**DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 30, 2003** 

### Purbachal plots

Allotment irregularities can't be made light of

llotment of Rajuk plots at Purbachal has given rise to a host of unpleasant questions. Newspaper reports say the allotment process was politically manipulated, apart from being plagued by many other irregularities

It has transpired that the list of the allotees has been published without the approval of the ECNEC. This deviation from the official procedure indicates that the men in charge of handling the project were not particularly worried about the infraction. Then more than one member of a family got plots in clear violation of the rules laid down by Rajuk itself. Rajuk employees not eligible for such plots have also managed to make their way into the final list of allotees.

What is particularly worrying is that the beneficiaries of violation of rules include lawmakers and ministers. That certainly adds to the widespread apprehension that the entire process was manipulated by the elements having political clout.

Regrettably, allotment of Rajuk plots had created controversy in the past, with politicisation of the allotment process being the principle charge that the authorities faced. The situation is not very different this time around.

What does all this boil down to? Will there never be a fair allotment process free from manipulation and unholy influence?

Allotment of plots in Uttara was cancelled not long ago because it smacked of favouritism, political or otherwise. But it seems the ingredients, including political influence, for an opaque allotment under a housing project have retained their potency.

Since several irregularities are being alleged about the allotment process, the government needs to investigate the matter with a view to establishing accountability in the distribution of plots. Such a step is warranted not only in the interest of genuine applicants, but also to make sure that people do not lose their confidence in the public sector housing projects, after all that has happened in recent

### Car set ablaze at DU

Let's put a stop to street justice

HE increasing incidence of mobs meting out street justice is a disturbing symptom of the corrosion of respect for the rule of law in the country. In the latest such incident, Dhaka University students set fire to a car and severely beat up its driver after he had hit a rickshaw causing minor injuries to one of its passengers.

There was no suggestion that the driver had been driving recklessly or that he had attempted to flee the scene or in any way acted inappropriately. Nor was the accident victim seriously hurt, although the young man who was driving the car has been admitted to DCMH with severe injuries from the beating.

In any event, even had the driver been guilty of recklessness or acted in a high-handed or arrogant manner, there cannot be any justification for bystanders to beat him up and set fire to his car.

Matters such as these can be dealt with perfectly well in a court of law and the fact that the mob took the law into its own hands merely goes to show how far the law and order situation has deteriorated.

That the vigilantes were DU students was more disquieting still, and it can sadly come as a surprise that the mob's ring-leader was identified by the police as a JCD student

The message sent by such vigilante action is that justice is not dispensed by a court of law but by whoever has the strength to mete it out, and that those who arrogate to themselves the duty of enforcing street justice are above

The first step to improving the law and order situation is to make clear that none is above the law or can take the law into his own hands. Those responsible must be brought to book.

# Governance: Don't judge the book by its cover

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

HE BNP-Jamaat coalition has governed the nation for two years. The achievement and success of the government are being measured in political, social and economic terms. The government eniovs a comfortable twothirds majority in the parliament and shows signs of resilience. The PM has tough words in stock for the opposition while the opposition bothers little to attend parliamentary sessions. The law and order situation is atrocious: and so is the economy that depraves amid 'unbridled' price hikes and massive lay off.

The government's response to such concerns is a bit weird and wobbly. Decisions are taken only to rescind under pressure (for instance onion price). Increased demands for consumer products are being met by import, not through investment to increase productions in firms and factories. Government is savingsavvy and investment-shy. Perhaps that is why we import ten times more than what we export

The forex reserve is compara-

tively satisfactory (about \$2.7 billion), but barely enough to pull us through three months of import financing. Irrelevant though it is how much we have in the kitty if that does not reproduce or proliferate; the collateral value of it must be used to maximise our national interests. A dollar is just a dollar as long as it sits tight: it is worth millions if it changes hands. Thanks to about five million expatriate workers who are contributing the most to pull this impoverished nation out of a prolonged stagnation perpetuated by decades of misrule and paucity of predictive vision. We must strive to create

abroad, and soon.

Beginning with the early 1980s, import rose to 18 per cent of GDP while export increased to 15 per cent. This may look okay, but in money terms, the deficit constitutes 10 per cent of GDP. Compare this with other Least Developed Countries (LDC), which, as a group, garnered 28 per cent GDP from export and import stood at about 29 per cent. Our trade deficit had hit the galaxy lately (nearly \$5 billion, of which \$1 billion with India). The economy suffers from nonequilibrium within and without.

60 per cent) in the current fiscal from the 2001-02 benchmark of \$304

Politics is all about delivering what is needed individually and collectively. Leaders must be wise to know that they control and manage our national assets and resources; and, we all have a stake in it. Blame globalisation, 9/11, conspiracy, opposition stalwarts, or whatever you will. for failings in governance. But leadership entails much more than blame-gaming. People want leaders to ensure justice, security and opportunities

through the clog, three millions are added to the job market each year, half of them ending up without any employment. This huge army of jobless inflates ranks and files of miscreants to nix rules of law. Then, there are over 100 million still lanauishing below the poverty line. Their fundamental rights include timely access to employment, health and social welfare. How much is being done to ensure that, and by whom?

Coupled with government's decision to close down a number of public owned industries, opportunities for employment shrank further moving of files; prompt gas, electricity and telephone connections in commercial/ industrial outlets: absence of kickback: befriending of domestic and foreign industrial captains; and ensurance of rules of law: none of it is happening much. despite pre-election promises. Why can't we get these basics sorted out

Then there is a culture of brain draining that hamstring our ability further as most of our talents had gone abroad and we have little incentive to lure them back. Pakistan decided in 2001 that it would

has been, and remains to be, accessible only to an oligopoly of entrepreneurs with partisan political leaning. Over 50 per cent of them are now branded as defaulters. As well, the fruit of whatever was invested does not seem to have chipped into the real economy as

entrepreneurs are cash starved and dare not approach banks due to the rates of interest exceeding expected returns. Nations raise interest rates to save economies from overheating. We seem unaware that the economy is stymied, not overheated.

Industrialisation is also hostage to, inter alia, shortage of power supply. Despite our power generating capacity having grown three folds over the last two decades (from 1.0 million kilowatts in 1980 to 3.3 million kilowatts), per capita generation reduced further as the population swelled from 85 to 129 millions. In the neighbourhood, per capita electricity generation stands at 0.1 kilowatts in India, 0.12 in Pakistan and 0.21 in China. Our's is 0.03 kilowatts only.

These being facts in hand, one must suspect that something is grossly wrong at the top echelon of our leadership. Hence, to say the government is doing 'good' entails the hazard of being liable of judging the book by its eye-catching multi coloured cover only. Aside from the issues of governance -- especially the failure to arrest lawlessness and keep the opposition in the parliament -- the economy's 'peculiarity' is particularly worrisome.

Author and columnist M. Shahidul Islam is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

A major factor retarding employment and growth is the difficulties a budding entrepreneur faces while accessing finance. Project finance has been, and remains to be, accessible only to an oligopoly of entrepreneurs with partisan political leaning. Over 50 per cent of them are now branded as defaulters. As well, the fruit of whatever was invested does not seem to have chipped into the real economy as yet.

Uncertainty is an anathema to nvestment. There are tertiary and substantive pitfalls that spurred such uncertainties. Chronic political instability, lawlessness, lack of infrastructure and poor research and dynamism are barring us from reaching out the global market. Between 1999-2002, private sector investment dropped from 7.4 per cent to 7.1 per cent of GDP amid caution not to inflate the economy.

Hang on. Don't we know that a seesaw trade off correlates the fibre of inflation and employment? Developing economies' priority must lie in tolerating higher inflation to achieve enhanced growth through investment and job creation. This partly explains why Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) accounts for only 0.50 per cent of our GDP. The FDI

that will enable them to move ahead with rational dreams.

The inflationary fear is unfounded, and it is already higher than that we're led to believe. Take for instance the Chinese economy, which had performed the best in the preceding decade. Between 1990-2001, average inflation in China was 7.1 per cent, in India 8.6 per cent and in Pakistan 9.2 per cent. Bangladesh, amazingly, has had an inflation of 5.1 per cent only during the period. It's even less now. The figure is good for showcasing as an economic sleight of hand, but the recurrent devaluation of the Taka and a sudden surge in prices of essentials belie the existing data on inflation. Our mode of accounting seems riddled with 'dubious figures.'

lately. This will impact negatively upon expected demand generation and growth. The food import spree is hurting the agriculture, which employs over 60 per cent of the 50 million strong workers

The economy also has an unaccounted for chapter, for kickback constitutes a bulk of our economic transactions. World Bank's Global Competitiveness Report of 2001/02 showed Bangladesh as the lowest among the 75 countries where bribery bottlenecked investment and growth. And, for the third time in a row, the Transparency International said we're the most corrupt nation on earth. With respect to infrastructure. Bangladesh ranks penultimate, just above Bolivia, in a global index of 74 developing

pay its talents nearly the similar amount if they fall back to work for the nation. Almost 90 per cent heeded to the call. Indian public sector too now competes with private sector to stir competitiveness within. Our government recoils to such prospects. Are we aware that per capita

growth pebbles constitute the bedrock of the development highway? This implies that a prosperous nation is built on individual skill and dynamism. The average per capita growth in Bangladesh was 1.2 per cent in the 1990s, against India's 3.5 per cent, Sri Lanka's 3.7 per cent and China's 8.2 per cent. The data changed little since in our case

A major factor retarding employment and growth is the difficulties a budding entrepreneur faces while

# After the 'Sankalp Sammelan'

## Hindutva's strategic crisis



PRAFUL BIDWAI writes from New Delhi

ILLIONS feel relieved that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's deplorable sankalp sammelan, meant to precipitate a crisis in Ayodhya, turned out a flop. VHP leaders could not enter the temple/mosque complex on October 17.

Finally, VHP supporters contented themselves with a darshan of Ramlalla in small groups under government escort. Mr Ashok Singhal stood completely isolated in his sadhu's robes when he was

The sammelan flopping demonstrates four things. First, a determined state government can enforce law and order in Ayodhya without shedding blood. Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav had a specific mandate from the Allahabad High Court against a VHP meeting. The Centre too is legally obliged to protect the status of the land vested in it in 1993.

The BJP's national leadership was reluctant to destabilise Mr Yadav after he indicated a "moder-

ate" approach. (This was reflected in allowing some 20-30,000 VHP supporters to enter Ayodhya after October 17 -- although even this could have been avoided).

Second, there is no support for the VHP's temple agenda in Ayodhya/Faizabad, leave alone elsewhere in UP and the Hindi heartland. Ayodhya's traders. mahants and sadhus joined hands against the VHP. The lead was

The BJP sharply criticises the Parishad. In return, the VHP spews filthy abuse every week at the BJP, and even more important, at Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, accusing them of "capitulating" to secularism! The fact that Mr Vajpayee hasn't rebuffed the VHP has not enhanced

After the sammelan fiasco, the BJP and VHP are likely to drift further apart. The BJP's governthat's is fiercely nationalist (but strongly anti-internationalist), and opposed to the BJP's globalisation agenda. This enables them to occupy the opposition space, edging out the real Centre-Left opposition to neoliberalism.

Others, like Vidya Bharati, which runs 20,000 schools, are crucial to recruiting children. Some, like the Bajrang Dal, are composed of modern-day storm-troopers who RSS activist, and India's "second ambassador" to the US. Mr Agnihotri's anomalous status -- the US doesn't recognise him -- his communal views, and his demands on the Indian exchequer, have generated controversy.

However, what puts him in especially uncomplimentary light is IDRF's fund collection, a portion of which probably financed last year's violence in Gujarat. A US-based

because he is a shudra who has dared to learn the shastras. Hindutva advocates have no respect for any religious sensibilities. As an agnostic, I can admire Mother Teresa's epochal social work, without sharing her faith, or believing that she really performed

stories of Ram, including narratives

that show him in a sensitive, kindly

light, as a person who can be

remorseful about his complex

relationship with Seeta. Their Ram

is a warrior God, angry, militant, out

on punitive expeditions. This Ram

can behead Shambuka merely

'miracles" The RSS cannot. It churlishly declared her beatification a "Christian conspiracy"; the Pope honoured her for "creating 10,000 priests in Mizoram" and contributing

This speaks of despicable meanness of spirit -- and failure to see anything good in any religion other than the sangh's dried-up version of Hinduism. It also speaks of paranoia about non-Hindus: "all they want to do is propagate their religion and

change!

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian

Hindutva advocates have no respect for any religious sensibilities. As an agnostic, I can admire Mother Teresa's epochal social work, without sharing her faith, or believing that she really performed "miracles". The RSS cannot. It churlishly declared her beatification a "Christian conspiracy"... Such sick minds are unfit to lead. It's India's tragedy that the RSS is the chief leader of its present leaders.

Bonds of friendship between Hindus and Muslims have been greatly strengthened in and around the

Third, a majority of the VHP's Ram-bhakts came from the non-Hindi speaking states -- half from Gujarat alone. Their total strength was only a fraction of the numbers mobilised 10 or 12 years ago.

Evidently, the temple movement is running out of steam-- and into conflict with India's judicial pro-

Finally, the VHP's "confrontationist" approach (NB: the BJP's term, not mine) is denting the image of the entire sangh parivar, including its political arm, the BJP, and the paterfamilias, the RSS.

taken by Mahant Gyan Das who mental wing will try to rein in the use physical violence to intimidate Indian secularist group has identiwith hardline positions. The RSS will try to play the mediator

> Here lies the BJP's dilemma. It needs the Ayodhya movement politically. But it doesn't like its leadership, dominated by the fanatical Mr Singhal and Mr Togadia. The BJP wants to assert its overall political supremacy over the parivar. But it needs the VHP's cadres for the next, make-or-break, Parliamentary

> The VHP, like every sangh parivar "front". has a well-defined function. Such "fronts" are said to number between 150 and 300, and are active among traders, trade unions, women and Adivasis.

Some, like the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, have an economic policy churches, mosques and people -as happened to the Graham Staines and two little sons.

The VHP's function is threefold politicise disaffected sadhus; mobilise people on emotive, seemingly "religious" issues like the temple; and raise funds for the sangh combine, especially from North America and Britain. The third function is important, indeed irreplaceable.

The VHP has countless religious associates based in the US, UK and Canada, which collect huge sums from non-resident Indians. Some collect in the name of earthquake relief or "development" assistance.

An example is the India Development and Relief Fund, headed by Mr Bhishma K. Agnihotri, long-standing

records. They include software giants like Sun Microsystems and CISCO. This investigation thoroughly

exposes the nefarious and genocidal ends to which the VHP helps the sangh combine. The BJP has never been fully distinguishable from the VHP's nasties. The Guiarat pogrom was the joint work of the

The supreme irony is that the sangh parivar has nothing to do with religion in the real, deep sense. It denies Hinduism's richly syncretic, plural nature and puts it into a rigid upper-caste-oriented, intolerant frame, amenable to political exploi-

It doesn't even have multiple

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

"50,000 Indian nuns" to the Church.

wipe out Hinduism from this coun-Such sick minds are unfit to lead. It's India's tragedy that the RSS is the chief leader of its present leaders. We urgently need a leadership

### TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

### The blessed bureaucrat

I read with extreme disgust the news report published in your esteemed daily of 27 October. The blessed bureaucrat you have referred to in your report is typically representative of the mindset of most of our bureaucrats and lawmakers. I am sad but not surprised. I have experienced such debilitating acts by many of our senior bureaucrats while dealing with scores of them during the 80s and 90s. However it must be said that some of the donor agencies providing funds for the visits are also to be blamed. Why does a donor agency continue to fund and accept a candidate of a different calling for which the resources are actually meant for? Using of a fancy vehicle for either official or private purposes is a regular practice

amongst senior bureaucrats. Now that you have exposed the matter the concerned bureaucrat contrary to "our" belief, perhaps will emerge as an individual stronger than before. Why not, since our

government from here onwards will Shamsher Chowdhury

### About weekly holidays

I totally disagree with Mr. Shahed Jamil's letter regarding weekly holidays published in The Daily Star on 30th September 30, 2003. Mr. Jamil told us that a nation like ours can't afford the luxury of having 2-day weekly holidays and insisted us to come out of present weekly holiday structure.

Talking about his first point, a developing nation may not afford 2day weekly holidays but for a corrupt developing country like ours, it is all the same. With the astonishing and amazing level of corruption we have installed in every step of governmental offices, it actually doesn't matter whether we have 2day weekly holidays or no holidays at all! If we want to solve the numerous problems of the country and want to uproot corruption from every level of government and

public offices, we must not restructure the holiday model. If it is a 2-day weekly holiday,

then the shifting of important files from one desk to another will take years. And if the government comes out with a seven day working structure, then the shifting process will take more than a year. In a 2-day weekly holidays, our govt. staffs will get 5 days to run their corrupt practices. And in a 1day structure, they will get 6 days. Which one is better totally depends on personal opinions. So, at first you must have corruption uprooted from the deep of our heart because here we differ from the western developed nations, not in holidays.

And regarding Mr. Jamal's most absurd notion of having a Saturday-Sunday holiday structure, our real "Holy-day" of the week is Friday. The holidays in western countries mean a "holy-day" when everyone have the chance of going to the churches or temples and sitting back and relax after a torrid week. So our current Friday holiday structure makes some senses at least! And one important thing

should be remembered, not Pakistan or even Saudi Arabia is the role model of an Islamic country. The one and only model of Islam is in what Allah says and what the prophet (sm.) did. That means Quran and Hadith instead of Pakistan, Afghanistan or Saudi Arab. Syed Muhammad Muhtad

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.

Department of Chemical Engg. and Polymer Science

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In last Friday's letter to editor section there was a piece from Mr. AAB, "On reading Jawaharlal

Reading Nehru

Nehru". Excuse me sir, but what was the point of this piece in this column. It seems as incomprehensible as your intent to print it. Commendable though his thoughts were, but what was the point the writer tried to hammer home? MAhmed

Thanks to Star Heri-

Thanks to Star Heritage, The Daily Star for highlighting some of Bangladesh's significant architectural heritage. It is a refresher for those of us who live abroad, and for our children who can learn something about the rich heritage of Bangladesh. At the end of each report, how-

ever, you bemoan the fact that no one seems to be taking care of these historical sites. We are not surprised to hear that, but cannot help but be disgusted that no one seems to care. A nation that cannot be proud and protective of its heritage -- what a sad and depressing condition. Add to that the commercial value of local and foreign tourism centred around sites of historical interest, one wonders why enough effort is not being made!

We urge The Daily Star to keep this issue on the radar and influence positive change in the apathetic treatment of our national treasures. If government agencies cannot do their job, perhaps private foundations and nonprofits can step forward. If there



Past treasures

are some such parties already active, who are they and how can we get in touch with them? There are many caring and energetic Bangladeshis at home and abroad who would help financially if someone in Bangladesh took the necessary first steps towards protecting these sites.

Keep up the good work. Rafiq Ahmed Chicago, IL

It was so nice of Star Heritage that I went many places after reading your heritage features. This is really very helpful for the people who like to

travel historical places. My request to Star Heritage is to provide us a list of ancient places which are very near to Dhaka. Palash Dhaka

#### I pity Iraqi people! To claim that we are civilised and

we are living in a civilised world has little relation with truth. Foreign aggression can never establish peace and happiness in a country, especially for the indigenous people. I pity Iraqi people that they have been destined to suffer in such a great measure. All casualties and miseries in the present day Iraq will just solidify Bush-Blair's burdens of guilt. The launching of their war in Iraq has made it a second Palestine where sufferings will continue, God knows for how long.

Portsmouth, UK