

Designated Sites for Public Rallies

A special parliamentary committee, in cooperation with the ministry of works, is about to finish its task of identifying suitable sites for holding public meetings and rallies in Dhaka city. According to a report in this paper, the work is in the final stages and is likely to be ready for consideration by the next session of the parliament starting sometime in October. We commend all concerned, especially the parliamentary committee, for the progress so made and would like to urge them to expedite the matter as much as possible. The way things stand now, the problems of public meetings and rallies being held on busy streets and intersections, and that also during the peak traffic hours, must be stopped immediately. The reckless behaviour of all political parties, trade unions and all sorts of organisations is bringing the city traffic to near standstill with severe economic and other consequences.

Every political party appears to have a designated street or an intersection — the busier they come the better — as its permanent meeting point. With total disregard for the rights and needs of the residents of the area, they hold their rallies and meetings making all traffic and normal business impossible. That only half the story. As politics has become violent and all of us less and less tolerant of each other's views, these rallies often end up in violent clashes with either their rivals or with the law enforcing bodies. So the arbitrarily chosen rally sites not only create obstruction to normal traffic, they also end up becoming a threat to the life and property of people who either live or do business in the area and in the neighbourhood.

What began as a defiance to the autocratic rule has now become a dangerous disregard for the fundamentals of civic life. The practice that seems to have been forced into legitimacy is one that is creating havoc with office hours, business and retail trade. It does not seem to cross the minds of the rally organisers that while their right to free expression and to assembly is inviolable, so is that of the rest of the citizens to carry on their normal life and business. When public rallies are being held in busy intersections or important avenues, an important civic right is being violated — people are being indirectly forced to participate in rallies that they may not have otherwise chosen to. Today no effort is made to publicize a meeting and try to persuade people to join it. Instead a meeting is literally "dumped" in the midst of thousands of people passing through important road junctions or doing their work in shopping and commercial districts of the city.

We expect that with the announcement of the selected sites for holding public rallies, this chaos and disturbance to public life will come to an end. However, the recommendations of the parliamentary committee must be accepted in a spirit of cooperation and accommodation. There are numerous political parties and trade union bodies who are not represented in the committee, all of whom we expect to accept the recommendations which are being prepared with the good of the public in mind. In this regard we would like to suggest to the parliamentary committee that in selecting the sites for public gatherings the factors of centrality, access, availability of public transport and other public convenience must be seriously considered. Otherwise a good initiative will fail, due to lack of public support.

Saving an Art Gallery

Art and sculpture may no longer be our strong point, but once we excelled in both. Archaeological evidences, although scanty, strongly suggest that the artistic flourish came at a time when many of the advanced nations in the world lived a barbaric life. Bengal had its worst days in the form of *matsyan* (dark age) starting after the 8th century. With a revival of Bengalee spirit in such areas as literature, philosophy and religion in the 13th and 17th centuries only, art and sculpture never really came to regain its lost places. Even in the 19th century Bengalee renaissance, the two most advanced aesthetic forms of expression once we had our speciality in did not quite match the achievements in other areas. Only recently is noticeable a growing interest of an elite segment of people in paintings; but not in sculpture.

A trend so set has not done any good either to help create new art and sculpture or to develop appreciation for the old ones, particularly beyond the urban confines. Even the most valiant attempt by some well-meaning people, including artists, of both past and present, fizzles out in the long run. News now comes from as historically important a place as Sonargaon that the lone art gallery there is virtually on the verge of ruin. Blessed by the personal touches and care as well as the paintings of two of the country's distinguished artists, S M Sultan and Aminul Islam, Sonargaon Art Gallery has the usual unenviable record of maintenance which is responsible for the present deplorable state of affairs.

Allowed in a two-storey building at once-famous Panam city, Sonargaon, this art gallery boasts around 2,000 paintings by Aminul Islam alone. While we are concerned about the ill-kept art works and the lack of maintenance of the building built several hundred years ago, we also note with heavy heart the other purpose of its establishment in 1947 losing its way in the wilderness. That was to develop an art school alongside the gallery for exhibition of paintings for art connoisseurs. As things stand today, both seem destined to embrace a premature death.

New art galleries, including permanent ones, have been coming up in the city as a manifestation of growth of the commercial dimension of the art business, not the development of people's taste for pure art. But this is bound to happen. Economic value — either in pure commercial terms or patronisation of the golden old days — is a necessary ingredient in the making of art. What is regrettable is the utter neglect our prized possessions in the art world suffer. Only a few months back the Shipa Sangrahshala, named after Shipac-harya Jainul Abedin, at Mymensingh had to suffer the worst art theft in the country's history. Not enough is known to have been done to recover the 17 invaluable lost art pieces. Similarly, sculptures are smuggled out of the country. All because of our lax attitude. A complete change in the attitude will help evolve ways and means to save the beautiful art objects.

Clinton Suggests a Radical Approach to Development Based on Grameen Bank Model

PROUD as we are of the performance of the Grameen Bank, a success story of Bangladesh, we should be gratified with the suggestion of the US presidential nominee of the Democratic Party, Bill Clinton that Prof Muhammad Yunus, the founder and the chief executive of this unique institution, should be awarded a Nobel Prize.

The Governor of the Arkansas who dealt with the relevance of the Grameen Bank to his own state, one of the poorest in the United States, made the suggestion during a wide ranging interview to a team of writers of the Rolling Stone, a popular high-circulation US magazine, published in its latest issue of September 17.

The clipping of the interview has just been made available to *The Daily Star*.

In discussing the performance of the Grameen Bank, Clinton spoke on problems facing his state and suggested how a radical approach to the banking system could help the disadvantaged groups.

He said, "I think, every major urban area and every poor rural area ought to have access to a bank that operates on the radical idea that they ought to make loans to people who deposit in their bank."

Then, when asked to elaborate on his radical approach, Clinton referred to the South Shore Bank, essentially a development-oriented institution, which had been in operation in his state. "It's made some mistakes, but on balance, it's done a lot of good," he added.

This is when he made his first reference to the Grameen Bank during the interview. Said the US presidential candidate, "You know, the South Shore Bank's Good Faith Fund (providing) loans to real low-income people, mostly for self-employment ventures, was based on the work of Muhammad Yunus at the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, which until the recent natural disasters, had a ninety-seven percent loan-repayment rate, better than the commercial banks in Bangladesh, even though it was making loans almost exclusively to poor people."

Clinton's thorough knowledge of the Grameen Bank took one interviewer, William Greider, by surprise. He asked, "I am intrigued because, with a few eccentric exceptions, I think, you are the only politician I have encountered who has heard of the Grameen Bank."

Clinton replied, "I think, Muhammad Yunus

Who knows that in not too distant future, the two — Borlaug and Yunus — may be working together as a team, in changing the grim realities in two of the most impoverished regions of the world, South Asia and Africa.

should be given a Nobel Prize." Then, the Governor went into some details as to how he came to know about the Grameen Bank, through the roommate of his wife in College, and then of his one hour and a half meeting with Muhammad Yunus in Washington.

To quote the presidential candidate again, "I spent an hour and a half with Yunus. I was just blown away. It was obvious what the parallels were. He made enterprise work. He promoted independence. Not dependence. The idea struck me that whenever the power of the government is used to create market forces that work, it is so much better than creating a bureaucracy to hire a bunch of full time people to give somebody a check."

From there, Clinton moved to other topics outlining his ideas for the regeneration of the

the poorest of the poor, placed in the low-income groups. It has taken still less notice of people who are also themselves participating in the development process, instead of attending seminars and delivering seemingly learned talks.

The claim of Muhammad Yunus to a Nobel Prize would, therefore, rest on the award committee looking at the work of this Bangladeshi expert from a different perspective.

However, it won't be that unusual a choice as some may think.

In 1970, Norman Borlaug of the United States won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in producing the high-yield variety of wheat that rescued Asia from famine and paved the way for a Green Revolution.

AT HOME AND ABROAD

S. M. ALI

economy and the revival of a new spirit, the kind of spirit that once moved the hearts and minds of people during the Kennedy presidency.

The proposal from Bill Clinton to give a Nobel Prize to Yunus comes at a time when grassroots development in most Third World countries faces one challenge after another. While many approaches are being rejected, donor nations and agencies encounter resistance in selling their prescription for "structural adjustment" to countries which cannot — just cannot — cut out agricultural subsidies or open their doors wide open to free imports.

In this scenario, the Grameen Bank provides an option that has gained the widest possible acceptance from all quarters, from the World Bank and UNICEF to national governments and voluntary organisations. Now, a presidential candidate in the United States has emerged as its latest — and apparently strongest — supporter.

The Nobel Prize Committee has so far taken little notice of exponents of Third World development which aims at the reduction of the poverty level, through direct participation of

There is an invisible link between the work of Yunus and the success story of Borlaug. Both are geared to the grass-root development in the Third World by changing the realities which poor farmers and people with hardly any income had been taught to accept for generations.

There is another link between these two outstanding men from two different parts of the world.

While Muhammad Yunus continues to expand the network of the Grameen Bank — its latest newsletter puts the number of its branches at 961 — and inspires countries even in other continents to follow the model, Borlaug, now 78, has now turned to Africa to see if parts of the continent, now facing drought and famine, can have its own Green Revolution.

Tentatively, Borlaug's answer is "yes", reports Richard Critchfield, one of the best writers — my own favourite for decades — on rural development. Author of *Those Days* and *Villages*, Critchfield may also be in his late seventies.

Borlaug's remedy is simply this: Marshal all available knowledge of African crops, fertilizer

use, control of insects and weeds, and use of moisture. Then, try all this out in African fields.

The initial results of Borlaug's experiments in several African countries are highly promising. In many places, yields have risen an average of 2.5 times. Borlaug began with wheat and sorghum in Sudan and maize in Ghana. Despite the civil war, the Sudanese harvested 800,000 tons of wheat in March, up from 160,000. Ghana's maize production has gone up by 40 per cent. Mexican scientists working with Borlaug are now operating in Tanzania, Benin and Togo and are moving into Nigeria and Ethiopia.

In short, Borlaug would do in Africa — he would certainly try his best — what has worked in Asia.

Unfortunately, Borlaug encounters some opposition, some of it, sadly enough, stemming from the World Bank.

To quote Critchfield, "World Bank senior officials are wedded to such vulgar policies as structural adjustment. Sensible enough in theory, it goes wrong in practice when the bank opposes fertilizer subsidies and argues that more research is needed. The Bank funds what it calls its 'training and visit' system of 27 African countries."

Then, Critchfield quotes none other than Borlaug as telling him during a meeting in Washington, "The World Bank says you can't justify this field work because enough research has not been done, even though we have demonstrated clearly that we can double, triple, sometimes even quadruple yields." Then, Borlaug adds, sadly and not sarcastically, "They have never lived in Africa. They live in an ivory tower called the World Bank."

This account of the battles Borlaug is fighting in Africa may remind Yunus of what he had faced in setting up the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the hostility from commercial banks, the scepticism of the public and shortage of funds, among others.

Both Borlaug and Yunus have come a long way in reaching their goals, in saving millions of people from hunger and unemployment. Maybe this is why the success of one reminds me of the work of another.

Besides, who knows that in not too distant future, the two may be working together as a team, in changing the grim realities in two of the most impoverished regions of the world, South Asia and Africa.

South Asia : Just Say 'Nuke'

The United States is tightening the screws on India and Pakistan to renounce their nuclear weapons programmes, but the two South Asian rivals are defiant. Kunda Dixit of IPS reports from Islamabad.

state visit in May.

Pakistani officials have recently stopped denying they have a bomb, and military experts say it is close to making one. India conducted an underground nuclear explosion in 1974, and is said to have enough plutonium stockpiled to produce up to 200 nuclear warheads.

With their bombs out of the closet, defence analysts on both sides argue that nuclear deterrence has actually prevented the two countries from going to war again. Last year, Pakistan proposed a five-power consultation to bring together the United States, Russia, India, Pakistan and China to stop nuclear proliferation in South Asia. The United States, China and Russia agreed to come, but India refused.

Pakistanis see this as proof of India's ambition to emerge as a major regional power in the post-Cold War world, and they suspect the United States is grooming India to serve as a bulwark against the spread of radical Islam in the region.

Pakistanis bristle when their nuclear programme is referred to by Western officials as a project to make the 'Islamic bomb.' Asked a retired Pakistani general at seminar in Islamabad recently: "The Americans have the bomb. Is it

called a Christian bomb? The Indians exploded one, was it called a Hindu bomb? The Israelis have it, is it called a Jewish bomb? why is ours called an Islamic bomb? Do bombs have religion?"

For Pakistan, things have not been the same after the United States slashed its aid package in 1990 citing the Pressler amendment under which the US president has to certify to Congress that Pakistan does not have a military nuclear programme.

With the resolution of the Afghan crisis, Pakistan was not so important and Washington was looking at radical Islam as the new threat in the 'new world order'. Pakistan used to be one of the largest recipients of US military and economic assistance alongside Turkey, Egypt and Israel. Today, it gets just US\$300 million for a handful of development projects.

There are other pressures. Former US Secretary of State James Baker in a letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif threatened to label Pakistan a 'terrorist' state unless it stopped helping Kashmiri separatists in India.

And only 30 of the 70 advanced General Dynamics F-16 warplanes that Pakistan



bought from the United States have so far been delivered. Shipment of 10 more jets were halted recently, and Islamabad is paying for their storage in US hangars.

Nuclear hardliners here accuse some senior members of the Pakistani civilian and military hierarchy of buckling under US Pressure. The air force

is vulnerable because of its dependency on spare parts for its US made jets, and is said to be "soft" on the nuclear issue.

In a stinging attack on moderate elements in the government, one noted Pakistani commentator wrote: "These habitual addicts of American aid are willing to barter away national sovereignty and even

national security at the altar of a few million dollars."

Pakistani officials have been uncharacteristically blunt and defiant towards the United States in recent months. Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry Akram Zaki, who is the country's de facto foreign minister, said in Lahore recently: "The new world order is a new word for imperialism."

India and Pakistan have fought three wars since 1947 when the subcontinent was partitioned. Bilateral ties have been characterised by chronic paranoia. The primary cause for tension is Kashmir. It is progress on this issue that will increase security and help in the resolution of the nuclear issue," said Zaki.

Some Pakistani officials also want the proposed five-power consultation on South Asian non-proliferation to include Israel. They fear a repeat of the daring Israeli raid on Iraq's nuclear installation on their own nuclear facilities.

Feelings are running high about US Pressure, and speakers at a pro-bomb seminar in Islamabad last month felt that if Pakistan signed, it would be "abject surrender and appeasement."

OPINION

Better Bureaucracy

A Mawaz

Mr Abul Ehsan's commentary on the bureaucratic systems (Star, September 2) was interesting, in these changing times, when new and inexperienced politicians (the shortcoming is circumstantial) are pitted against well established institutions such as the civil service. The dust has yet to settle down since the British left in the middle of the 20th century.

The new democratic government is at present facing so many artificial and politically oriented problems that it is hardly the time to look into the restructuring of the civil service to make it more modern and efficient. This exercise, of course, would not imply witch-hunting or chasing individual records, but focusing on the benevolent goal to make the civil service more citizen-friendly. It does not necessarily mean that the invisible wall of the Secretariat be completely removed. A small dose of the de Gaulle mystique is good for the governed.

Those who have devoted their lifetime to the Civil Service (three decades or more) would not find it difficult to come forth with varied lists of reformatory suggestions. Many of the weak areas have been pointed out in the article. By broadening the parameters of the article, it is possible to offer a few comments on some areas which should have priority while examining plans for reshaping the Civil Service.

1. MANAGERIAL INEFFICIENCY is mainly due to the lack of the right type of training and the right type of experience. Behind these lapses are the structural weaknesses misapplied in today's administration.

2. WORKLOAD INEFFICIENCY is due to surplus staff with underload of assignments or responsibilities. The staff has to be trimmed, with more individual assignment for greater output per hour. The slow-moving leisurely atmosphere in the government offices is not in public interest. The Secretariat never hums with activity. The increase in individual efficiency will work wonders.

3. How far internal ANONYMITY is to be observed has to be looked into. The prevailing system of "passing on the buck" has to be permanently removed. This means less noting and more responsibility. Unnecessary paper work is a tremendous waste, especially in the developing countries. It is possible to keep adequate written records (to check on precedents) without wasting or using so much paper. Here policy-making work and operational work have to be distinguished (the difference between the Secret and the attached Departments). There is too much noting in the operational offices, delaying and reducing the daily output.

4. TRANSFER MORE OPERATIONAL SERVICES TO THE NON-PUBLIC SECTOR, thereby reducing the load on the over-burdened and inefficient bureaucracy. It is not necessary for the government to run all the essential, and al-

leged, sensitive services. The private sector has to be encouraged. The trial and error period is still on, but the nation has to pay the price for the neglected training and the experience. The semi-autonomous sector has a bad performance record. This has to be analysed and rectified. The key question is whether the civil servants make good managers. The counter question is: How about vice versa?

5. TRANSPARENT ACCOUNTABILITY has to be introduced. The question is how and when. The loyalty of the civil servants has to be clearly defined. This is especially required during the period when the various political institutions are passing through the teething time. In fact such institutions are now being built up through scratch, after several decades of successive autocratic rules.

6. In a have-not society, MISUSE OF POWER AND MONEY would continue for some period. The checks and balances, and the deterrents have to be evolved. This will also take time. The rules of the game have to be laid down clearly.

7. USE OF FASTER COMMUNICATION SERVICES such as fax and telephone: Fax is much faster, and cheaper in the long run than the peon-delivery system (India has introduced reminder service using her domestic satellite). The outgoing telephone calls from the Secretariat, at least locally, should be encouraged. It is more time-saving than returning a file with a petty objection, or a written call for supplementary information. The officers are not yet telephone-friendly.

To the Editor...

BUET's session jam

Sir, With reference to your editorial of August 23 (Session Jam Saga), may I add a few points: The situation of session jam is aggravated by a peculiar and unbelievable custom of giving a month's study leave prior to the annual exam and additionally providing about a week's gap between each paper during the exam itself.

Previously the exam used to commence after a weekend and be finished before the following one. Thus while the whole process used to take a week the same takes more than two months and a half now. Reverting back to the semester system, as practiced earlier, the situation can be eased to a great extent. The present system encourages cramming prior to the final exam.

Elimination of political favouritism in the hierarchy of BUET administration can retain the discipline which is the hallmark of this institution. It is rumoured that a recent selection for a top position from an academically brilliant panel has the stigma of political interference. The indirect consequence was the dislocation of the date of exam for the last paper recently.

Lastly, I endorse your concluding recommendation to

introduce an element of competition in the running of various faculties.

An ex-student

Senile ramblings and statistics

Sir, We take a lot of things for granted: our land, air and water to name just a few. To those of us who live near the sea, water seems limitless and Bangladeshis are apt to consider it as a nuisance, especially during cyclones and floods and give no thought to the drought stricken areas of Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas, who would gladly take our excess off our hands if they could.

Assume that all the water on planet Earth totals 1,000 litres. Now please subtract 970 litres, which comprises the Oceans and Seas, which is salt and thus useless for almost all our purposes. That leaves just 30 litres of fresh and sweet water. Now take away 20 litres out of this, since it is trapped in the Antarctic Ice-cap, and out of our reach. Only 10 litres left and now we find that 4 litres are in our underground aquifers and another 3 litres frozen in glaciers and as eternal ice and snow on mountain tops.

Just 3 litres left and we get the bombshell that almost one

litre is in Lake Baikal alone (good luck to the Siberians); leaving only 2 litres to make up all the rivers, lakes, ponds and surface water all over the world! And in our stupidity, we are busy polluting this, by now scarce commodity, with our garbage, our pesticides, our sewage and our wastes. Just this trickle has to suffice for all the needs of almost 6 billion people and the billions of living things with whom we share the Earth. So next time you keep the bathroom tap on full while shaving or brushing your teeth, bear this in mind.

For some years now, our daily news regularly gives us detailed statistics on, amongst other things, the number of miscreants caught; amount of arms and ammunition seized; kilometres of canals dug and the resultant tons of foodgrains which will be produced. If all this is added up, and surely somebody, somewhere must be keeping the accounts, we should be informed that our country is now (1) one big prison; (2) most heavily armed; (3) all canals with no land area; and (4) the biggest exporter of foodgrains!

Verily it is stated that statistics in the modern world are used, as a drunk uses a lamp-post.

Quazi Akhlaque-uz-Zameen, Anderkilla, Chittagong.