

Brutalising Lebanon

Ceasefire brooks no further delay

NO time should be lost by the UN in ironing out the nitty-gritty of a ceasefire resolution to end the Israeli aggression on Lebanon. The attack on Lebanon has gone on for too long, with the world standing by in muted response, if at all. Splitting hairs on the precise wording of the draft means death of more innocent civilians and further destruction of the country. It is immaterial whether cessation of hostilities should come first before a stable ceasefire can be effected.

To the dying, the semantic difference between a ceasefire and cessation of hostilities is of no consequence. What is important is that, the inhuman bombing of Lebanon, on the excuse of self-defence and for the purpose of neutralising the Hezbollah, should stop forthwith. Thus, we feel that the call by our prime minister for an immediate unconditional ceasefire and cessation of hostilities is not only timely, it certainly echoes the sentiments of the international community.

It is also undesirable that the major powers should fail to bridge the gap in their perception of the modus vivendi of peace in Lebanon. It is even more unacceptable, for the major powers, who are also the troop contributors, to insist on a 'durable ceasefire and a comprehensive political settlement first' before investing troops.

It has been grossly unethical on the part of the major powers to oppose any suggestion of a ceasefire. And the abortive Rome conference, organised to address the catastrophe aggravated by Israel's attack on Lebanon, failed to demand of Israel to stop its aggression in Lebanon. Decision of the world powers not to call a halt to the Lebanon offensive has been taken by Israel as a carte blanche to continue with its indiscriminate bombings and to embark on a ground offensive across the international borders into Lebanon.

Finalising a mandate for a new force in the area is likely to be time consuming. And a permanent solution of the Lebanon crisis can only be possible within the context of the Middle East situation, and no permanent solution can emerge without addressing the Palestinian issue; while both are essential for 'endurable peace' they are also time consuming. But in the meantime, what the international community, led by the UN, can and must do is to stop the bludgeoning of Lebanon, through an immediate ceasefire.

Ensure better management of jails

Inmates deserve better treatment

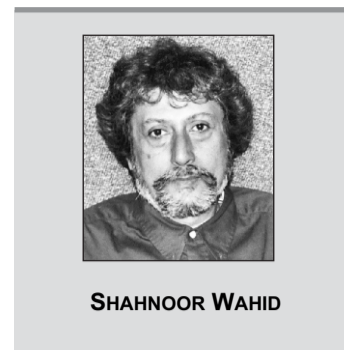
THE chronicles of corruption and mismanagement in Dhaka Central Jail would run into volumes if compiled. And despite numerous media reports over the years, the situation remains as grim as ever with no tangible steps taken so far to remove the obstacles for turning the decades old prison into a modern one. The prison is abysmally overcrowded and infested with criminals who peddle drugs inside.

Now the latest story to make headlines is that the inmates have not been served with fish and meat for last two months. Though prisoners are entitled as per the jail code to get these two sources of protein on a regular basis, the supply is reported to have stopped on the plea of price escalation.

The supplier had quoted prices reasonably within the limit to win the bid and had been supplying the goods as per tender specifications until the market picture changed. Why no corrective action was taken defies our understanding. It is only obvious that the prison inmates did not appreciate the diet without meat or fish and began to express their resentment.

From the detailed report that appeared on the topic in our daily on Saturday, we come to understand that there has been some anomaly in the way the evaluation committee's recommendations with regard to price fixation have been handled by the higher authorities. We may suggest that the relevant authorities should put their heads together and find ways to overcome the situation and ensure availability of essential food items for the prison inmates. This should be done on an urgent basis to avoid any worsening of the situation. It also needs to be mentioned that there has to be a qualitative improvement in the overall management of the central jail as well as other prisons in the country. We hope the relevant authorities would give a serious consideration to this need.

Thin line between piety and perfidy



SHAHEEN WAHID

THIS is a country where one moment we preach piety and the next do a perfidious act of horrendous scale. Some of us seem to enjoy being on the extremes. Either we are too religious, too hospitable, too polite -- or we are too villainous and too wicked. We cross over the line between good and bad with considerable ease and composure, never caring to ponder the long-lasting impact of such acts on the collective morals of society.

For example, we may deliver a speech at a public meeting or talk to the media in the secretariat on the villainous activity of market syndicates, and then join a luncheon with some black-marketers at Hotel Sonargaon. While we talk of virtues and morals to our children at home, we may so very easily hold back the upward movement of an important file on the

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

The recent haul of a big group of militants undergoing training in some remote part of a forest under Mymensingh district tells us that we have not seen the back of the die-hard militants in this country. Far from that, now we hear of more secretive organisations with equally bone-chilling names working at the grassroots level. Their leaders look more like the bandits of India's notorious Chambal forest than a person who would evoke holiness in our minds. To be candid, some of them look like close cousins of Rasputin in his heyday!

release of pension money of some poor, grade-two employees.

We may also sit on a file concerning allotment of a government quarter against a female employee who happens to be a widow with four children. We may quickly respond to a call for donation for a mosque or a school, and then go to office to send heroin to Britain or some other country.

The line continues to get thinner by the day. Then again, a poor patient may die untreated on the road in front of a posh clinic. Why so? Because the renowned surgeon of the country would not remove his tumor until he sees the money on his table. While the tumor devours the poor man, the thin line becomes invisible in the twilight.

But the scary news for the saner citizens is that the line has totally

disappeared for a section of young men and their leaders who are preaching piety as a profession one moment and are hurling bombs at innocent citizens with the intent to kill the next. Can anything be more perfidious than taking the life of innocent human beings?

Well, the young people in question do not think so. These are the religious rogues. They and their leaders are doing such heinous acts with the skewed notion that by doing so they would one day fulfill their agenda -- establish Allah's rule (whatever that may mean) in Bangladesh.

These people have had their initiation at the hands of some half-literate religious bigots and have been programmed to do anything at their command. Under the banner of some organisations (the names of which sound quite foreign

and frightening) they have secretly but surely made inroads deep inside our society. They have used various madrasahs and mosques as their base for recruitment and training, and they did it all so effortlessly under the nose of the administration.

After the arrest of the top JMB leaders, the nation heaved a sigh of relief thinking that the country had been saved from the evil clutches of the local and foreign conspirators and that the Talebanic tarts have been done away with. But lo and behold! Many more of those menacing-looking guys keep coming out of their rat-holes!

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What remains unanswered is where do these outfits get funds and who are providing them legal, administrative and network support within the country? Shall we be able to progress amply to reach the ranks of other developed countries of Asia if we fail to uproot them? To be honest, these obscurantist elements want to take us back to the medieval times through establishing their own brand of rule.

But, aren't these people the offspring of ruthless, illiterate dogmatists who had wreaked havoc in human society throughout the centuries in a bid to seize state power? And haven't they always bungled very badly when it came to establishing order and cohesion in society? We find solace in the historical fact that these elements have been thrown into the dustbin of human civilisation again and again.

Therefore, the burning question of the day is: how long will it take to uproot the militants who are auda-



cious enough to disregard the very tenets of our constitution -- secularism, democracy, and social equality. They have no business upsetting the social order that the majority of the people are happy with. The very fact that they would find no space in a democratic set up is evident in the secretive way they have been carrying out their operations. But enough is enough. The nation wants to see the capital punishment of the ringleaders of JMB is carried out so that it finally scares off the smaller fries. Let these medieval entities be given the modern treatment they deserve. Let them be deleted from the nation's hard drive permanently.

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The difficult road ahead



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THROUGHOUT the history of mankind, the desire to perpetuate power has been the avowed aim of dictators, be they wearing uniforms or professing the legitimacy of their rule through "imperfect" elections. Developed countries through centuries of trial and error have reasonably perfected a system of governance that broadly represents the will of their peoples, and should there be any breach of contract with the people, the system provides for the exit of governments through free and fair elections.

In many developing countries, governance is primarily aimed at distributing the "spoils of war," elections can veritably be described as "war," won mostly through money and muscle power, among the faithful and constrict the voice of the opposition to its utmost, again aimed at perpetuating power which was the original aim of holding "imperfect" elections.

The process of distribution of the "spoils of war" invariably embraces corruption in varying degrees. In some developing countries the head of government and his family become the richest people in the country with incredible speed,

GOING DEEPER

The challenge before countries like Bangladesh is not only to recover state institutions which have been politicized and robotized beyond recognition to serve the interest of the rulers, but also to overcome the disadvantages inherent in small and weak economies in these days of globalization where stronger economies are better equipped to take advantage of unrestricted trade and to enforce the rules of the system to their own advantage.

conquering any economic theory on capital accumulation.

A legalistic definition of corruption would be "a secret form of social exchange by which political or administrative power holders make a living from their power or influence that they exercise by virtue of their mandate or function." Invariant characteristics of corruption are: (a) violation of societal rules or norms; (b) secret exchange among political, social, and economic markets; (c) illegal access or influence given to individuals or groups to the process of political or administrative decision making; and (d) resultant tangible benefits to the parties involved in the transactions.

Most developed countries have by now legislated strict laws on corruption with expansive definition and the corrupt have to pay heavy price for their misdeeds. Though occasionally some cases of corruption are shoved under the carpet, there are many glaring examples of politicians tossed on to the ash-heap of history due to their corruption.

Not all can be accused of financial malfeasance. Some erred in judgment. But developed

societies in particular are unforgiving that their chosen leader should stray from the righteous path. Such strict demand made of the politicians by the electorate in developed societies is possible because the electors have been empowered by law and tradition that strays from the honest path be punished.

Along with law on their side, the electors are also financially well off, as opposed to those in poverty-stricken countries who can be bought and bullied by a section of politicians who have amassed wealth by using their public office for private gains.

Francis Fukuyama has included level of development of a country as one of the four basic conditions necessary for democratic transformation of a society. It has been found that virtually all industrialized economies are functioning democracies while relatively few very poor countries are. When a country attains GDP per capita of US dollars six thousand or more and transforms itself from an agrarian society to an industrial one it also attains sustainable democracy.

Fukuyama thinks that the growth of property owning middle class makes them a stakeholder in insisting on an institutionally and orderly transition of power through a transparent and predictable system. Property owning middle class being almost invariably educated are more aware of their rights and are less swayed by election mongering.

But then, any sweeping judgment that only the rich are fit for democracy and the poor have to wait to become rich before they can practice democracy is not only a fallacious contention but is also as arrogant a premise as the one posited by historian Bernard Lewis that democracy is a peculiarly Western invention for administering public affairs which may or may not be suitable for others.

Indeed, Pandit Nehru correctly noted in his Glimpses of World History that if the French Revolution ushered in an age of political equality, the boundaries of democracy have to be extended to ensure economic equality as well. But then the efforts by some to come out of poverty have not been easy, and some would even argue that the efforts have failed.

Except for Botswana, in the last thirty-five years none of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) has graduated out of that category. It has been argued that the LDCs are so disadvantaged in their development process that they face "the risk of failing to come out of poverty," and consequent differential treatment given to the LDCs instead of bolstering their economies has contributed to their failure to "address the misguided policies in particular domestic over regulation, weak property rights, skewed trade regime, and lack of democracy" stunting their growth.

Freedom House that ranks countries according to political rights and civil liberties has accorded LDCs median scores (1 being most free and 7 being the least, with Bangladesh scoring 3 for political rights and 4 for civil liberties and therefore defined as partially free) in the average index of 1995-2005.

One could, therefore, infer that a correlation exists between good governance (and democracy) and economic development. That some command economies during the Cold War era (e.g. South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) developed by leaps and bounds (China can also be cited as an example due to its current phenomenal growth) does not negate the argument that there is congruence between democracy and development mainly because under democracy the government, being accountable to the people, is more likely to look after the needs of the needy.

In this context, Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz's suggestion of moral growth become contextual i.e. "growth that is sustainable, that increases living standard not just

today but for future generations as well and that leads to a more tolerant, open society (where the benefits of growth are shared equitably, creating a society with more social justice and solidarity."

The challenge before countries like Bangladesh is not only to recover state institutions which have been politicized and robotized beyond recognition to serve the interest of the rulers, but also to overcome the disadvantages inherent in small and weak economies in these days of globalization where stronger economies are better equipped to take advantage of unrestricted trade and to enforce the rules of the system to their own advantage.

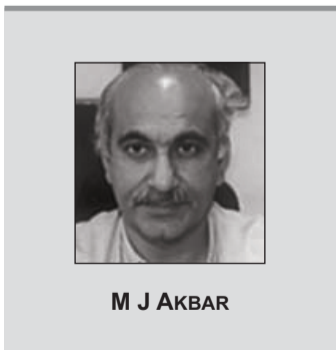
While we should train ourselves to compete with better educated and technologically more advanced economies, we have to ensure that social goods such as maximum employment, social security, social cohesion and over all quality of life are made available to the people in general.

In short, the challenge before us is to take back the ownership of decision-making relating to issues of vital national interest, which has been hijacked by the plutocrats who, while promising a better quality of life, have delivered instead a shattered utopia.

Indeed, Bangladesh still remains an unfinished revolution, rudely interrupted in 1975. Time has now come to choose a competent steward to steer the ship out of the morass and take it towards the horizon of unbounded promise.

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Post-prime minister



M J AKBAR

CANDOUR is injurious to the health of any government. This is a widely-accepted non-partisan fact. Any president or prime minister who went about distributing truth with the sincerity of the Salvation Army would soon find himself in the Salvation Army. But to treat Parliament like a bunch of gulls is not very good governance either. Opposition MPs may be on the wrong side of the House because of past foolishness, but that does not make them gullible.

Parliament was in an understandable uproar after Justice Pathak found former foreign minister Natwar Singh guilty in an odd sort of way: of having used influence to get the Iraq oil deal, presumably for friends as well as the Congress, but without gaining any personal financial benefit either directly or

BYLINE

India's foreign policy is the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru, who made this nation synonymous with a virile independence. Four decades after his death, India's voice has been reduced to an occasional bleat from the shadows. I cannot imagine Nehru or Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi without a role to play at such a moment; but then they never decided that their foreign policy would become "congruent" with America's.

through his son.

Parliament's anger was over the fact that the inquiry report had reached the media before it was shown to Parliament. Dr Manmohan Singh has applied his familiar remedy, yet another committee, this time to enquire. If he thinks that this is a bandage for yet another self-inflicted wound, then he is in some unreal world. He has merely added weight to suspicions that his government and party may have more to hide than the principal accused.

Justice Pathak seems to wear a robe with two pockets. One is a very large pocket. It is stuffed with chits that are so clean that you cannot find anything on them. These are the clean chits he hands out to the Congress. The second pocket is very small. It holds only one chit, an unclean one, soiled with the scrawl of contorted logic. This he has

handed to Natwar Singh. There shall doubtless be rewards for doing so. Shall we say, a chance of becoming vice-president of India next year with the help of this government?

Natwar Singh is being held guilty of doing something which he never denied -- writing a letter of recommendation. If this was the standard benchmark of public probity, no Cabinet minister would last in his job. Actually, the biggest money-grabbers in politics never write letters at all. Their word is sufficient guarantee for any corrupt deal.

If Prime Minister Singh really wants to find out who leaked the Pathak inquiry report, all he has to do is telephone his finance minister, P Chidambaram. Chidambaram is a clever and knowledgeable man who makes it a point to know far more than he tells. I would not advise the

prime minister to telephone his home minister, Shivraj Patil, despite the fact that the latter is in charge of the police, both the public and the secret police. Shivraj Patil knows far less than he tells, and he doesn't tell too much.

There is the palpable reek of failure in the high offices of the Manmohan Singh government: home, foreign and finance. Defence is managed ably, because it would be difficult to mismanage this department, but the relevant point is that defence minister Pranab Mukherjee is not interested in his job. He is certain he should be in charge of a more active office, and given the disarray elsewhere, surely he has a high crisis areas are home and finance. If Shivraj Patil continues as home minister much longer, Mumbai's Muslims will soon stop

worrying about Narendra Modi. The home ministry is taking revenge upon the city's Muslims, particularly those who are poor (in other words, most of them) for the terrorist outrage on Mumbai's trains on July 11. Groups have complained to Mrs Sonia Gandhi and while she has given them time, there has been no effort to change the attitude of the home ministry. You can see the seepage of this culture in the shocking and shameful incident in Delhi, where the rooms of a visiting Pakistani delegation were searched by spooks in their absence.

The delegation included as eminent a visitor as the human rights activist and lawyer Asma Jahangir. It was kind of Prime Minister Singh to write a letter of apology, but words are less important than action. His letter confirms that the incident did take place, and the home ministry was guilty. Has the prime minister held any officer accountable? Is there a departmental inquiry? Will any action ever be taken? Does the home minister have anything to say? No is the probable answer to all three questions.

The finance minister thinks that his core responsibility is the protection of share prices rather than vegetable prices; while economic

reform, the ballast of this government's declared momentum, has ground to a halt. Strangely, the Congress part of the coalition government has begun to come apart under the pressure of time. Strange, because the Congress has experience, and wanted to rebuild its support base with effective use of power.

Instead, non-Congress ministers are the new stars. Lalu Yadav, who disguises a sharp mind with gallery humour, is now the subject of discourse in management schools. Dayanidhi Maran keeps the DMK flag high. Praful Patel is doing a fine job in a tough ministry. Kamal Nath is the only Congress minister who has enhanced his reputation -- and will probably be punished (as Mani Shankar Aiyar was) for being too successful.

The foreign ministry is floating in a vacuum because it has lost its head. This may be a bad pun, but I can't think of a better one. Jokes may be ill-suited to a time of violent turmoil across the world, but gallows humour has its virtues. There is a fusion of wars in the Middle East, that is not only changing the region dramatically at this very moment, but which could set off fires towards our doors. America and Britain are trapped in a morass they do not understand. Iraq

and Lebanon are becoming one war: I wonder how George Bush would have reacted if hundreds of thousands of Shias had gathered in Baghdad to support Hezbollah under Saddam Hussein's watch. Washington would doubtless have accused Saddam of abetting "terrorists."

Well, an Iraqi regime wrought by George Bush and Tony Blair has not only officially condemned Israel but has also permitted the most massive pro-Hezbollah demonstrations in the region. Hezbollah, of course, has turned conventional wisdom on its head and won significant battles against overwhelmingly superior forces armed and re-armed by America; its success will have ground-breaking implications.

The region is in turmoil and the land up to the Nile is in flames. Never has India been so marginalised as under the watch of Dr Manmohan Singh. This is not a reflection of the stature of India in the world, but reflection of the stature of this government. India's foreign policy is the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru, who made this nation synonymous with a virile independence. Four decades after his death, India's voice has been reduced to an occasional bleat from the shadows. I cannot imagine

Nehru or Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi without a role to play at such a moment; but then they never decided that their foreign policy would become "congruent" with America's.

Ironically, the Natwar Singh letter to the Saddam government is also proof of a time when the Congress was considered a friend of the Arab world. This relationship, built with care and consideration by Nehru and Indira Gandhi, had enough depth and credibility to permit India to improve relations with Israel without affecting its ties with the Arabs.

We had become, with time, a unique resource in international diplomacy. The drift from the Arabs began with the BJP, although Atal Behari Vajpayee tried, sporadically, to check the drift (relations with Saudi Arabia, for instance, improved dramatically under his watch). Under Dr Manmohan Singh the drift has turned into a directionless swirl. He is clearly a foreigner in the foreign ministry.

The moment has definitely come for the prime minister to reinvent his government. If he does not do it soon, Mrs Sonia Gandhi will come under pressure to reinvent the whole government, including him.

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