

Getting Rid of Musclemen

Armed clashes, twice in just three days, between two groups of musclemen known as mastans, in and around Shaheedbagh have let loose a reign of terror in that locality. In the Saturday's confrontation for supremacy, stray bullets and bombs used by the rival gangs accounted for injuries to six pedestrians and two policemen. About the Monday's casualty number, reports carried in different dailies vary. One report, however, put the number of injured at 20, two of them wounded by bullets. This time as well the injury list includes two members of the law enforcing agency. On both occasions the hostility, in which all kinds of lethal weapons were used, continued for hours and the ferocity of the rivalry can best be imagined from both the injuries to the police and the protracted fight.

Then this is not the only time that groups of the musclemen have been engaged in settling a score on each other. Only recently did two groups at Motijheel Colony pit their might against each other and succeed to kill an innocent man, in a similar incident the other day, a father and his son were sent to hospital with bullet wounds, thanks again to stray bullets. The list of such incidents may be longer still but there is hardly any need to recap all of them to get a clear picture of the dominance of the muscle power in the city. In fact, the criminal gangs try as much as possible to avoid hostilities among themselves by not crossing each other's path. But this rule of the game cannot always be respected in otherwise compelling situations, especially when physical might is the deciding factor.

Evidently, such clashes among the criminal gangs are not as frequent as they were expected to be. For a true measure of their might, the daily crimes that take place in the city should perhaps provide a realistic guide. The maintenance of peaceful co-existence among the different criminal groups is a further proof that the whole city has been divided by the musclemen among themselves in a way the Italian Mafias do. Only these mini-Mafia gangs are many in numbers and not yet known to be enjoying the laundering of big drug money. But they are no less brutal and notorious than their more illustrious Italian and American peers. Even the police appear to be at a loss in their dealings with the bullies. The list of criminals punished for different terms made public the other day, surely includes such offences but no one in his right senses will admit that crime incidents are on the wane. If anything, they are alarmingly increasing.

The way toll collectors and muggers are flexing their muscle defies not just the law of the land but has also put to the test the ability of the administration to run the country smoothly. This is a fact anyone denies at a heavy cost. If the publication of the list of criminals meted out punishment does not have any deterrent impact on the law and order situation of the country, there should be no doubt that something somewhere has gone terribly wrong. If the situation continues to deteriorate in the manner it is doing, we are afraid, the nation will end up creating a Mafia reign. Before that horrible prospect comes true, the worsening of the law and order must come under serious scrutiny.

True, our musclemen are no match for the Mafia rings, but in a limited way the comparison is not totally out of place. Mafia leaders wield enormous power because they have money and men in the top echelon of the government. Laws there cannot take their own course because either they have precise hit-men to gun down the investigating officers, judges and witnesses or have succeeded to place backers in the legal system itself. Apart from political connections, the musclemen here have not many things to depend upon. But left unattended for long, they may go for similar tricks. That the criminals of some sensational mugging-cum-killings — Mona Bhai's is one — could not be brought to book is an ominous sign. Yet at its present level of deterioration, crime situation can be tackled — provided that enough political will is there.

Release Suu Kyi

Military dictators, we have seen plenty, both home grown and of the foreign variety. But the Burmese military dictators are in a class completely of their own. They are perhaps the only military dictators in the recent times who gave an election, lost it completely, and then brazenly ruled around and continued to rule as if nothing had happened. To top it all, they imprisoned the leader — Aung San Suu Kyi — who won the majority support. Yesterday Suu Kyi began her fifth consecutive year in captivity. The current administration in Myanmar, SLORC (State Law and Order Restoration Council), seized power in 1988 in the face of large scale pro-democracy movement by the people putting Suu Kyi in prison. In 1990 it held a general election, which Suu Kyi fought from jail and led her party to a tremendous victory. She has been, and continues to be, punished for it all.

It has been for four long years that the leader of the democracy movement in Myanmar has languished in house arrest, separated from her English husband and children. During this time, the world has, more or less, been silent. There were some attempt made to internationalise the issue and put pressure on the Myanmar government to release Suu Kyi. But they were timid and half-hearted, generally making no impression on SLORC. The international community has failed, more or less, to create the type of global movement which is necessary to force action in such situations. It is true that Myanmar stands diplomatically isolated. Its standing among the community of nations is at the very bottom, to say the least. But none of it mattered because the vital trade links continued to survive, in fact flourish, in some cases with China and its Southeast Asian neighbours. The role of ASEAN countries in this has been opportunistic rather than principled. The West's lip service to human rights with a keen eye on the economic benefits that Myanmar's vast natural resources hold out, has created the type of global political situation that keeps Suu Kyi in prison.

All this must change. We express our solidarity with the democracy loving people of Myanmar. We must create pressure on the SLORC to abide by the wish of the Myanmar people as expressed in the election of 1990. The world cannot permit the SLORC to get away with what they are doing. This will encourage dictatorships elsewhere.

WE celebrate the renaissance of democracy along with much of the world. For democracy has been a superb form of government, the most desirable in human history. For us, elsewhere it was not an easy street all the way to wrest the goal, for it exacted quite a price both in terms of human suffering and the time overhang. But it has its finest hour for the nation when the high drama of democratic consensus was enacted right on the floor of the national Parliament after long twenty-two years on end — a precious rarity in an untraced political scenario of ours.

We unreservedly welcome the multi-party democracy, the practice of free and impartial election, the freedom of expression, respect for human rights, rule of law, free economy, — the essential and inalienable features of democracy.

But all celebrations come to an end, forcing us to return to Saturday morning's world of reality, to come to terms with less glamorous but ultimately more important virtues of perpetuating those ideals whose success we celebrated.

In building democracy in our country, we virtually break a new ground in our archaic political culture. We are to essay a fresh start that goes much beyond drawing up a constitution. So it could not be viewed simply as a process of restoration: it was essentially a process of creating new institutions and implementing new routines, new habits and new ways to live together respecting individual dignity and freedom. These of course will take time to materialise, for they were part of a process, not an event.

Having entered into democ-

CAN a team play a game without a captain? Can an orchestra entertain the audience without a music director? Can a battle be fought without a commander? The answer to all these questions is an emphatic "no". No institution can operate in a leaderless way and no institution can achieve efficiency without coordination. All officers cannot be the coordinators of the same institution. A district or thana in grip of famine or affected by natural calamity must have a contact person with whom the prime minister, the minister or relevant secretary can speedily communicate. The concerned public representatives cannot afford to contact all the officers of the district or thana for information. In fact, DCs and TNOs are the coordinators of the coordinators at their respective levels; they are designated leaders at their own institutional levels when thana administration or district administration is considered. Of course, DCs and TNOs who are deficient in maintaining healthy and congenial interpersonal relations with the members of other cadres need to be reoriented before they are provided with these important assignments. The government should therefore be very choosy about appointing deputy commissioners because the office of the deputy commissioner is decidedly an institution and the person who will man this sacred office should have integrity of character, pleasing interpersonal behaviour and embody a new set of administrative values. He must command respect and confidence of others, otherwise the credibility of the institution will be in jeopardy.

Now a few words about the description of deputy commissioner as 'zila prashasak'. There is nothing wrong with the word 'prashasak'. Can the importance of a post be reduced simply by redesignating a title or by changing the nomenclature of a post? A rose remains a rose even if one forcibly changes its name. Thus the

Democracy to Stay on Course

by Syed Badrul Haque

In building democracy in our country, we virtually break a new ground in our archaic political culture. We are to essay a fresh start that goes much beyond drawing up a constitution. Hero-culture, a feature more common in underdeveloped countries, is often a bane that should be shunned to the utmost.

cratic governance for the third year running on the basis of a free and impartial election — which won acclaim beyond the borders — it is not time yet to permit any conclusive judgement on the performance of the ruling party, BNP. There is a strong empirical evidence to suggest that economic prosperity is of key importance for stable democracy as both are so closely linked and mutually reinforcing. But this is an area where we failed the nation so badly. Ranked as one of the poorest nations on earth, the endemic poverty had even graduated to be a part of our identity to the outside world. So much so, the former American President Richard Nixon found it appropriate to coin Bangladesh as a metaphor for poverty when he wrote: The Soviet Union is no nuclear-armed Bangladesh.

The economic gloom, — so overwhelming for us — and which is not relenting — is simply beyond the resources of a single political party to overcome. If any lesson is to be gleaned for the period the BNP government is saddled in power, it has become so very obvious that yet another consensus is rather overdue not only to shore up our beleaguered economy but also for some other vital

concerns that sit so heavy on our way up. Why, for instance, issues are taken to streets instead of the Parliament is a key question that is not easily reachable by reasons of democracy. This negative posture on the part of the Opposition clearly undermines the designated role of the Parliament in a democratic polity. The political perspective dictates that both the ruling party and the Opposition work more in tandem than in opposition to operate our nascent democracy before it can absorb any shock that may smother it. Surely, at this moment of truth, we can ill-afford to be pedestrian in our thinking than be idea's men.

Democracy needs caring of a tender shoot without which it simply rots, and may even spur an eventual authoritarian response from within the society. Hero culture, a feature more common in underdeveloped countries, is often a bane that should be shunned to the utmost. For it has a propensity to undermine and even circumvent the rule of law spawning a dichotomy in a government billed democratic. It is no less important again to enable the average workday practitioners lacking charisma or brilliance to keep the democratic engine running once the cheering has

faded. If democracy stays on its course, democratic governance could be enhanced as the citizenry seek out ways to resolve their conflicts and dilemmas within the bounds of the existing institutions. Until democracy takes root, the travails of democracy are likely to be no less severe for us than they have been everywhere else. But if one is obliged to glimpse on the basis of slim but real evidence, one cannot, however, miss a flickering light at the end of the tunnel. But this should not deceive us; alongside the encouraging developments are others that cast a disturbing shadow over.

In the sphere of political freedom, a hallmark in democratic norms, some negative developments are in the horizon. For sometime past, the idea of a leader to borrow a journalistic term to ban the Jamiat-e-Islami Party which is anchored in fundamentalist preaching is being aired, albeit in a low-key, through print media and political platforms as well. The ban, a dictatorial over-stretch, is in bad faith with democratic rationale and hardly provides any relief sought by its implementation. Worse, it could even be the precursor for another round of authoritarian fare on

this soil of ours. So it concerns us in a much fundamental way than what it may innocuously look like. In a democratic dispensation, political parties should face each other politically, not by banning, in reverence, it only reflects the inadequacies of our democraticness and even lack of intellectual vigour striving towards an understanding of the multiparty system; its profound unsettling impact on our fledgling democracy too cannot be brushed off so lightly. If past is any guide, it would be an utter folly to take liberty with democracy in any form. Hopefully, our budding democracy is still holding. We must refuse to diminish it with trivial issues which seemingly are at a distance from democratic ideals. In our political savvy, we are to discover that it is easier to arrange the trappings of democratic governance than achieve its substance.

Mentionably, in western democracies, the communist and fascist parties — not infrequently with aggressive postures — freely propagate their views. In India, the biggest democracy in Asia, BJP with Jendankism as its credo is a strong contender for power.

To recall, in 1975 the assault on our democracy was no less

than a disaster. Awami League, the ruling party, in its bid to show down the dissenters unilaterally switched over to one-party rule under the banner BAKSAL. The party's political carriage jolted heavily, the charisma card failed to spell magic any more. Even to-day, the party continues to pay the price in the esteem of the citizenry. Even the emergence of BNP as a political force is widely attributed to the democracy-deficit of the Awami League, other contributing factors apart. The new-born BNP's popularity soared high in no time. In the political run-up, it clearly stole march over the once-sovereign Awami League and is now well-ensconced in the country's political arena. And this is the most outstanding phenomenon emerging from the political legacy of the 1975 event.

A study into the BNP phenomenon in our national politics, if undertaken, would certainly be a rewarding document towards a better understanding of the country's political development, besides, of course, meeting a historic void that still stares on our face so brazenly.

Our politics is rarely granted the opportunity to embrace the cherished moments of democracy that currently exhilarate us in the ex-authoritarian society. Given the constraints, visible or otherwise, and political graces permitting, should BNP run its term of office, that would be a luminous gift to the nation, even if the bureaucratic hassle continues to plague the citizenry or the economy grows at a crawl. If democracy is allowed unfettered sway, it will in its stride, take care of the impediments and effect a qualitative change in nation's politics.

BUREAUCRACY-TECHNOCRACY TENSION II

Leadership is Vital in Administration

by Syed Naquib Muslim

problem seems to lie not in the nomenclature but in the attitude of those who are objecting to it. In fact, much of the tension between the specialists and the generalist, originates from the misperception of the basic concepts like leadership, coordination, status and power.

In all activities perception is very important because unless one perceives correctly, one cannot behave correctly. Wrong perception is the root of incongruous behaviour. Administration is what the administrators do. As Marshall Dimock observes, "Administration is administered by administrators." Its functions cannot be determined by conjecture but by experience. The members of the civil service, irrespective of cadre, have to call a spade a spade in these days of transparency. They have to acknowledge that the functions of the administrators are quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial. It means that apart from executive functions, it has to perform adjudicatory functions. In this sense, the job of an administrator is inherently multi-functional. These substantive functions of the administrators cannot be shared by the engineer whose job is to build bridges, roads etc. or by a district agricultural officer whose job is to raise food production of his district. It is therefore, pragmatic to accept the realities.

Leadership is again a concept highly misconceived and misunderstood by the civil servants of all cadres with traditional orientation. Administration and leadership are linked to each other. As Marshall Dimock observes, administration is "a dynamic process in which leadership sets the mark and thereafter sails as

straight a course as possible". Leadership does not mean domination; it means the art of maintaining order and harmony. It is elementally a coordinative and an integrative function. Modern administration is based on synergic teamwork and the leader has to influence the team-members to achieve common goals.

It is true that TNOs and DCs who are designated leaders in the thana or district administration must make a reappraisal of their role in the context of democratic administration. They must get themselves re-oriented; they have to create a new administrative culture if they are to play their leadership role effectively. They must shake off the colonial and paternalistic attitude which cannot help them in discharging their duties properly. They have to remember that an elitist outlook is never compatible with the democratic spirit. What they should have is the pride of craft, not the craft of pride. Moreover, real power flows from the commitment for service to the disadvantaged or distressed people. Real status consists not in the emoluments one draws but in the degree of efficiency one has achieved. And incorruptibility is a part of efficiency today.

The specialist being members of the civil service are also members of the bureaucracy; but ironically they are trying to mobilize public opinion by propagating that democracy cannot flourish unless bureaucracy is eliminated. In fact, modern bureaucracy and democracy are not antithetic to each other; they rather need each other so that they reinforce each other. The rule of law, impersonality, merit sys-

tem which are elements of bureaucracy are also requirements of democracy. In a development-oriented bureaucracy, delegation and decentralization which are democratic practices are widely practised. Both bureaucracy and democracy do not favour use of arbitrary power; both are subject to law/rules.

The specialist are in favour of devolving executive responsibilities on the elected public representatives ostensibly to reduce the power of the administrators. This does not seem pragmatic and the idea is not theoretically valid. The func-

tions of an administrator and an elected public representative are different. Elected public representatives are not supposed to have technical expertise in policy-making, rule-making and law-making; they express their will or vision and it is the administrators who give flesh and blood to the skeleton of public policies; they exercise surveillance over the activities of the administrators but it is the administrators who know wherein lies the problem. Acknowledging this fact, Robert S. Lorch remarks, "administrators are taking legislative and judicial power in the heartlands of representative

OPINION

Public Expenditure, at whose Cost?

Shahabuddin Mahtab

The Finance Minister Mr Saifur Rahman is making some genuine efforts to bring some discipline in public spending. As a respected Chartered Accountant, he very well knows that unless some norms, rules and principles are applied to private concerns, private corporations etc these are bound to go in the red and be liquidated. The same principles apply to the business of the government as well.

Now that an elected government is functioning, for more than two years, the people expect that things will be done based on rationality, and the greater national interest.

In the pre-budget meeting called by the Finance Minister, his Ministry insisted that 'wholesale' nationalisation of educational institutions, should be carefully reviewed. As quoted by the news media (Daily Star July 11th) the pre-budget meeting went on to say, "The meet-

ing noted with dissatisfaction, that the nationalisation programme benefits only the teachers, not the standard of education, and rather posing a permanent burden on the national budget". So what good it brings to the country and the people when more than thousand crore Taka are spent in the education sector? When the per capita cost for a student in a college, university college or a general university for a year is anything between Tk 15,000.00 to Tk 20,000.00, how does it fare with our per capita income of Tk 8,400.00 (\$210) for the whole year?

The governments all over the world are responsible for school education only. The higher education is available only to the very rich, and they have to pay for the whole costs. Special

provisions are, however, made for the really meritorious students. For year in and year out, we are flooding the market with graduates, who are either unemployed or unemployable. The tax payers have not sacrificed their hard earned money for things which are totally unjustified.

During the eighties, declarations were made for nationalising colleges — in grand public meetings amidst great applause. Nowhere in the world such things happen. Going in for higher education with a bounty from the government, and paltry tuition fee is an unheard of thing in the developed world.

It is our sincere hope that the matter will be dispassionately examined by our legislators, planners and the government, so that we can reach at a consensus, which is beneficial to the country in the long run.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

"PWD and Dhanmondi R/A"

Sir, I refer you to the letter of Mr Zohurul Huq on "PWD and Dhanmondi R/A" published in your esteemed paper of June 19 last. We the residents of the area in general fully endorse his views and we are pained and taken aback that the matter should be broached at this distance of time since the plots were allotted in 1958.

Mr Huq has given cogent and fully logical reasons for maintaining the status quo and keeping the house owners undisturbed. Yet considering the gravity of the matter, I would like to make brief comments as below.

It is an undisputed fact that the conditions and circumstances obtaining at the time of allotment have radically changed and the entire question must now be judged in the context of present situation and realities. For example, in 1958 when the allotments were made, the town planners could not obviously have in their conception

people are compelled to go to clinics or private hospitals as life is most precious. Dhanmondi is a fairly big area and its population is fairly large and so schools are essential for education of the children of the area. Banks also are a dire necessity in the economic life of the present day society. Offices both government and non-government are also the crying need of the people of the area to deal with their day to day problems. Now if ignoring this stark reality, government embarks dislodging the organisations/establishments from their present location an absurd situation will arise and people's sufferings will simply be unbearable and horrifying.

In Dhaka, Motijheel is practically the only commercial area where international, government and non-government offices of the standard of Dhanmondi R/A can be located. But finding accommodation in that area is a Herculean task. Furthermore, prevailing rent in Motijheel may be beyond the financial ability of many organisations/establishments. Schools, clinics and hospitals cannot be shifted to Motijheel as the area is simply unsuitable for them. Banks and offices serving the local people cannot also be shifted, leaving the people in unimaginable difficulties. Government's duty is to mitigate sufferings of its citizens and certainly not enhance

them. In this context, the PWD should also kindly consider that in the changed situation, particularly Dhaka becoming a big metropolis, Dhanmondi and other adjacent areas have become, on their own, important busy areas and so the original factors governing the principle of allotment cannot now be applied by any stretch of imagination. For instance, Mirpur Road passing through Dhanmondi and the adjacent areas is one of the most busy roads and the houses on the roadside are not at all suitable for residence and hardly anybody will hire them for such purpose.

The din, bustle and noise being inevitable, the houses on Mirpur Road can be let out mainly for non-residential purpose and as a matter of fact it has been practically so done. Frankly speaking, Rajuk has taken a pragmatic view and has allowed the non-residential use of the houses on Mirpur Road. Certainly if the then town planners did have any inkling of the future change and development, the lease clauses would have become different and in conformity with reality.

The matter involves another aspect which must be taken into serious consideration. The houses in the area which are let out yield rent income to the house owners which in turn yield income tax and other taxes to the government. They

are thus an important and sizeable source of tax revenue to the state which must not be stifled particularly in a financially starved country like ours. Apart from government, in many cases houses let out are the only source of income of many persons who are retired or widows to live on. If at this stage they are to lose this wherewithal of their existence they will be thrown into a grim disastrous situation and many will have to starve.

It is reported that the government will not acquire in future any more land either for residential or other purposes owing to serious objections of the land owners. Sometime ago, the government invited applications for allotment of lands in Nikunja, an area near the Airport but owing to stiff opposition of the land owners it is reported to have abandoned the project. If future acquisition remains banned, then it will be a burning question how the rapid growing population with the accompanying need for more offices establishments/organisations can be given spaces to accommodate.

Housing is a fundamental right of the people of a country and whereas the need of the time is to widen the prospect to the maximum, it will be disastrous if government, on the other hand, go for dislodgment of many institutions, organisations, establishments etc from

their present location and force them to find alternative accommodation which is already almost an impossibility in a city currently so hard pressed for house.

Lastly, it must be noted that already more than 1/3rd of the lease period had expired and any attempt to alter the system already prevailing in the area will throw the house owners concerned into untold misery and hardships.

We appeal to the concerned authority to refrain from taking any steps detrimental to the interest of the concerned house owners.

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Letter with tailpiece

Sir, It was a pleasant surprise to read a letter by K R Zakhami "Criminalisation of politics" (D/S 26-6-93). This is the first time I have ever read a letter to the editor with a tail piece.

You have introduced a new trend in this column which is most welcome. I expect more such witty letters from your readers with tailpiece.

Zubaida Khanum
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