

Why Always Face Fait Accompli?

Every other day, as we hear of either a rice mill or a salt factory or any other pucca establishment being devoured by the Meghna in Chandpur, a big question-mark is put on our basic capacity to predict, prepare and preempt flood-related dangers to life and property.

Frankly, we have grown wary of generalisations coming in the shape of flood forecasts and then, facing the tragedies as fait accompli.

Such a thought does creep in as one takes into account the Chandpur episode as a test case. That the Meghna and Dakatia rivers could swell and devour 40 shops and factories on a single day should have been well within the range of predictability given our basic know-how and gauging instruments.

In this vein, could we urge the government to give a full-blown status report on the country's various embankments and groins? People are also entitled to know as to how many tube-wells are in working order or have gone kaput and, indeed, how many medical teams have been despatched with what kind of stocks of ORS sachets, medicines and water purification tablets to the affected areas.

The government is obliged to give such a full picture of its crisis management activities because the parliament has been rendered infunctious.

Port Headache

Chittagong Port is once again in disarray. On top of the congestion problem there, it is now threatened with a surcharge, double the previous amount, payable by the port authorities. This is a penalty for the high level of congestion that lengthens the waiting time for ships at the outer anchorage upto five or six days.

Although the port officials have an assorted explanation for the log-jam, there is one unmistakable fact which is that congestions are bound to take place whenever there is a rush of ships. And who does not know that more and more ships have been calling at our ports lately — Chittagong port mainly. While this is a good sign and, we should have proved equal to the challenge, we have seemingly buckled under pressure and demonstrated a certain handling incapacity.

Rain or no rain, an extra day's holiday or not, these should hardly make a telling difference in the efficiency of a port. Better admit that the port is running short of essential equipment. The expansion of the jetty is a must. We were told earlier of an expansion programme and also of a plan to procure a number of equipment to revamp and modernise the port facilities. What has happened to these projects? Considering the importance of the port — almost the only artery for our imports and exports — why not embark on the expansion and renovation programme sooner than later? Our export volumes are increasing and if any delay at the port makes us fail to meet the contractual obligations to the foreign buyers, our trade will be seriously hampered. We cannot let it happen at all; for it will be detrimental to our export-led growth strategy.

So apart from refurbishing the Chittagong Port, other options have to be explored in a longer-term perspective. One option may be the diversion of merchandise through the Mongla Port, the potential capacity of which has hardly either been developed or utilised. All this calls for some modernisation work at and around that apology of a port. We need taking up this project side by side with improving facilities at the Chittagong Port. Dependence on one port is unsound and uneconomic.

RU's Sore-point

For some days there have been student demonstrations, sits-in etc, for reopening the Rajshahi University. This could indeed be a positive sign but for the underlying sore in the situation. After the latest opening of the RU on May 30, the university could remain open for only seven weeks before it was closed sine die on July 22. Even during the few weeks of its opening on that occasion the university had failed to bring in most of the general students, let alone the student activists and leaders of different student organisations. Purportedly all because the Chhatra Shibir had consolidated its entrenched power in the residential halls.

The question is, if the intrinsic situation has changed at all in the RU. By available indications, it has not. Newspaper reports and editorials had persistently warned of the danger of opening the varsity on May 30 itself but the varsity authorities went ahead with their plans. There was no serious attempt to recover the lethal arms from the Shibir goons who were waiting for avenging the death of two of their comrades in the earlier clashes with the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on February 11 and 12.

So, the saga of deep-rooted violence on the campus continues. But the general students are eager to pick up the threads of their academic life. Some reports have it though that the demonstrations for reopening the RU have been orchestrated by the Chhatra Shibir who control the campus. All we are for is an effective containment of the bastion of violence before the university re-opens. Pressures from all quarters — including the government — must be built on the university authorities to flush out the stocks of weapons and their wielders from the campus.

Reviving the One Point Programme... The one point programme of the 1990 national movement was 'Ershad must go'. The time for such a one point programme has again come. It is 'Banish Politics from Administration'. Everyday, the damage being done from politicized administration is enormous.

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The one point programme is for one and all to support. It is 'Depoliticization of administration, in particular, law enforcement agencies, civil administration, magistracy and judiciary'.

Rule of law is the fundamental basis for democracy and development — not only in Bangladesh but anywhere else in the world. Nobody can or should be above the law. From the highest authority of the government to the smallest functionary of the municipal authority — everybody should be the same in the eyes of law. I will repeat, depoliticization of administration would definitely ensure that the rule of law is established in our country.

How can this be done? If the opposition believes that yes, it is possible, then they should make a firm announcement to that effect. They may organize one major political meeting in each and every constituency of the country on the same day, same time. I think the Awami League is capable of organizing 300 simultaneous meetings and in this way, also avoid the need for the mass media. Pre-taped statement of the leader, being delivered at the main Dhaka meeting, could be simultaneously heard in all the 300 meetings; where speeches by local leaders should precede the main announcement. As a result, Awami League could make tremendous political gains.

On the other hand, BNP can more than match the opposition announcement, since they are the party in power, by first of all, enabling law enforcement agencies to arrest and try in the court of law, known offenders from within its own rank and file. At the next stage, try out the

criminals hiding behind the shelter of other parties. In a very vivid manner, the government party can meaningfully establish its steadfast commitment to rule of law. It would be seen in deeds — not through announcements only. Thereby BNP has a clear advantage over opposition parties.

Will the political leaders dare to act or remain cooed within the four corners of their small world. Last month, there were 17 murders in the first 18 days and till today, not a single criminal has been apprehended.

The new depoliticized state engine, we are talking about.

The one point programme of the 1990 national movement was 'Ershad must go'. The time for such a one point programme has again come. It is 'Banish Politics from Administration'. Everyday, the damage being done from politicized administration is enormous. Many transfer/posting orders are carried out on political considerations. Police have been paralyzed due to the persistence of discriminatory actions — most often inactions.

pulled out and resold.

An era of chaos and anarchy prevail in the land of hopes and aspirations. The only solution is the one point programme. On the eve of the national election, let all major political parties promise on the one and only programme which is above all controversies: a promise to act and restore the rule of law which can be done only and only if administration is depoliticized.

The issue of governance where the primary task is to ensure rule of law have been the subject of several articles in the columns of The Daily Star. It is not enough. Much more vigorous campaign is necessary. May be, a peoples' movement is necessary; to realize fundamental human rights enshrined in the rule of law which must not only endure, but ought to prevail everywhere. The Gono Forum, it was thought by many, would emerge as the non-political body, campaigning for realization of the basic desire of the common man (the rickshawpuller included), that the engine must change.

First and foremost, law and order must prevail and if political responses are lacking, citizens' pressure groups need to be constituted as the only possible answer (though not adequate) to the present disorder and chaos. Let there be a citizen's committee at every locality to maintain peace and harmony; and a network can be developed for city wide promotion of order and peaceful civic life. However, without the authority of the state, such initiatives will be of limited value. On the other hand, before the election now, such pressure groups can bring home the message to the politi-

icians. They have to listen to get the votes.

Politicians are also residents of various localities of Dhaka city in particular. Almost all prominent politicians live in Dhaka. Such citizens' committees at each and every locality can bring about considerable pressure to depoliticize administration and establish rule of law. In many other ways as well, rule of law can be promoted. The shopkeepers should join hands and force out the chandawallahs. Illegal trafficking in drugs and women can be controlled. Utility services can be forced to operate much more efficiently. Municipal garbage collection could be better organised through citizen's efforts. Night patrolling of streets by citizen's groups can reduce the scope of hijacking and public harassments by anti-social elements. Citizens' committees can perform very many useful functions. Given the lack of police vigilance, people must take care of themselves and in the process, without taking the law in their own hands, put pressure upon the law enforcement agencies to do their two-pence worth for the taxpayers, who bear the burden of their salaries. This would be a highly innovative method never tried before.

United, people will always win. The need of the hour is a nation-wide organization of citizens committees for the promotion of law and order which could force the political parties to accept the one point programme.

However, the task will be much easier if on the eve of the national election, the Prime Minister makes the bold announcement in favour of law and order by ordering the police to arrest the criminals from all over the city of Dhaka without any fear or favour — regardless of political affiliations. The results could be stunning in matter of days; and believe me, BNP, as a result, will be the biggest gainer in the forthcoming national election.



Window on Asia

Shafiq Latif

hended. Who knows — which offender belongs to which political party. The other day at Biman counter of Bangkok airport, a huge passenger, at least 100 kg. in weight himself, was trying to get into the plane another 100 kg. of excess baggage, free of charge because he happened to be the nephew of a political bigwig in Dhaka. One can get away with murder in this country. The situation therefore is getting really very scary. Unless we restore law and order, nothing else can be sustained — not even the very political process, the basic system of governance.

I remember the rickshawpuller whom I asked after the BNP victory in 1991: 'would it be good for the future of the country? His reply was revealing: 'Sir, the drivers have been changed many times, nothing happened — we got to change the engine now'. This is ex-

Such a politicized atmosphere constitute the ideal breeding ground for corruption. No doubt, it was there before; honesty was and never is the best policy in this country. However, its range and depth was atleast limited; in the sense that in course of the day to day life, a more or less secured middle class existence was feasible. For example, trouble free utility services were possible; masted misdeeds were never heard of and education as the means of success in life remained well recognized.

The changes have been rapid as well as brutal. A retired pensioner without any one to assist, will find it difficult to secure his monthly pension payments or clear his utility bills unless prepared to pay illegal service charges. He is not even sure if the letter he posted will ever reach its destination since the stamps might be

Removing Misconception about Rights of Women in Islam

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

As a result of misinterpretation of the verses of the Holy Quran in many Muslim countries by so-called religious leaders, Islam is being ridiculed in the western societies. The suggestion that Islam allows a Muslim man to have four wives without any pre-condition attached to it is preposterous. In ancient pagan Arabia men could marry unrestricted number of women but the restriction was imposed after the battle of Uhud.

In the battle of Uhud many male members of the Muslim society lost their lives. As such females outnumbered the males and many orphans and widows were left alone after the devastating war. Against this backdrop Sura Nisa was revealed to protect the interest of orphans, widows and prisoners of war. In this particular Sura provision (not permission) was made for having

four wives not for the sake of conjugal pleasure but to care and protect orphan girls and widows, who were dependent on male members during the period of emergency. This provision also indicates prohibition of pre-marital amoral relationship with women which was prevalent in many of the past and yet so in some present societies. This provision also equally puts strict restriction: 'If you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal favour then marry (only) one'; (Sura Nisa).

According to an interpretation given by Prof G W Choudhury in his book, 'Islam in the modern Muslim World', which says 'it does not give unlimited licence to marry any or every woman of a man's attraction or choice under any circumstances as this Quranic provision is being misused widely by

Muslims specially by the rich and powerful ones'. Marriage becomes an Institution in Islam as Sura Al-A'raf puts it 'He it is who did create you from single soul, and of the same did he made his mate that he might take rest in her'. In Islam adultery is liable for punishment for both man and woman which implies Islam believes in order in the society. Sura Bani Israel puts it this way 'And come not near unto adultery. Lo! it is an abomination and an evil way'.

There has been a misconceived notion about the law of inheritance in Islam. It is true that a woman inherits a lesser share of property with regard to a man in the family.

The ratio is 1:2 that is a woman receives half of the property while a male member receives the share of two women. Now one may ask:

Why is this inequality in Islam? In fact we find no inequality in Islam if we take into account other shares which a woman inherits. These are: 1) she is entitled to Mohrana (dower) from her husband payable before he first meets his wife on the bridal night, and her maintenance allowance. Sura Nisa says, 'And give into the women (whom ye marry) free gift of their marriage portions, but if they of their own accord remit unto you a part thereof, then ye are welcome to absorb it (in your wealth)'. In the present day a newly wed wife often claims minimum Taka 100000/- as Mohrana. She also inherits from husband's property, apart from parents'.

Inheritance is one of the means to acquire wealth and there is no discrimination between man and woman in acquiring wealth by other le-

gal means. According to verse 228 of Sura Baqarah, they (the wives) have the rights similar to those of men. Sura An-Nisa also allows women to earn money and own property.

It is a social system of Islam that man bears the responsibility of maintaining the family and the children. According to Sura Al-Baqarah, it is not obligatory on the part of wife to suckle her child. Verse 233 of Al-Baqarah says, 'Mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years; (that is) for those who wish to complete the suckling.' Practically a woman owes no financial responsibility in the family. So, her financial needs are less than that of man, for the quantum of financial benefit is always determined by financial needs. There virtually exists no injustice and discrimination. Rather considering all relevant aspects, a woman in Islam is supposed to get more financial benefits than the man.

The ownership of property in any society is determined according to the social needs and extent of personal responsibility. So the ownership in Islam should also be looked into from this perspective. It is obvious that Islamic social system differs from other social systems in many respects. It is not logical and rational to view Islamic social system from the points of view of western society. Sura Nisa has made it clear that men are in charge of women because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend their property for the support of women.

As a matter of fact Islam is in favour of establishing family as an institution, which is the basic principle of human civilization. This is achieved by limiting the number of man's legal wives, by giving every woman legal rights which are to be respected and making every man legally responsible for his conduct towards every woman.

To the Editor...

Help Jamtoil Girls' College

Sir, Kamarkhand thana is an important place in Sirajganj district. There are two colleges, eight boys' high schools and a girls' high school in this thana. Over the last few years, comparatively, the SSC and the HSC results of Kamarkhand are above any other thana of Sirajganj district. In those results the girl students showed their skill was not insignificant at all than that of the boy students. But it is a matter of regret that there is only one women's college at Sirajganj Sadar in the whole district of nine thanas.

Many of the boys can take admissions to famous colleges of the country after completing their SSC examination. But for the socio-economic condition of our country and owing to the hindrance that our society still faces, a favourable situation for education of women has not built up yet. Living away from home for higher study often cannot be imagined in case of a girl student.

But there is no reason to undermine the role of women in development of the country. They have been proving their efficiency successively by their merit and thinking. And education is a fundamental right, not only for a boy but also for a girl. So all kinds of necessary steps should be taken towards achievement of this right. So it is undoubtedly praiseworthy that a group of University fresh students have taken steps to establish a girls' college at Jamtoil Sadar of Kamarkhand. Every year some 350/400 students pass SSC examination from Jamtoil Girls' High School and also 250/300 girl students from outside of Jamtoil Sadar. And for the opportunity of their education, an exclusive educational institution is essential. Therefore, for the well-be-

ing of the women folk and spreading women's education, it is my humble appeal to the Prime Minister, Education Minister and all others concerned to please help establish the Jamtoil Girls' College at the earliest.

Md Kamrul Hasan Dept of Mass Communication and Journalism, Dhaka University.

"Arabian Nights"

Sir, 'Arabian Nights' is running for six months now on BTV but the duration of each episode is so short that it kills the enjoyment. BTV is showing more commercial in the Arabian Nights than others.

This had not been the case with an earlier serial, Tipu Sultan. With Arabian Nights, BTV is abruptly ending each part before letting the story to a normal growth and reach a climax.

We hope BTV will think over it and not deprive us from enjoying a famous tale in a more logically divided parts.

M Khan Manikgonj

Western hypocrisy

Sir, When the Bosnian Muslims are subjected to unparalleled barbarism by the Bosnian Serbs with all possible help from the mainland, the World's most vocal preachers of 'Human Rights' are still harping the tune of peaceful political solution. The United Nations Security Council's declared 'Safe Havens' were not spared — old, young men and women were subjected to segregation, killing, rape and every possible form of brutality. The world's most powerful country's President Clinton and his European allies are engaged with Chinese leaders about the victims of Tiananmen Square when

Bosnian Muslims' blood is flowing in the heartland of Europe — the world of civilized nations. What a mockery! Long parleys in UNSC, NATO and Akashi's shuttle diplomacy resulting in rhetorics with no intention to implement any of these resolution. The apathy, ineffectiveness and insincerity of UNSC aid Ghalh compelled the UN human rights invigilator to resign. What else the champions of Human Rights wait to see? Look at the happening in US Congress and Senate. The honourable members of these institutions have ventilated their feelings overwhelmingly to allow the basic right of everyone for self defence by lifting the arms embargo from Bosnia. Clinton must take note of these happening as these members represent the majority people of USA. At the sometime it appears that UN Secretary General Ghalh has failed totally to uphold the UN Charter about protecting the sovereign right of its members. As it appears UN is held hostage to the permanent members of UNSC. This is not a good sign as this may lead to the same fate of League of Nations. It is true when members would find the organization's ineffectiveness then membership of the same would have no value.

The OIC has an excellent opportunity to bring more cohesiveness in the organisation and among its members by playing a catalyst role. So far OIC really has not proved to be a powerful organisation in tackling problems on issues affecting the Muslim nations. Not even protesting the charge levelled against some Muslim countries by the Western so-called civilized nations as fundamentalist. The Western power do what suits them. In Nigeria and Algeria democratically elected leaders have not been

allowed to get into power by conniving with the military junta. Now that some of the leaders of Muslim countries have ventilated their feelings on very just cause, OIC should strengthen the same so that the Bosnia-Herzegovina — a UN member is saved from further disintegration and its people are saved from untold misery.

With the pressure mounting on Serbia by the Croatian successes, the Western allies have awakened and appear to be determined to do something. What happened to those defence ministers in particular, the United Kingdom, when Serbian military crushed Srebrenica and Zepa in spite of the fact that these were declared UN 'safe haven' and it was UN moral responsibility to protect them.

MAM Dhaka Cantt

Sylhet Division

Sir, Thanks are due to Mr. Iqbal Siddiquee for his write-up (1-8-95) in your paper on Sylhet Division. We also congratulate the people of Sylhet on having a new division and for their long struggle to achieve that status.

However, the relevant authorities are requested to fulfil the following demands of the newly created division:

- 1) Sylhet airport should be expanded and direct flights should be introduced between London and Sylhet. 2) To handle ever increasing number of passengers, private air lines should be allowed. 3) Transport and communication including road, railway and other infrastructures should be developed. 4) Sylhet should be declared a metropolitan city.

M Ali Rajshahi

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Chop, Chop, Chop

WHEN the Fogtown Door Knob Company announced the layoff of 18,000 workers, there was no joy in Fogtown, but Wall Street was elated.

John Allen, the door-knob specialist at Goble and Goble Securities, told me, "This is a step in the right direction, and Wall Street is very pleased with the action that Fogtown has taken to get its financial house in order. Of course, there's a lot more to be done. Fogtown still has 980 people on its payroll, and we will not be convinced that management is serious until all of those employees go, too."

"But if they have nobody working at the plant, they won't be able to make door knobs."

"It doesn't matter. We have to think of the stockholders. Their interests must be served, even if it means chopping the payroll into sawdust."

I then asked an embarrassing question. "Does Wall Street ever lose any sleep over the people who are laid off in a cost-cutting drive?"

John said, "We're not insensitive to the plight of workers being sent home. But we're coming at the issue from a different viewpoint. We want to know what it's going to cost the company to fire all its employees. If the settlement is too expensive, Wall Street will react negatively. But if it's in the layoff ball park, we'll recommend a buy for Fogtown stock. When a company purges the bottom line, how are the investors protected?"

"Suppose Fogtown Door Knobs is unable to fulfill its orders with a limited number of employees?"

"Then it will have to produce them in Mexico. Wall Street never objects to manufacturing a product abroad as long as the dividends are increased over the previous quarter."

"By the way, who are all these investors?"

"Look, we service billion-dollar pension funds that depend on us to produce income."

"Are these large pension funds bothered when thousands of people are laid off?"

"There's no connection between the two. Wall Street was the first to discover that in today's capitalist world a person does not need workers to make lots of money."

"Doesn't Fogtown need salaried people to buy the door knobs it makes?"

"We don't need people any more. Everything is bought by computer."

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