

Need for Restraint

What a way to observe the first anniversary of the fall of autocracy? The Awami League has accused the police; and therefore, by implication, the government; the BNP called it a planned action by AL and the Five Party leaders blamed both the BNP and the AL for the Friday's disruption of the political rallies. They were all, as we may well remember — as we hope to remember — partners in the fight for democracy just one year ago. Not only that, during the nine years of struggle to topple the illegal and corrupt regime of Gen Ershad these same parties and their allies, with a few ups and downs, had worked together, suffered together and had earned the confidence of the people together. For these parties to now accuse one another, of all sorts of crimes, within one year of that remarkable phase, is not only sad but downright demoralising.

There will be many explanations of what happened last Friday. Many more will be its interpretations. What, however, needs no in-depth analysis nor too much introspection is that all parties involved — and victimised — in the sad incident should show utmost restraint in their follow-up activities. We are not too sure of the wisdom of the Awami League's call for an 8-hour general strike. We are far less sure of the wisdom of the Home Ministry's press note putting the total blame on the shoulder of one particular party. However, we are seriously concerned at the drift of things. The parties that brought democracy to the country seem to have gone into accusations and actions without a thorough investigation of what actually happened two days ago. Was it a "well planned conspiracy" as claimed by the secretary general of the ruling party? His counterpart from the AL thought it fit to blame the Prime Minister for directing the police attack. All these can at best be called over-reaction and at worst, immature political outburst. Such statements lead to deep scars and deeper suspicions.

What had happened on the first anniversary of the fall of autocracy is shameful. It is not too difficult to imagine the pleasure that the remnants of the forces of autocracy may be deriving from all this. The danger of it is that the two leading parties, AL and BNP, are running the risk of moving further away from the spirit of unity that held them together; and with them the whole country may be dragged into a quagmire. Given the high passion that seem to be dominating the decision making process of both the parties, it is difficult to imagine that much constructive thinking will emerge from either. The other members of the old unity must, therefore, work hard to prevail upon the two principal actors to restrain themselves. They must realise that last year they were driving a usurper from power. Today they — both the ruling party and the opposition — are part of the process of governance. In running the affairs of the State many things may go wrong and many things will. But they must be handled with moderation and maturity. The speed with which both the BNP and the AL seem to go after each other within minutes of the sad episode, does not auger well for democracy.

A Welcome Development

We never really understood why it began about seven years ago, but we sure are glad it is about to end — the sordid and tragic hostage drama in the war torn Lebanon. The release of Terry Anderson, the chief Middle East correspondent of the Associated Press, marks the end of an important chapter in the macabre history of victimising the innocent that became a hall mark of the events in that region. We sincerely welcome the release of all the hostages and hope that the two Germans, still being held, would also be freed soon.

The release of the hostages amounts to a major success of the United Nations whose negotiator, Giandominico Picco, was able to open dialogue with and between all the concerned actors in the hostage affair, who have not been in communication with one another before. It is to the credit of the outgoing Secretary-General of the United Nations Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, that he was able to see the end of the hostage crisis before ending his term.

The release of the western hostages is indicative of major changes in the politics of the region. It can be taken as a final signal that the anti-western Iran is finally set on a pragmatic course in its foreign relations. Following the death of Imam Khomeini in 1989 and the coming into power of President Rafsanjani, Iran has gradually — but slowly — moved away from its strident anti-Americanism. These waves have been reciprocated by the Bush administration who paid US\$260 million in compensation for weapons impounded during the Iran-Iraq war.

Syria also played a very constructive role in leading towards the resolution of the hostage crisis. Seeing the dramatic changes in global politics, and not being able to count on its long term patron — Soviet Union — any more, Syria was forced to face the fact that it needed to change the direction of its international relations and try to neutralise old adversaries, if not gain new friends. The most dramatic signal of this shift was President Assad's agreement to sit face-to-face with Israel during the Madrid peace conference, followed by the presence of the Syrian delegation in Washington last Monday.

While we welcome the release of the western hostages in Lebanon, we look forward with more interest, to the further advancement in the peace process in the Middle East, that the hostage release indicates. Iran and Syria now seem amenable to the prospect of closer ties with the West. Syria now clearly follows a policy which is more conducive towards establishing peace in the region. But while the Arab hardliners seem to soften, Israel appears to become more belligerent. Israel must respond — or be made to respond by the US — to the prospect of peace that is now opening up in the Middle East.

THIS newest of our universities has set up a record both in respect of pre-natal and post-natal complications. Since the baby is already with us, it is the latter which should engage our attention now. They certainly made a grand show of it when the Prime Minister visited the university. What was the occasion, exactly? The newspaper reports, some of them, made it sound as if it was the inauguration of the university. Was it a repeat ceremony, then or was it not? According to one report, the foundation stone of the university laid earlier by the former President was pulled down and a fresh one was put there. I should hope that is not what actually happened.

When I say this I should make it clear that I have no particular love for the past regime. But this thing has nothing to do with love or hatred. This is simply a question of propriety, of decorum. Foundation stones are laid only once, if the site and the institution are the same. It would be setting a dangerous precedent if these historic monuments are removed and replaced with every change of government.

I would like to believe that the report was not true but I must say that there exists, unfortunately, a curious tendency to deny or to distort history. In some of the later records and reports about the university at Khulna which I have seen, the foundation work done by a committee set up by the University Grants Commission was hardly mentioned, though the fact is that the report of this committee went through all the stages of examination, —

the UGC, the Ministry of Education and, finally, the Planning Commission.

If you disregard the continuity of an idea, there is every chance that you are going to make a mess of things. The UGC committee did painstaking work in suggesting the phased introduction of academic disciplines in the new university, keeping an eye on the logical growth of a teaching university which will slowly develop into a research institution too. What appeared to us as a sensible idea was totally dropped and was replaced by a novel idea fabricated by some fertile brains. This novel idea drew an immediate and sharp criticism at the ECNEC meeting when the project came up for approval. ECNEC, as far as I

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remember, referred the matter to UGC. And now I find that the UGC could do nothing by way of stopping what appeared to many of us as a refusal to accept the dictates of common sense. One is led to ask: what should be the criterion of academic planning, — the fancy of man or the needs of a community, the demands of academic common sense?

At the time the objection was raised at the ECNEC, it transpired to our dismay that even before the project was

passed, some appointments were already made. These were teaching post, and the subjects were yet to be approved. This shows the poor surveillance we have in certain areas of our development where in the absence of that, much damage can be done. As far as I have been able to judge, I cannot fail to have profound misgivings the way matters are moving over there.

I notice that the Prime Minister on her first visit to the university, laid the foundation stone of a hall of residence for students. What pro-

PASSING CLOUDS  
Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

portion of student should have residence on the campus? This was one of the issues carefully considered by the UGC committee. The clear recommendation was that, hopeful with a suburban site and close to a major urban area, campus residence should be limited to, say, less than one third of the total enrollment. Our experience with halls of residence in the existing universities — in some cases, choice of university sites made them necessary — should make us take a close look at the issue. Hall administration has virtually collapsed in the majority of cases. Where there are alternatives available, these should be tried. The larger the halls, the greater the chance of disorder. Lesser concentration of students on the campus and their distribution in a larger

area could contribute to a peaceful campus. It is not clear if the authorities at Khulna have given any thought to these ideas as developed by the UGC committee or if they are happy to tread the beaten path which was designed in the past for a different society but which, after all the social changes that have taken place, is no longer the right path.

One would naturally wish Godspeed to this new university at Khulna which has got started after unusual travail. They have been rather stingy in the allotment of land for this university. The requirement, as reflected in the master-plan, is modest. One would expect that the government will review the question of the size of the campus and will have the imagination to see that it is the irreducible minimum that has been asked for. An early decision is necessary, otherwise what can be easily done now may prove rather difficult after a few years.

I was visiting a family a few evenings back. They have only two children and the elder child, a girl, goes to one of better known private schools of the city. The couple was discussing the fees which was already high and of which a fifty per cent rise for the

next year has been announced. On top of fees, there was what was cynematically called donation. Now this was a nominal one for a donation is supposed to be voluntary and this was not. They asked for it and you were expected to pay. The gentleman was saying, he could understand a donation if one were to pay it only once at the time of admission, but this was an annual thing which was fixed by the school and which could equal if not exceed the total fees for one year!

What was my feeling, I was listening to the frustrated dialogue of the couple! I could feel their anxiety, as, the

One could understand a donation if one were to pay it only once, at the time of admission, but no, this was an annual thing the amount of which could equal the total fees for one year!

younger child would be going to school in a year's time, and that meant that the schooling expenses would be distributed when that happens. I felt relieved as my children were all of them past their schooling, and past their university phase of education, all save one who is almost through. All of them have had fairly good schooling, by our standards, and without the important for me, at a reasonable

ate cost. I am horror struck at the thought of being younger by twenty to twenty-five years, and having have to send four children to school and college, with my present income.

But while I have escaped the tribulation, my children cannot do so. Perhaps, I need worry overmuch, for the present generation parents have found a solution for them: while expenses have gone up tenfold, they have brought down the family size considerably. One-child family is a common sight these days. Even then, the cost of schooling at a private place being what it is these days, the parents of a single child will have enough financial worries unless they belong to the very highest rung of income groups.

It reminded me of a newspaper interview of half a dozen American parents I was reading of some months ago. The dilemma posed was one of choosing between a private school for your child and giving him/her a better schooling though at a higher cost, and a state-managed school with decidedly poorer environs but, for the child, a more egalitarian, a more democratic upbringing. The choice was difficult, but I was delighted to find at least one parent, himself the product of a private school, justifying his choice of a state-managed school for his son. He did not like his child growing up with a feeling of being special, with a sense of superiority.

One wishes to know how our young parents in Bangladesh are facing the same dilemma, and which way the wind is blowing.

How a Detective Opened the Kenyan Can of Worms

by Alan Rake

President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya is facing the biggest challenge to his authoritarian government. The opposition group Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD) is fighting for multiparty democracy. An investigation into the murder of foreign minister Robert Ouko has further undermined the position of the resident and exposed him to charges of corruption.



PRESIDENT MOI His biggest challenge



ROBERT OUKO Reporting on corruption

His biggest challenge was among those arrested — but there was little real violence and damage. The FORD leaders had won wide international publicity for their cause. The Kenyan government complained of foreign embassies interfering in the internal affairs of the nation. MPs called for the deportation of US ambassador Smith Hempstone. Germany withdrew its ambassador for consultation and Scandinavian countries threatened to halt all their aid projects in Kenya. Kenya is in desperate need of continued Western aid to meet budgetary and trade deficits. Many donor countries are demanding improvements on the country's human rights

record and concessions towards democracy. Apart from the ongoing trouble with the principal aid-givers, a major war has also blown up with the British firm Lonrho. The firm is one of Kenya's principal investors and was planning a new sugar project and another oil pipeline in the country. On top of all this have come the extraordinary revelations of a British detective called in to investigate the February 1990 death of foreign minister Robert Ouko. A five-month investigation ended in August with British detective John Troon ready to name those he thought had been involved in Ouko's murder. But he was

told to hand his report to the government and go back to Britain.

For more than a year the judicial commission dragged on, calling minor witnesses, while all the time the public wanted to hear what the man from Scotland Yard had to say. Suddenly he was recalled, cheered by eager spectators, and the commissioners found the courage to ask him to read out his report in full.

With cruel clarity he exposed massive corruption at top ministerial level and an attempt at a gigantic cover-up by some of the most powerful figures in the state. Troon named names and caused Moi to demote and then sack the powerful Energy Minister Nicholas Biwott and his trusted security chief Hezekiah Oyugi.

Troon told the inquiry that as soon as he arrived in Nairobi he was surrounded by top officials determined to thrust on him the theory that Ouko had committed suicide. Most witnesses agreed that

Ouko had been taken away from him home in the middle of the night. Then his body was found with a fractured leg and a bullet through the head. One witness suggested he had hopped to the spot where he had died, doused himself in inflammable liquid, set fire to it, then used himself before the flames had reached his body.

To Troon all this was clear evidence that he had been murdered. But as he pursued his inquiries other obstructions were placed in his way. He was never able to arrange an interview with Nicholas Biwott, who avoided him.

After three months of investigation Troon found that the motive for Ouko's murder was his desire to expose massive corruption by at least three ministers. This had blown up into a major quarrel between Ouko and Biwott when they were on tour with Moi in the US in January 1990.

Troon told the inquiry that he thought Ouko was murdered on his return because

he was about to send Moi his report on corruption.

The report was supported by the evidence of a Swiss-Italian firm BAK, which complained to Moi that it had been asked for a huge kickback by three prominent ministers, including Biwott. The ministers claimed they were collecting their commissions on behalf of the President himself.

Troon repeatedly named ministers involved in corruption and senior officials involved in the cover-up. He found Oyugi evasive and unable to account for the movements of himself, his driver and his bodyguards in the area at the time Ouko died.

Under cross-examination Troon said Biwott and Oyugi were the "prime suspects" in the case. He also recommended that a full and impartial investigation be carried out into the allegations made by the BAK directors of corruption among senior government ministers and civil servants.

Long before Troon had finished his evidence Moi summarily dismissed Biwott as a minister; earlier he had fired Oyugi. Troon's evidence had already been accepted by the President and the Kenyan public at large. — GEMINI NEWS

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To the Editor...

Democratic violence!

Sir, It pains me deeply to record an incident of senseless violence which affected me and a friend of mine on the evening of December 1st. My friend, who had arrived that day from Calcutta, wanted to buy a saree for an Indian friend of hers and we had gone to a shop on the Mirpur Road in Mohammadpur. We had scarcely been inside the shop three minutes when the shop assistants began to hurriedly close the shutters and told me to move my car to an inside road of Mohammadpur as they had heard warning shouts of possible violence. I rushed down the stairs only to find three or four well-dressed young men throwing brick pieces at the windshield of the car. The bricks miraculously bounced off but then one of the men came with a wooden chair and systematically smashed all the glasses of the car as well as causing some damage to the body.

No doubt the hooligans would have set fire to the car also had not shield-carrying, helmeted riot police arrived in force within two minutes of the start of the violence and their arrival caused the violent men to run away. I was dumbfounded, and, by asking loyal people as well as, later, the police, could not find out any reason for the senseless violence against my car which was one of a number of vehicles attacked, some with passengers inside. My organization, a Canadian NGO, purchased our small car many years ago and it is still in

very good working order after 18 years of service. Assets such as our car, purchased with funds donated by the Canadian public and the Canadian Government, are used carefully in order to keep administrative costs to a minimum. I am now faced with a repair bill of over Tk 30,000. Our comprehensive insurance does not cover damage caused by riot or mob violence. Will the political party which has admitted responsibility for the incident reimburse us from their party funds?

Wishful thinking, I believe! Perhaps each political party should set up a contingency or "community fund" to pay for damage caused to innocent by standers at times such as this. Presently my organization is assisting in a social forestry project in the cyclone affected areas of Cox's Bazar, district and another of our programmes is the support of a number of organizations working with disabled persons in Bangladesh. Are the destructive anti-social young men aware that Tk 30,000 could have purchased 6,000 tree seedlings for planting on the denuded hills of Cox's Bazar district? Tk 30,000 could pay for life-saving operations for five or six persons disabled as a result of the cyclone. It could have paid for wooden or metal crutches for 100 persons disabled as a result of polio. We do not raise public funds to assist wreckers and arsonists; we try to assist and empower disadvantaged people to stand on their own feet. A year ago people shed blood to overthrow autocratic

violence. Is democratic violence that much better? I have had links with Bangladesh since 1971 and have lived here for the last six years and have always had a deep respect for the resilience and capabilities of the people of Bangladesh. I am now becoming disillusioned as I see an increasing number of people ready to press the "self-destruct button."

Julian Francis  
CUSO Director South Asia

Role of police

Sir, Often questions and doubts are raised by the people about the role of the police. Plainly, police is responsible for maintaining law and order and this is the prime role of police. It is felt that the Police Department of our country should be re-organized by providing some autonomy and extra-incentives for honest and dedicated cops with a view to make the role of the police more effective and people-oriented. The Govt. have to take necessary measures to keep the police neutral law enforcing agency. On the other hand people in the opposition fronts should not always try to colour every police action as part of the ruling party's political activity. Let police personnel function as neutral public servants under the constitutional provisions of the State. M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka.

OPINION

Industrialization and Welfare

Dr. M. T. Haq

It was extremely encouraging to know from the news media in recent days that the Prime Minister attached a very high priority to the industrialization of the country as a means of alleviating the mass poverty, unemployment etc., in the country. It would be true to say that the whole economy of Bangladesh and its different sectors are in a shambles now and almost all of them require utmost priority which is, however, not possible to be accorded to all of them, due to the paucity of resources in the country from both internal and external sources and their massive misuse and mismanagement by the past autocratic regime. We appreciate that the tasks before the new democratically elected Government are formidable. However, it is high time that a beginning is made on sound and well-conceived lines, because the poor people of Bangladesh cannot suffer any more and see the tiny exploiting section prosper at the cost of the vast majority. Looking at the manifold problems of the country and taking a cue from the statements of the Prime Minister I envisage an integrated rural development and rural industrialization. The idea is, however, based or dependent on the basic requirement that the whole country is divided into viable economic and social units or geographical areas — neither too large nor too small — suitable for development purposes on the basis of dispersal and decentralization which should be, among others, the two major objectives of economic and social policies of the Government. I find no alternative to some such arrangement on sound lines in the light of various relevant considerations. The

Thana (Police Station) area concept smacks of dealing with criminals of all types and is not appealing for the regional development concept. The country was divided by the past regime into some 450 or so Upazilas. The present Government has, however, by an Ordinance, repealed the 1982 Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganization Ordinance) and has said that all public functions at the Upazila level will now be performed by the executive organs of the Government. The Government has set up a high-powered body to review all aspects of the local government institutions. However, even the terms of reference for the commission — in definite terms — are perhaps lacking. If a rural industrialization programme has to be adopted and implemented in Bangladesh to expedite development and to deal with other problems, then there is an alternative to dividing the country into regions which should be viable as far as possible, both economically and socially. These regions should be regarded as the geographical units for economic and social development. The sooner a new or revised arrangement in this respect is adopted, an alternative to the upazila system, the better, because a country like Bangladesh cannot afford to delay economic and social development. The rationale behind the idea of the division of the country into regions is that, while the national plan will influence economic and social development in the country as a whole, the regions of the country, each of which may have, say, 200 to 300 thousand

people, will receive concentrated attention for and efforts on development producing salutary effects or impact on the individual regions. It is interesting to observe that there are two ways of getting the picture of the GDP of a country. One is the sector-wise calculation and the other, region-wise (which is a very difficult one) calculation. Both calculation should ideally give the same results. The purpose of these regional divisions should be mainly economic and social development and their administrative machinery must be geared, accordingly. These regions and their administrative arrangements must not be used only for political purposes, as was done by the past Ershad regime. The device is a means of achieving economic and social development of the country on the basis of dispersal and decentralization. The political action on the upazila system should have been to hold fresh elections in the Upazilas rather than abolishing the whole system by an Ordinance in the existing political system and climate in the country. In conclusion, I wish to emphasize again, that a number of over-riding considerations justify the geographical pattern of economic and social development. These are: 1) To deal with local unemployment and under-employment; 2) To discourage the concentration of industry in one place and to stem the migration of the rural people to the metropolitan areas (cities and towns); 3) To reduce the pressure on the essential services (such as electricity, gas, water etc.) in the metropolitan areas; and 4) To educate people of almost all ranks that they will be better off in the rural areas if development is taken there.