

## HC directive welcome

*Equality before law upheld*

ON Thursday the High Court directed Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) to realise unpaid telephone bills from 427 members of the fifth and seventh parliaments within six months. So persistent the MPs appeared to be as defaulters that the matter had to go to the court. The court's ruling, that came with an 8-point observation, said that if the defaulting MPs fail to pay the accrued money the authorities would take appropriate legal action against them. It stressed in clear terms that no one is above the law. The High Court directive came following a writ petition filed by Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust (BLAST).

We welcome the HC directive which basically upholds the supremacy of law in public interest, and appreciate BLAST for bringing up the issue before the court.

Despite having no prerogative as such, the MPs continued to use the facility provided by the state and remained nonchalant about payment of the arrears. The only amusing side of the story is that the MPs of both sides of the aisle apparently committed the same default. Even if the amount may not seem horrendously large, we are appalled by the sheer number of defaulting MPs.

The observations of the High Court are noteworthy. The salient features are, Bangladesh is a sovereign country that is governed by a government and not by individuals however powerful they may be and that the people of Bangladesh are the owners of the state. And all functionaries and members of all services must serve their cause and only in their interest.

The bottom line is, the people feel to have been let down by their own representatives. The MPs currently receive a ceiling of Tk 6000 per month for payment of telephone bills and the amount seems reasonable. And like every other citizen of the country they should pay the bills in time to avoid any unpleasantness. To our mind, as lawmakers the MPs must not only be seen as models in terms of exemplifying respect for the law but act as such in their individual capacity. Besides, as elected representatives they are obliged to live up to the public trust reposed in them.

## Heroin smuggling

*Scratching the surface*

THE fact that questions are being raised about the way investigation is going on to unearth the real culprits behind the latest case of smuggling of a large consignment of heroin to Great Britain prompts the need for more prudent handling by competent authorities. As the prestige and image of the country is involved here, we feel intelligence experts must be given full protection by the state from the unholy influence from any quarter whatsoever so that the real smugglers of the deadly cargo can be put in the dock. Already the media is replete with news and comments that efforts may have been on to shield the real culprits.

It is worth mentioning that following the official complaint from the British authorities, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) of Bangladesh carried out its own investigation and identified as many as five private companies for their alleged involvement in the smuggling that included BD Foods Limited and two of its sister concerns. But when the case was handed over to the CID the name of BD Foods was struck off. On the other hand, a low level former staff of BD Foods has been arrested by the CID who was working for the said company when the smuggling of heroin took place. This particular person's services were terminated after allegation of smuggling came from the British authorities.

Two things are worth taking note of. One, that many who are following the case are not happy with the way the investigation is going on and the way the owners of some accused exporting companies are moving heaven and earth to prove their non-complicity. Second, we observe with a bit of astonishment how such a large consignment of contraband item like heroin could slip through the net of our vigilant intelligence agencies and law enforcing authorities? Where were they when the deadly cargo was being lowered in to the hatch?

It is intriguing that most of the time contraband items like heroin or infected food products, such as shrimp, get caught in foreign ports. On the other hand, if the faulty products or contrabands could be intercepted by our intelligence agencies and law enforcers way before being shipped then that would save the country from a lot of embarrassment. We therefore hope the authorities would soon find the real culprits behind the heroin smuggling and bring them forth for trial.

# Make police people-friendly

## POST BREAKFAST

It is time that the relevant authorities took it upon themselves to straighten the image of the police force. The police must also understand that they have been recruited to guard citizens, not to kill or maim them, not to unnecessarily enter residences and smash furnishing and not to be symbols of despotic behaviour. The police have to regain the confidence of the common people through greater self-imposed discipline.

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

A bad example is the worst sermon that you can preach. It is a language that everyone understands and easily. Respect for an institution also grows from the manner in which it conducts itself.

It is the duty of policemen to maintain law and order. They are there to provide leadership in the zero-sum game of deterrence. They are expected to be the strong arm of the Administration that will ensure better governance and provide swift retribution in cases of transgression.

Members of the police force, all over the world, are respected members of society. People do not hesitate to extend full cooperation to them in the interest of obtaining justice. There is also no hesitation in approaching a policeman or a police station and seeking help. It is taken for granted that in any civilised society, policemen will be the symbol of protection against injustice, terror or repression. In many countries, from the earliest days, school children are taught to rely for emergency support on the nearest police official.

So what do we have now in Bangladesh?

The Prime Minister stated on 18 April in Sardah that the Government

had increased budgetary allocation for the police force to Tk 1,702 crore in fiscal 2005-06 from Tk 889 crore in FY 2000-01. It was also mentioned that many had been sent abroad for training. I am forced to admit that for obvious reasons, the government's efforts are not proving to be sufficient.

We are faced with a serious and complex issue. I believe that the police force still continues to suffer from resource constraint, personnel constraint, poor equipment and inadequate police training. However, they (a vast majority) seem to be particularly deficient, on the question of attitude in the performance of duties. This includes a willingness to offer help, to be friendly, to be firm but courteous, and of course in being non-partisan.

I am not sure that we have entirely succeeded in instilling the right values within our police force. They, like the judiciary, are essential and vital components of good governance and constitutionally mandated behaviour. Unfortunately, we are suffering today because of lack of professionalism and increase in politicisation.

This deviation from the straight line starts from day one. In many cases, recruitment in different levels

is undertaken not on the basis of merit and suitability, but more on recommendations of partisan politics. This disappointing trend persists subsequently not only with regard to postings and promotions but also in decisions regarding assignments. Such a scenario eventually encourages lack of accountability.

It also creates in the mind of the police officer a feeling that his sole effort should be to satisfy his superior and also to conform to the political views of the Administration in place. He thinks that this will guarantee for him the necessary perks and flexibilities that will make his life that much easier.

The next step in the scenario evolves out of the juxtaposition of all the above factors. I am now referring to corruption. Transparency international and many other civil societies have already gone on record in pointing out that this malaise as now permeated into the various layers of the police force, just as it has polluted through osmosis many other areas of governance.

I am writing today about our police force with great anguish in my heart. How can anyone forget the important sacrifices made by our policemen during the eventful days of March

1971 or during the rest of the War of Liberation? They fought bravely and did not hesitate to die for our freedom and independence. In those few months, policemen in many parts of Chapainawabganj, Dhaka and Chittagong became role models for many freedom fighters.

What we have today is just the opposite of such conditions.

Only a few decades later, our police force is under serious scrutiny. Critical reports have appeared persistently in the press and the electronic media highlighting excesses of the police. We have watched with horror brutality being meted out to unarmed demonstrators. Many have also questioned the use of overwhelming force that was unleashed in the streets against women.

This gradual deterioration has accelerated over the past few months. I happen to live in a residential area of Dhaka, where residents, more often than not, have to be passive participants during hartal days. They are witnesses to brick batting, beating and police-baiting. The residents have front seats in the political theatre that unfolds regularly in this zone and the over-enthusiasm of the police in not only clubbing

demonstrators but also in restraining them from forms of protest, consistent with democratic norms. The response of the police, on such occasions, is a far cry from the way their colleagues handle demonstrations in cities like London, Bangkok, Jakarta, Seoul, New Delhi or New York.

What is the difference? Police in most countries of the world keep in mind that it is a fundamental right of any citizen to be able to express dissenting views with regard to any issue or any situation. This, they know, is the essence of democracy. It is quite often bandied about in our country. In such a situation, policemen abroad try their best to ensure that participants neither hurt anybody nor get hurt. Rubber bullets or live ammunition, as a matter of rule is practically never used. This is not done because it is understood that such steps might inflame the protests even further.

What we have seen in the streets of Dhaka, in Kansat or inside the stadium in Chittagong, time after time, are examples of what should not happen. One would have thought that Kansat was a sufficient lesson for our Administration. Obviously, it was not. Very soon afterwards, in front of the world electronic media, policemen unleashed the totally unacceptable attack on sports journalists in Chittagong, in presence of the visiting Australian cricket team. I thought it was a tragedy. We waste nearly a million US dollars for rebuilding our image through lobbyists in the USA and then, in one stroke, destroy it by clubbing journalists with guns and smashing their cameras inside the stadium. Photographs of an elderly

photojournalist being severely beaten by an arrogant police officer embarrassed us, the eyes of the world.

Electronic media have also shown policemen throwing stones at protesters and opposition activists. In the recent past, we have also had a pregnant lady advocate not only beaten black and blue, but also subjected to threats and unfounded cases, just because she had the courage to expose the injustices done to her by police personnel.

It is possible that the Administration continues to be apprehensive of large gatherings in sensitive places. However, such apprehension should not necessarily be translated into merciless beating by any Administration.

It is time that the relevant authorities took it upon themselves to straighten the image of the police force. The police must also understand that they have been recruited to guard citizens, not to kill or maim them, not to unnecessarily enter residences and smash furnishing and not to be symbols of despotic behaviour.

The police have to regain the confidence of the common people through greater self-imposed discipline. They need to understand that whatever be the political persuasion, a citizen has the right to be treated as a human being.

They should not become a source of dread, and cause for women and children to flee from their homes and hide in fields to avoid being harassed. They should exercise their punitive powers with the knowledge that they are accountable for their actions.

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# US-Iran, Israel, India and Pakistan

## AS I SEE IT

Skeptics may consider it ludicrous, there is an outside danger Pakistan may even become a simultaneous target. Reputed analyst Eric Margolis says that Pakistan is definitely on the US agenda after Iran. Could Israeli (or US) planners afford the risk of leaving a Muslim nuclear state with the means of missile delivery intact, if there is war with Iran? Can they take this calculated risk in the face of possible Pakistani nuclear reaction because of military action on a fellow Muslim nation?

IKRAM SEHGAL

ON June 7, 1981, Israeli F-15s and F-16s took off from Etzion airbase near Eilat at 4:00 pm and at 5:35 pm, in an action lasting less than 80 seconds, the nuclear reactor at Osirak being built with French assistance was left in ruins. Osirak would have given Saddam Hussein an Iraqi bomb in less than 10 years. After the Osirak raid, nations (among them India, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, South Africa, etc) developing nuclear weapons through clandestine means dispersed their nuclear facilities and buried them deep in secret locations, making it all that much harder for an Osirak-type "solution."

On the other hand, the development of stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, precision-guided bombs, remotely-piloted aerial vehicles, extremely accurate GIS maps, etc gives a potential attacker numerous options, many of them already field-tested in battle in the last 15 years. During the Iraq war, the US used covert means, viz (1) extremely successfully in buying off the loyalties of key Iraqi generals so that organized resistance collapsed in the face of the US blitzkrieg, and (2) not so successfully in activating domestic Iraqi resistance (e.g. Washington-based Chalabi) to cause Saddam

Hussain any real damage.

Despite relentless diplomatic efforts to head off a possible war, it is only a question of "when." The US has learnt many lessons from going it alone in Iraq, particularly in not letting diplomatic action to run its full course. Israel has never been inhibited by any such qualms and/or restrictions. Osirak compromised and endangered Israeli security; they had to take it out and they did. Facing strong condemnation from all over the world, Israel had no regrets, equating most of it as hypocrisy by EU countries since many were privately grateful.

The US-led condemnation of Iran has manifold objectives, among them, viz (1) creating international pressure on Iran to scale down its nuclear program or maybe even abandoning it "without bloodying swords," to quote Sun Tse Tzu, (2) creating a favourable world coalition supporting possible military action against Iran if necessary, and (3) to head off imminent possible Israeli action against Iran, and if it does happen and the US is forced to be a participant in the fait accompli as a necessary bitter pill, to soften world approbation.

Despite the sabre-rattling, US military action against Iran is not a done deal if the decision was Washington's alone. Overstretched

in (and because of) Iraq the US armed forces could suffer grievously both in Iraq and Iran. The preferred attack mode will be an air assault, a combination of B-2 stealth bombers, F-117 stealth fighters, B-52s, Tomahawk cruise missiles, etc. any mode that can deliver Joint Direct Action Munitions (J-DAMs) taking out multiple targets in deep concrete bunkers.

A CIA unit already seems to be operating in Sistan, Balochistan Province, stirring up Iranian Baloch tribes, does this strike any chord about the incentive and support keeping Akbar Bugti in the hills? The Iraqi-based Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) operating against Iran with Saddam Hussein's help had been disarmed; the Pentagon is believed to be seeking MEK's re-activation. Even though liberals may not be enamoured of President Ahmedinijad or his government, Iranians are very nationalistic, on the nuclear issue they are united and charged, the regime change option will not materialize. The Iranian regime has put the threatened US invasion to good use, uniting Iranians on one pro-nuclear platform.

With increasing number of Americans wanting US troops out of Iraq, can the Republican president risk another war, given that both Iraq and Afghanistan seem to be prover-

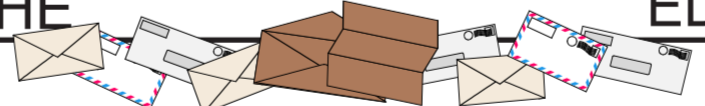
bial "black holes"? Condemnation of Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's conduct of the Iraq war by six retired generals, some recently serving as divisional commanders in Iraq, was extremely damaging for the Bush administration. The political risk will exponentially be higher with elections for the US Senate and House of Representatives due this November. Contrary to common perception, the US will not rush into war. There are confirmed reports about diplomatic back-channel talks, an aide to Iran's nuclear chief was believed to be in Washington talking to US officials.

The Holocaust exercises strong influence over the Israeli psyche; "never again" is an Israeli article of faith. When an Iranian aircraft lightly damaged the Osirak reactor in 1980 during the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqis stated that the proposed bomb was not meant for Iran or Muslims, but for Israelis. Enough for Israel to trigger plans for the Osirak raid!

Recently Iran's President Ahmedinijad has said Israel will be wiped out from the face of the Earth, for Israel that amounts to "casus belli." Contrary to world perception, the US does not exercise inordinate influence over Israeli decision-making; at best there is close consultation on many issues.

John Locke's (1734-1802) "Sec-

# 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.

## No protection against nuclear terrorism

I am writing with reference to the article "Discourse on nuclear primacy," by Kazi Anwarul Masud (April 9). In his op-ed, Ambassador Masud refers to the article by Professor Keir Lieber and Prof. Daryl Press about the U.S. nuclear invincibility. In an article in the current issue of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Lieber of the University of Notre Dame and Prof. Press of the University of Pennsylvania lay out results of simulations according to the model they developed. According to them the US has developed nuclear capacity sufficient to launch a nuclear strike wiping out Russia and China, without the risk of suffering a counter strike.

As Dr. Graham Allison, former U.S. Assistant Defence Secretary and now Director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard, points out in his seminal study "Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe": "The nuclear weapon that terrorists would use in the first attack on the United States is far more likely to arrive in a cargo container than on the tip of a missile. In March 2001, six months before

9/11, national intelligence officer Robert Walpole testified to a Senate subcommittee: "No missile delivery means are less costly, easier to acquire and more reliable and accurate... The weapon could have arrived in any of the ways items of similar size and weight reach American cities every day. A football-size lump of HEU [highly-enriched uranium] enclosed in a lead camera bag and packed inside a suitcase would be indistinguishable from any metal object of the same size. Every day, 30,000 trucks, 6,500 rail cars, and 140 ships deliver more than 50,000 cargo containers with more than 500,000 items from around the globe. Any one of these containers could hold something far more deadly... A nuclear bomb smuggled into the country inside a ship or a truck and detonated by surprise would leave no return address. In the aftermath of a nuclear attack, America's leaders could find themselves with no idea of where it came from, or how and against whom to respond."

The so-called missile defence will be completely useless to detect and counter such a nuclear device delivered by a container ship, ready

to explode on docking.

The only way to prevent such a catastrophe would be to monitor all cargo ships at their port of origin and intercept them on high seas. Patrol boats and frigates fitted with radioactive sensors (HEU gives off radioactive signatures at close quarter even inside a container) can do a better job by sending search parties to board suspect vessels. Also all shipments entering the United States need to be scanned for radiation. For this, radiation portal detectors must be installed in all ports. As Dr. Allison points out: "Since these portal detectors offer a no intrusive way to scan trucks, rail cars, and cargo containers for radioactive materials, the United States should be hurrying to install them at every major port of entry... For perspective, it is useful to note that the layer of defence on which the nation is currently spending more money than on all the others is missile defence, where the latest budget request has topped \$10 billion. Against the threat of nuclear terrorism, this initiative is virtually irrelevant... This allocation of funds suggests that the Bush administration and Congress do not fully grasp the nature of nuclear terror threat."

Despite repeated warnings

before 9/11 by the CIA that Al Qaeda might hijack planes to attack targets inside the US, both Clinton and Bush administrations neglected the airport security and thousands of New Yorkers paid with their lives. Now the Bush administration is neglecting the port security and millions of New Yorkers may pay with their lives.

The Bush administration prides itself on its willingness to "pull the trigger" on threats to America, but as Mr. Allison writes, this is of little avail if "the shooter does not know where to aim." America's formidable military might did not protect it from 9/11, and its formidable nuclear arsenal might not protect it from any nuclear 9/11.

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## Eligibility and leadership

Knowledgeable and competent persons will be placed at the highest positions everywhere in the society; this is the expectation of all of us. But what is the real scenario? In Bangladesh, many highest posts are captured by the persons whose eligibility is questionable. Often they are elected by the masses people.

They swear to the people that they would do their best; even staking their life for the people. Do they do that? In this way they achieve the goal of their life. On the other hand a simple first class officer has to pass the highest degree then go through a series of competitive exams and finally, a viva voce to the employer to show his/her competence for the post of Tk. 6800/= scale. But the government that drive them is constituted with the elected people who need no academic qualification, no competitive exams, no interviews to the employer, no innovative ideas but receive only party's nomination and enjoy much more than adequate facilities. A not-so-enlightened person knows little about his/her mistakes. He/She hardly knows about what is right and what is wrong. So the decisions they will take must have the chance to be wrong. Do such persons deserve to administer better learned government officers?

Everyday we are talking about our problems, about threats, about adverse situation created by some miscreants, etc. We are designing various policies for controlling the same. We are wasting a considerable amount of our valuable time, which may be used for some productive work, allowing us to protect against the evil deeds. Sometimes we

succeed but over all we have failed to protect these threats. On the other hand, these kinds of intimidations are appearing in more astonishing and innovative ways! Are these miscreants more talented than our security personnel? What is the reason behind this? Who are the people in our national administration? Why do we fail again and again in containing miscreants and become champion in corruption for the series of time?

This is high time we need to think about what we actually want? Since there is no indication about eligibility (a 25 years old person with mental fitness can be elected as a member of parliament) about the members of the parliament in the constitution it should be changed. The highest posts in a country must be achieved by the people with at least a standard level of education and other qualities. But there is a great problem what the people sent to the parliament will do? How far honest would they remain about their commitment to the people and patriotism?

Several times proposals have been raised for increasing their (members and employees of the parliament) facilities and passed, but what about the mass people? A new scale is offered to the government employees

after seven years, but mass people are facing continuous price spiral. This is the situation which often makes people clever rather than wise and honest. They involve themselves in politics not education. Dr. Humayun Kabir, one of my favourite teachers of Dhaka University once told us, "The most brilliant students should come to the educational sector in their professional life. The second most brilliant should come to politics. But we have got the reverse situation. The worst ones come to politics because this is the easy way to make money." This is the most tragic trend in our society. I like to take the opportunity here to explain honesty as financial honesty and ethical honesty both, because some people think and emphasise on honesty related only to financial dealings. Therefore, we must be qualified, and of course, honestly do good to the country, for there is no alternative way for our existence. I have no intention to hurt anybody but if it does, I beg apology.

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Transparent ballot box  
The proposal for transparent ballot

boxes is an innovation (or transfer of innovation) that can achieve a lot in terms of monitoring the rigging on the poll day.

I think this monitoring can be taken a step further by supplying independent monitors with time stamp enabled digital still camera. With digital cameras getting cheaper, smaller and more powerful everyday, both in terms of zooming and blow-up capabilities, an observer or any voter can take pictures of the ballot box at different hours on the poll day. These pictures, provided the ballot boxes are clearly labelled with the polling center identification, can later be used to contest any unusually large turnout.

An even better, though little costly, solution would be cell phone cameras with instant transmission capabilities, thus eliminating the traditional film or camera, so vulnerable to hoodligan attacks.

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