

It's Being Clever, Not Wise

It appears that government is now certain to seek the opinion of the Supreme Court (SC) on the issue of 90-day absence of the opposition MPs. As a report in this paper indicates the matter is out of hand of the Speaker, and is being handled by the Law Ministry.

The Constitution provides for seeking of such opinion on matters of interpretation of law. While there is nothing patently wrong or questionable in this move, there is however some skepticism in the public mind as to the timing of it. The benefits of the Government's move comes under a shadow of doubt when one is confronted by the fact that no attempt was made to clarify this issue for all these months during which the opposition MPs have been absent. Even for the last few weeks when the subject was being written about in the national press, and while the Speaker was preparing his own ruling, the BNP did not realise the need for seeking SC opinion. So why now?

We feel that the move is a legally camouflaged delaying process, made to suit the ruling party's aim to push back the election date as far close to the completion of the five-year term of this government as is possible. One can say if going to the SC for an opinion gains a few more weeks then why not use it to one's benefit. The only thing wrong with such an approach is that it amounts to being 'clever' as against being 'wise'. Yes, there are always measures one can adopt to delay, to harass, to prolong and even to mislead. But then this does not go to solve problems, nor do they build understanding, harmony, consensus, or provide solutions. It just sets bad precedents.

It will be the credibility of the Speaker which will suffer the most. There will be no way for him to remove the impression, especially when he himself has been saying that there is no ambiguity in the law, and no scope for interpretation, that it was under his party's pressure that he withheld the ruling on resignation and agreed to the move to seek SC opinion. So, our view is that BNP, instead of going for a delaying move, and using seeking SC's views as tactics to realise the ruling party's own political agenda, should, as has been the Speaker to give his ruling.

Master Plan for Ctg

A 15-year master plan for Chittagong is all ready, minister Abdullah Al-Noman told a Chittagong Development Authority review meeting on Saturday. Drawing such a gigantic plan — costing Taka 10 billion in the first estimates — needs a bevy of top experts and considerable time and exacts a hefty fee in millions of taka. Strange, not many people got the scent of such a big job being completed almost in silence. Credit-craving ministers would well have publicised the coming of such a big thing — perhaps it was not known even to them. Eventually it fell upon the fisheries and livestock minister to let the thing to press and public — the master plan in question being the farthest from his designated cares.

Some people in the capital city are wary of such master plans, and some are even scary. There must be this or that M.P. at work here otherwise how would all the waterways and dighis of the city simply vanish so perfectly. Minister Noman informs us Chittagong was so far being developed under a master plan launched in 1961. It is not known whether that plan ran its full course. But the effects of that M.P. is strewn all over that hill city once called the Scotland of the East — numerous hills levelled to the ground. Well, cutting hills was no part of the '61 M.P. and this act of unsurpassable vandalism is duly banned also in the new M.P. So what? Hills would continue to be cut. And if that is true, you can consign this new 10 billion taka M.P. to the Bay of Bengal.

When hills were being razed to the ground, not exactly in the stealth and in the dark of nights but with three-digit decibel bulldozers — there was the same CDA there, there were DCs heading district administration and there were ministers come Chittagong in every government after the British quit in 1947. And the hills were cut down. What chance the new M.P. stands against this supra-governmental force. One knows of another such force — corruption. If the government cannot stop hill-cutting, they should better stop talking about Chittagong's development.

The drainage and flood control systems being touted as the main features of the new M.P. are being needed only now, as a direct result of hill-cutting. A hill city is not a hill city if nature does not take care of its drainage and flooding problems.

The Chittagonians' self-satisfied mental frames must first undergo a radical change before Chittagong can be developed to its full potential of a great port city nestling in the hills.

Nightmare in Sylhet

The whole of the city of Sylhet is now a hostage to terror. Violent clashes between students are nothing new specially in the 'academic' cities of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Mymensingh or even Barisal. Chittagong and Rajshahi university campuses have for long been bastions of a certain fascist organisation ruling there through their superiority in armour as well as action. But the all-too familiar eruptions in Mymensingh Agri-varsity or Barisal Medical College etc do not touch upon the lives of those towns. The Sylhet campus nightmare engulfed the whole of that city on Saturday and spilled into the next.

This is far beyond what a civil society can take. About 25 activists of the warring students fronts of BNP and Jamaat were grievously injured in bloody engagements occurring mostly outside the campus and deep inside the city. It will take a goodly exercise of imagination to know how it feels with hordes of student hoodlums roaming the roads and lanes of one's town to ferret out enemy students and shoot or stab them or cut their veins at the tendon. One such horde needed a motorcycle and stabbed a passing rider — a contractor — to take away his vehicle.

Tension has been mounting from Tuesday and on Friday M C College and Madanmohan were closed sine die. By the time it exploded into bloody clashes on Saturday the whole city has been embroiled. And now this is no more a campus eruption conveniently avoidable as lending to no ordinary preventive measure as ordinary cases of violent crime. The Sylhet city and district administration must stop the riot with iron will.

Shah Jalal University of Science and Technology was commissioned to be our small beginning towards a combination of Princeton and MIT. Specialised and academic all the way with no scope for sliding into organised murders available as standard in other universities. And that high dream has come to this!

OVER twenty years ago two fine brains representing two civilisations — Roman Catholic Paulo Portoghesi and Mussawi from Baghdad — put their minds together to create a prayer house for Muslims in the heart of Christendom and the city of Saint Peter's Basilica. The dream of these two architects found expression in perhaps the finest Islamic mosque in Europe, built in the post-modern era, and President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro inaugurating on June 21 in presence of Prince Salman Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, one of the guardians of the holy mosques of Mecca and Medina, Cardinals, orthodox priests and Tullia Zevi, leader of Italy's Jewish community.

Located in the patrician district of Parioli, not far from the St. Peter's Basilica, and in the vicinity of Via Antonio Bestolmi, housing both the Villa Taverna, the American Embassy residence as well as the Bangladesh Embassy, this structure has drawn the attention of the architectural buffs from all over the world. Quite by co-incidence the piazza and the road, named after Bangladesh in July 1991, is within stone's throw of this monumental novelty.

To match the architectural 'particularity' of Saint John Lateran, the Cathedral church of the Pope as the Bishop of Rome and Saint Peter's Basilica, the Vatican, the builders of the mosque went about in search of a symbol befitting the Roman surrounding as well as Islamic philosophy and tradition. As a historian has said, "one must agree to put off defining civilisation till one has looked at the Rome of the Popes".

Light upon Light : The Mosque in Rome

By erecting the House of Light in the land of St. Peter's Basilica, the Muslims have achieved through diplomacy what they couldn't accomplish by the power of the sword.

Sura Nur in the Holy Quran provided exactly what they were looking for. The architecture therefore, carefully, draws on the inner meaning of this verse: "Allah is the light of the Heavens

And of the Earth, His light is like a niche in which there is a lamp, The lamp is in a glass And the glass is like a shining star, It is lit from a blessed tree An olive tree Neither an Eastern nor a Western one, Its oil almost shines alone Even if no fire touches it, Light upon light....."

A believer entering the portals of this House of Allah will have little doubt in believing that Allah creates allegories for man and Allah knows all things. Islam is not unknown to the Italians. In 827 the Arabs set foot at Mazara Del Vello in Sicily and after defeating the Christians, they ruled the area for long three centuries in humanitarian and conciliatory spirit ensuring considerable economic development. The Muslims brought about innovations in agriculture, citrus and silkworm cultivations. Islamic decorative art and technique including the art of calligraphy made particular contribution. Local architecture imbibed new

forms with the building of mosques, the Royal Palace in Palermo and numerous other monuments. Scholars, philosophers, poets, and scientists met at the court of the Muslim rulers and Sicily had become the centre of culture and civilisation maintaining a bridgehead with the still barbarous and medieval Western countries. Although the Muslim rule terminated with Norman Conquest in 1091, monuments like Saint Gio-

Catholics in Italy numbering over half-a-million. Majority of them are from the Maghreb. Amongst them are about 30,000 Bangladesh citizens who have gone to Italy between 1987 to 1992. Piazza Victoria has the verisimilitude of little Bangladesh in Rome! The third largest ethnic group is the Jewish community numbering about 50,000.

The inauguration of the mosque by the Catholic pres-

ident of Italy is a true demonstration of ecumenism in religion. It is a far cry from the day when the Normans used to decry the Muslims. Even the Jewish community in Italy, a powerful ethnic group, is making serious effort to forget a past which is not so memorable. Emperor Titus, the conqueror of Jerusalem, was known to be so unhappy with the Jewish community that he applied many repressive measures against the Jews.

The religious harmony that exists in Italy could perhaps be a model for many countries to follow. Italy has a long history to fall back on.

ENCHIRIDION

by Waliur Rahman



vanni Degli Fremiti in Palermo still bears the indelible mark of Islamic heritage. Built by Roger II in 1132, on the ruins of a mosque, the austere square structure of the building with red Oriental Cupola, rising above the tower bell unmistakably generates its Islamic suggestiveness to the visitors.

The Normans who succeeded the Saracens made serious efforts to erase the memory of Islam from the Sicilian mind. But they never hesitated to use Muslim architects to decorate their palaces and churches.

Muslims are the second largest ethnic group after the

Arabian Muslims began settling in these parts from the early 9th c. The glad tidings of this promising land lured the Persians, the Turks, the Afghans and the Moguls to follow the Arabian trail. From the 16th c. onwards, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and finally, the British have inhabited the land, colonised, plundered and, in many ways, sentenced the people to incalculable sufferings and tribulations, one of which is being a nation whose men shall be without a national dress. But, presently some of us are eager to confuse each other.

Because we have been so blessed as to have had a bevy of nationalities visiting us, mostly uninvited, should we then be wearing the Indian *nagra*, the titanic pyjamas, the embroidered *punjabi*, the Arabian *al khalas*, the English coat, the European choker and top all of these with the wry Bangalee smile? Many of us already do. But, this is getting us nowhere.

Usually, the most popular attire is designated as the National dress. The lungi would then be the natural choice for men. Of course, the men would require a top. You don't expect them to wear the lungi like those lovely African damsels or as a

and by the Burmese. The Arabian Muslims began settling in these parts from the early 9th c. The glad tidings of this promising land lured the Persians, the Turks, the Afghans and the Moguls to follow the Arabian trail. From the 16th c. onwards, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and finally, the British have inhabited the land, colonised, plundered and, in many ways, sentenced the people to incalculable sufferings and tribulations, one of which is being a nation whose men shall be without a national dress. But, presently some of us are eager to confuse each other.

Because we have been so blessed as to have had a bevy of nationalities visiting us, mostly uninvited, should we then be wearing the Indian *nagra*, the titanic pyjamas, the embroidered *punjabi*, the Arabian *al khalas*, the English coat, the European choker and top all of these with the wry Bangalee smile? Many of us already do. But, this is getting us nowhere.

Usually, the most popular attire is designated as the National dress. The lungi would then be the natural choice for men. Of course, the men would require a top. You don't expect them to wear the lungi like those lovely African damsels or as a

usually, the most popular attire is designated as the National dress. The lungi would then be the natural choice for men. Of course, the men would require a top. You don't expect them to wear the lungi like those lovely African damsels or as a

Basilica
Earlier in the thirties when the Muslims wanted to build a mosque in Rome, the fascist leader Mussolini-Duce insisted that the Roman Catholics should also be allowed to build their Church in Muslim Holy Places! As the Italian President was inaugurating the Mosque, Pope Paul II was making his appeal to the Islamic world to reciprocate this noble and ecumenical gesture.

Islam and Christianity have had numerous face-offs in the past. In 720 Charles Martell delivered Christendom by defeating the Arabs at Poitiers, south of France. During the Crusades the Italian cities grew in wealth and created the lay culture of Europe. As Hugh Trevor-Ropes said, "Even the Crusaders themselves were improved by contact with Muslim civility". As late as early 16th century, the Roman Ambassador to the Sultan of Turkey Busbequius lamented, "Christendom subsisted precariously by the goodwill of the Sophy, the king of Persia, whose ambitions in the East continually called the Sultan of Turkey back from western conquests".

By erecting the House of Light in the land of St. Peter's Basilica, the Muslims have achieved through diplomacy what they couldn't accomplish by the power of the sword. Let this new spirit of intra-religious ecumenism serve as a beacon to the establishment of harmony and understanding amongst all the faiths.

The writer was Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy, Tunisia and Switzerland.

IN the long-drawn argument on which is the superior sex, the feminine variety around us, has a cakewalk when it comes to singling out our National Dress! The saree is elegant, graceful, dignified, sensual and what not; but the muscular version of mankind (with or without chin whiskers) would look outrageously silly in this otherwise captivating outfit. Of course the man on the street looks equally preposterous in apparels borrowed (often permanently) from wardrobes around the world.

There's this man in a dark suit with no tie, another with a darker ensemble in combination with running shoes (helpful for people late for their office), black shoes and no socks (lips reddened with pain), pyjama with a shirt, lungi and punjabi, jeans trousers with a five inch wide belt, etc. The gentler versions carry on their daily chores in shirts and trousers. Come the holy days, for the really confused ones the *shalwar-kurta* of Pathan/Punjab origin (maybe Bihari) anything but *Bangladeshi* seems to be the order of the day, and God knows why.

If per chance you have been presented with five bed sheets and are at wit's end in deciding what to do, perhaps the best thing is to make

yourself a pair of these colossal, blown-out-of-proportion, pyjamas. They can double as a floor mat, of course, with you out of it. Children can hide in them, only two at a time. If you have four children, you ought to have two pairs at hand. And, when the laundry has failed to deliver the curtains on time, you could always hang a pair at each window to give your home that archaic look.

This thing about a national outfit invariably strikes you during the 'Opening Extravaganza of any Games. That is surely the world's fashion parade of national attires. While our "sareed" women will be given their deserved ovation, our men in coats and trousers, necktie and shoes, hats and no smiles, will be confused as over tanned Englishmen.

In neighbouring Bhutan men and women can be reprimanded with a cash fine for not wearing their National Dresses, the *kho* for men and *kira* for women; the Nepalese men have their characteristic pyjamas, fashionable jackets and a smart *Bhadgaone* top; the Pakistanis and the Indians have their national as well as regional costumes. The Africans, the Arabs, those from the Far-East, the Dutch, the Germans, the Red Indians, the Eskimos; they all have a

Lungi at the UN

Push of Sea

by Chintito

national identity when it comes to clothing. Our past perhaps hands down to us reasons to be con-

fused. Being a prosperous land, Bengal was first invaded by the Aryans, and later by the Mongolians from Tibet,



LEVIES
LUNGI FOR MEN

To the Editor...

One policeman for 4500 people

Sir, A news item published in your esteemed daily on 24.6.95 reports that there is one policeman for every 4500 people in the city to check crime and ensure security. And that for about 75 lakh people of the city the strength of the DMP is about 13,250 including officers against the sanctioned 15,158 which is also 'too less' for the population.

However, one cannot deny the fact that crimes like highway robbery, raping, abduction, trafficking, hijacking, violation of traffic rules, mugging, theft and dacoity etc have increased to a great extent nowadays. But it does not mean that many of the 4500 people commit crimes at a time for which one policeman cannot control such huge number of criminals and ensure security of the commonman. So to say, gunbattles between the rival groups of student community and musclemen of political parties do not occur everyday that the police cannot check it.

What is the number of criminals in the city? It will not exceed 15 thousand and majority of them, believably, are in the know of the policemen. And if the majority of the professional criminals could be nabbed, the newcomers would simply flee the field. But in most cases when criminals perform crime the police reportedly perform the role of silent spectators.

We admit that DMP suffers from inadequate logistic support such as vehicles, arms and communication equipment but we differ on the issue that the strength of DMP is 'too less' for the population for which they are unable to check crime and ensure security.

It is also needless to say that if the policeman found to be in corrupt practice of, say, toll collection from the criminals or bus/truck operators, as

often alleged, are given exemplary punishment, crimes will be reduced to a great extent.

So we urge the concerned authorities to start 'combing operation' to eliminate both criminals and corrupt policemen, if any, to ensure safety and peace of the citizenry.

Salaudin Chowdhury
Masdhair Gorsthan Road,
Narayanganj

First Bengali Muslim ICS

Sir, Of late, several letters appeared in the letters to the Editor column of The Daily Star, with a view to ascertaining the first Bengali Muslim in the ICS cadre. From these letters it transpired that four Muslim officers, i.e. Mujibur Rahman of Faridpur, K G Morshed of Murshidabad, T I M Nurunnabi Choudhury of Gaibandha and Aktar Zaman of Munshiganj were in the ICS cadre. It was also known that the first three gentlemen were nominated/selected by the British government and the last named person was the only Bengali Muslim who joined the service through competitive examinations.

Your readers are probably unaware of the fact that there was another senior Bengali Muslim who joined the ICS through competition in England before the turn of this century. His name is Gaganer Ali Khan who hailed from Sylhet district. He was born in 1872. After obtaining BA degree he appeared at the ICS examination in 1897 and topped the list of successful candidates. He joined service in the then Central Province (CP). He retired from service as Commissioner, Nagpur Division in 1932. He was the fourth Indian Muslim and first Bengali Muslim in the ICS cadre.

Mr Khan's elder brother Dr Asadder Ali Khan was a renowned physician who retired as Civil Surgeon from Bihar government in Patna.

His two sons, Ahmed Ali Khan and Mahmud Ali Khan were Barristers in Calcutta High Court. Our Rear Admiral, late Mahboob Ali Khan was the son of Barrister Ahmed Ali Khan.

Mr G A Khan was decorated with OBE and CIE by the British government. After retirement from service, he returned to his village home and devoted himself in the welfare activities and the development of the area. He died in 1959.

W Choudhury
2 New Mansion
Ispahani Colony,
Moghbaraz,
Dhaka

Duty on cement and MS rod

Sir, It is very much heartening to know that the honorable Finance Minister, in his budget speech, has proposed many a cut, say, 30 per cent to 10 per cent of Customs duties on various imported raw materials used in cosmetics, ceramics and melamine, manufacturing of electrical goods, as well as on television and fridge but mentioned nothing, in his speech, on the most important items like cement and MS rods which are urgently needed in housing, specially by the low income groups whose life-long dreams are to construct a small house to live in.

Presently, cement is being sold in the open market at Tk 280 to 300 per bag (often adulterated) and MS rods at Tk 20,000 to 22,000 per ton which are really beyond the capacity of a common man to purchase. Hence I request the government to lower the import duty on these two items too like on other less essential items and also to see that the cement is not adulterated and the genuine purchasers are not cheated.

Firuze Ahmed
360 Free School Street, Dhaka-1205

OPINION

Whilst the Mighty Treason Flourished

As a sovereign independent country, we maintain a Defence Force to safeguard our territorial integrity. As Bangladeshis, we are very proud of our Armed Forces.

During the days of the British Raj, the Bengalee, in the role of a soldier, was depicted as undependable, misfit and undesirable and the general impression given to be cut out more of an "Office Baboo" (clerk). Surely this canard had no historical truth, as there are countless evidences to the contrary. It is quite obvious that this concoction was done with an mischievous end, which also quite suited the Pakistani regime, as can be easily seen from the representation of Bengalee soldiers in the Pak Army.

Thus, the birth of Bangladesh Armed Forces raised and tempered in the battlefields of the 1971 War of Liberation had unfurled the might and capabilities of the Bengalee as a fighting force. The age old attempts to belittle the Bengalee, as a soldier, was finally put on the ebb. Young captains and majors of the Bangladesh Forces literally shook the top brasses of the Pak Army. It is they, who within a very short time had transformed our Armed Forces into a highly professional and efficient fighting force. This indeed is a tremendous achievement and is highly commendable. The performance our troops in various United Nations deployment worldwide under the most difficult conditions establishes this fact.

It takes a huge amount of expense to build a professional soldier. Right from the training stages in the Military Academy, as the soldier climbs the ladder of seniority, the expenses on him also increases. There are courses to be attended, facilities/benefits to be provided, war games

(exercises) to be organized, subsidized rations to be given, *burra khannas* to be held, low cost residential plots to be allotted (to live or rent out) etc. Apart from these, there are expenses in the way of procurement, replacement or refurbishment of weaponries and war machines.

To this extent such expenses it is perhaps necessary and warranted. But beyond these when there are instances where expenditure continues even after their retirement or dismissal is very unfortunate. It is often seen that after their departure from the armed forces, they have to be absorbed by different ministries, corporations or our Missions abroad in quite senior positions. In some cases even when their career performance does not warrant such an appointment. It becomes hardly a matter of consideration whether these postings are commensurate to such individuals aptitude, experience or qualification or whether they are justified in the light of their track record or against the needs of the country.

Who is paying for these expenses? It is either the taxpayer and the silent majority of our poor country whom I call as the "Simple Citizen" or the foreign donors. Against all these contributions and sacrifice, the last thing "Simple Citizen" deserve to get is a barrage of tailor made stories time to time involving some members of our Armed Forces, purely to suit or justify the needs of the hour. At the end of the day when truth finds its way out, it makes "Simple Citizen" feel that he has been cheated and subjected to sheer mockery.

Though what has not missed the attention of "Simple Citizen" is that over the years on various grounds, and circumstances some of the finest and dedicated personnels of our armed forces had been

eliminated from service. What appears most striking here, is that all of them had participated in the War of Liberation where they had a track record of impeccable loyalty, total dedication, unquestionable integrity, tremendous skill and represented the very core of what started as the Armed Forces of Bangladesh. Yet a totally different facade depicting them as traitors, foreign agents, conspirators were held before "Simple Citizen" after they were systematically killed or when they were hanged or summarily dismissed. Under this facade all their achievements were obliterated. This is the most unfortunate part in the annals of our Military history.

An article under "Opinion" column by Mrs. Niloufer Huda, wife of late Colonel K N Huda Bir Bikram published in your daily on 1st February '95 leaves before us many questions on which even if we sleep now, the future generation is going to ask. This was followed by your coverage on the murder case of General Manzur Bir Uttam.

These events have transformed "Simple Citizen" and he is no more "Simple". He now demands to know the truth, wants the mischief undone, and the culprits be apprehended.

Let us as a nation, once and for all straighten our records. We will otherwise not be spared for sleeping "whilst all the mighty treasons flourished over us". In the words of Lincoln "It is for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

"A Simple Citizen"