

Indemnity Ordinance : A Rejoinder

by M Amir-ul Islam

The author responds to some points raised by Barrister Rafiqul Haque in his article published on 23 and 24 August, regarding his, the author's, piece published earlier.

THE nation owes gratitude to the *Daily Star* for having initiated the debate on the Indemnity Ordinance 1975. Former Attorney General Barrister Rafiqul Haque, has also written a piece in *The Daily Star* on August 23 and 24, 1996.

It is heartening to note that my learned friend, Barrister Haque, has agreed with Mr. Mahfuz Anam and myself that the Indemnity Ordinance is black law and this must be repealed and declared as ultra vires to the Constitution. He further confirmed that this law is against human rights and contrary to the rule of law. Barrister Haque also agreed with me that the Ordinance was beyond the scope of Article 46 of the Constitution. He however, differed with me as I consider the Ordinance, in any case has come to an end, the same not having been laid before the Parliament under Article 93(2) of the Constitution.

The reason given by my friend was that since the Ordinance was ratified by the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution, it is not necessary to lay it before the Parliament. He further said that since the matter has been ratified by the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution and the new paragraph 18 has been added to the Fourth Schedule this Ordinance has had the effect of law notwithstanding the fact that it was void ab initio; and despite the fact that it was not laid before Parliament under Article 93(2).

I would in this context like to raise three basic questions for the consideration of my learned friend as well as the other members in the legal community and the concerned citizens interested in the constitutional governance.

Firstly, to understand the meaning, purport and the context of the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution, before making any comment or relying upon the subsequent insertion therein of certain illegal and unconstitutional acts and instruments for validation. The 4th Schedule is a schedule which was annexed to the original Constitution by the exercise of its plenary power. Certain transitional and temporary provision set out in the Schedule like those provided in any other new Constitution (i.e. Indian Constitution or in 1956 Constitution of Pakistan) were protected. Those laws and the holders of office were given continuity notwithstanding any other provisions of this Constitution.

The transitional and temporary provisions set out in the Fourth Schedule shall have effect notwithstanding any other provisions of this Constitution. Article 150 appears as the last part (Part XIII) of the Constitution under the heading MISCELLANEOUS which reads as follows :

"The transitional and temporary provisions set out in the Fourth Schedule shall have effect notwithstanding any other provisions of this Constitution."

Obviously the laws and validation as was necessary was for transitional and temporary purpose fixed in the schedule for the purpose of their continuity till the Constitution comes into the full play. Once it has come into operation there is scope for any other transition or validation thereof.

The Original Fourth Sched-

is provided as follows under Article 7:

All powers in the Republic belong to the people, and their exercise on behalf of the people shall be effected only under, and by the authority of, this Constitution.

The most fundamental of all fundamentals of the Constitution is that all powers belonging to the people, their exercise can only be made by the people and to be effective only under and by the authority of this Constitution, and the constitution being the supreme law, the other law to that extent of the inconsistencies is void. Therefore, the Fifth Amendment and the Seventh Amendment, both being violative of the constitutional continuity and being inconsistent with the Constitution cannot be validated by mere insertion of some Martial Law Formans in the Fourth Schedule.

The object of giving those saving and powers to bring about the order and continuity so that everything can conform to the Constitution but not to break the Constitution. So by looking at Article 150 and the Fourth Schedule, it is very clear that laws which were protected were a one-shot legislation. It is time-bound for the period starting from 26th March, 1971 till

judgement delivered by a Constitutional Bench of the Indian Supreme Court consisting of Mr. Justice Bhagwati and Mr. Justice Desai "As regards Article 14, 19 and 21 being reduced to a dead letter" (equivalent to our Article 27, 32 and other fundamental freedom contained in the chapter on Fundamental Rights), we are unable to appreciate how an Ordinance which is subject to the same constraints as a law made by the legislature can in its practical operation, result in the obliteration of those Article".

It even suggest that Fifth validated the Indemnity Ordinance is to suggest that the basic structure of our Constitution, the Rule of Law and the security of life and body and all the other fundamental freedom has been reduced to dead letter.

It is indeed violative of the very concept of the constitution that the Ordinance be allowed to supersede or dilute the constitutional provision in any manner.

Even during the days of colonial regime when there was no Constitution in existence a provision of the central legisla-

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ture i.e. Defence of India Act was not allowed to be altered by the Ordinance-making power. It was thus held in *Shibnath Vs. Porter* by Calcutta High Court (AIR 1943 CAL 377) that "When one legislative authority which is representative and democratic in form has expressed its will in the enactment, that will not be nullified by introducing into the enactment, an expression of the will of another legislative authority which consists of one individual e.g. the Governor General, who is the supreme head of the executive, and who must necessarily be constantly included by considerations of executive expediency. To permit the Governor General to vary, by direct alteration, an enactment which expresses the will of the Indian Legislature of which the Governor General himself constitutes only one element, would be illegal and opposed to the theory of democratic Government."

Thirdly, one must admit therefore that the law-making power of the President is limited in any way by the fact that it can never alter the provision of the Constitution or even an Act of Parliament.

It is patent as is known to every citizen that Khandaker Mustaque Ahmed promulgated this in famous piece of document known as Indemnity Ordinance, 1975 in order to put the self-proclaimed killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members including women and children above the reach of law. What can be more malafide, grotesque and most perverse a motive than this to abet murder and genocide.

The creation of such an instrument is a crime itself, as it is a clear abatement to crime and to give protection to the crime and the killers is also crime.

Such a motive can never be validated if any iota of conscience and consistency is left with our Constitution and all that we trust as part of our basic commitment as a nation.

It was so said by Chief Justice Chandra Chud of India in a

case of R.C. Cooper Vs. Union of India (AIR 1970 S.C. 564 Para 233) it was observed that the exercise of the power by the President can be challenged on the ground of bad faith or malafide or corrupt motive.

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