian cartoon character that spends his life living on his wits, cheating people and stealing from those who befriend him. Like this character, Peter Finlay also has a lurid past, chequered with many unsavoury activities like working up debts of hundreds of thousands of dollars, indulging in drug and gambling addictions, smuggling contraband, leaving behind a trail of wronged women etc. He has also tried his hand, albeit unsuccessfully, at film making and treasure hunting.

But what brings Peter Finlay's character parallel to that of O Henry's safe-cracker is that while love made the safe-cracker a reformed man, it is the inner creative urge, what Peter Finlay himself calls the "art beast" struggling within him, that finally enabled him to metamorphose into what he has become today -- a creative writer, and an undoubtedly good one at that measured by Booker prize standards. And Peter Finlay -- or DBC Pierre, if you prefer -- himself feels that he is at least reforming, if not quite reformed yet. He has said that he is going to use the £50,000 cheque he has won to pay off some of his debts and, as he may well be able to make a fortune from future writings like other Booker prize winners, he will certainly try to compensate all the people he has wronged over the years. Well repentance -- if that's what it is -- is strong medicine and it may indeed win Peter Finlay a reprieve next.

## LONDON LETTER

The present Labour Government under Mr Blair has already been in power for a record period and is beginning to show the tell-tale signs of dissolution -- complacency, arrogance and losing its edge. But the main opposition -- the Conservative Party -- is in disarray, their leadership lacking the strength and the determination and the strategy to turn the Labour Party's weaknesses to their advantage.

hospitals proposed by the government had generated a lot of controversy, turning away from them at this point would be a grave mistake. "The worst thing we could do at the moment is back off and back away," he said: "Whatever the battering you get, I actually feel more confident of our forward agenda. If we give up on that, it would be just a catastrophic mistake." Brushing aside the whippers circulating in Whitehall and elsewhere, he said that the Government was going to "hold its nerve" in the face of all adverse criticism and that he would stand for a full third term at the next general election.

Meanwhile, a poll conducted on behalf of the same Sunday broadsheet that carried his interview found that more than 40 per cent of Labour Party members considered Mr Blair an unacceptably liability and wanted him to resign before the general election, while nearly 60 per cent believed that he was wrong to join the US President in going to war against Iraq. The same poll also revealed that Mr Gordon Brown enjoyed strong support among Labour sympathisers, with 88 per cent of them declaring to be satisfied with the way he was doing his job as Chancellor of the Exchequer. The real challenge, however, facing the Prime Minister is that much of his own party now looks upon him

the national dailies carried pictures of Gordon Brown sitting in the front row looking grim and with his hands folded in his lap while others around him were clapping their hands off. Mr Blair declared once more that he was certainly not going to "back off" from the government's "forward agenda", adding: "I have no reverse gear" which earned him another round of applause. But at the next day's session, the government's much vaunted scheme for foundation hospitals was summarily rejected by the unions, thus forcing the Government to suffer a humiliating defeat and causing panic among loyal Blairites. At the moment everybody is keeping quiet, probably watching each other's back surreptitiously, trying their best to interpret body language if one may use that expression.

Like the Awami League and the BNP in Bangladesh, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party in Britain have held power in turns ever since Labour's Clement Attlee replaced Winston Churchill. The present Labour Government under Mr Blair has already been in power for a record period and is beginning to show the tell-tale signs of dissolution -- complacency, arrogance and losing its edge. But the main opposition -- the Conservative Party -- is in disarray, their leadership lacking the strength

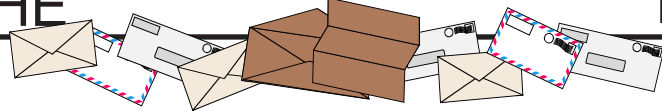
hended by a tenacious policeman, arrives at a small, sleepy town and sets himself up there under a pseudonym. Soon he discovers that the old-fashioned vault of the town's only bank was fitted with locks that would be ludicrously easy for him to pick and so begins to devise a plan to help himself to its contents. But one day as he is reconnoitering the premises, he comes upon a beautiful young lady and all thoughts of robbery goes out of his mind in a flash as he is smitten head over heels with love at first sight. He discovers that she is actually the daughter of the owner of the bank and manages to ingratiate himself with her father with the purpose of asking for her hand in marriage at a suitable time. He has already decided to turn a new leaf, to give up his safe-cracking career and sever all ties with his criminal past. He has a suitcase full of the tools of his trade which he wants to dispose of.

One afternoon, suitcase in hand, he is on his way to the railway station when he notices a crowd and a commotion in front of the bank. Noticing his lady love among them he approaches near and learns that the banker's youngest son -- the young lady's kid brother -- has somehow locked himself inside the vault which is totally airtight and will certainly suffocate to death unless he can be brought out within a few

watching him over the heads of the crowd around him. Yes, it is the policeman who has been after him all these months. Realising that his time is up he approaches the officer and says: "Well, you've found me, so take me away." But the policeman looks at him for a few seconds feigning puzzlement and says: "You must be mistaken, Sir, I don't know you at all." Saying that he raises his hat in a salute, turns and goes away. Our hero has won a reprieve.

Now, why did I have to narrate this story at length? Because the circumstances surrounding this year's Man Booker award, viewed as literature's most prestigious for the best fiction writing, reminded me of it. This year's Man Booker winner is -- no, not Monica Ali, the author of "Brick Lane" which topped the Granta magazine short-list of first books earlier this year, received lots of pre-publication accolades, managed to generate quite a furore among a section of the Bangladeshi (mainly Sylheti) community in London who took umbrage at some of the remarks made by the principal characters of the book and was also a hot favourite with the bookies as a sure winner. But finally the £50,000 Booker award -- which made the careers of Salman Rushdie, JM Coetzee and Margaret Atwood, among others -- went to someone

# TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### India's river-link plan

In order to create public awareness on the above subject, the DS should publish a half-page map of the subcontinent showing the relief and detailed drainage system, preferably on the front page. Such a map would speak volumes and make clear India's absurd venture to reverse nature which is bound to bring disaster to the nation itself besides the consequential catastrophe to Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries. And what if

China diverts the headwaters of the *Brahmaputra* emulating India! And other nations in parallel positions would do the same! Humanity will be in danger almost everywhere.

So the issue is not simply regional, it is global. Conscious people and activists around the world must unite and come forward to resist the ominous plan invoking the world charter for nature.

MA Hashem  
Ring Rd, Shyamoly, Dhaka

### Sheba Telecom

Bangladesh is a poor country but still there is demand for mobile phone in the country. And a large portion of the population use mobile phones. Sheba telecom is one of the mobile companies which offers a very cheap rate and that is very tempting. But the service they provide is really bad. I should say so bad that anyone can't even think of. One of my relatives was admitted to Gastro Liver Clinic in Green Road. And I went to see him. As soon as I entered

the clinic my mobile indicated no frequency. I was expecting some important calls but I failed to receive them. Even after having a mobile connection of Sheba Telecom I had to borrow a mobile from an stranger in the clinic who had an Aktel connection and made the calls. So, what is the use of having a mobile if a person cannot use it in case of emergencies.

Now a days they give advertisements on the streets saying have Voice Mail Service whereas the customers of Sheba does not

even know about it. (I have seen these advertisements at Rifles Square and Gulshan 2). Grameen Phone, City Cell and Aktel users can send messages to all parts of the world but Sheba Telecom users cannot. Therefore what is the use of having sms service in Sheba Telecom. This is because I hardly know any relative or any other friend having Sheba Mobile connection. So, my question is why doesn't Sheba Telecom improve their network and any other services? Without satisfying the demand of the customers they

already have, they are going for more customers and they are introducing new packages like Valentines Day, FIFA World Cup, Bangla New Year and so on.

In their advertisement, or you may say logo, they have written "Sheba Telecom", "Simply Better"; but I would say that they should change it and say something else. After all, your advertisements and service quality should not contradict! Or should they?

Rajiv Siddique  
One-e-mail

### Marriage crisis

Only the parents who have marriageable children could say well as to how they pass their time in tension thinking about their children's marriage. Every parent, no matter what social strata they belong, suffers from the tension of marrying their children. And we know that often neighbours and relatives, rather than be of any help, remain busy criticising; such as why the young-aged daughter is not getting married and so on. Meanwhile the parents spend days in anxiety

finding an eligible partner for the daughter.

Sometimes the parents even have to go to a professional matchmaker to ensure their daughter a normal social life. And these matchmakers take money finding good many excuses.

My request to government is to establish a matchmaking institution to save the parents of young children as the whole society is suffering from marriage crisis.

Citizen  
On mail