

MP Hostel Story

Serious charges have been made in the national press about the situation in the MP Hostel. First, it is a terrorist den — one that offers them complete inviolability. And terrorists do not go alone, various crimes accompany them — such as the business involving girls. Second, those MPs having houses in the city and are still residing there, have rooms in the hostel. The number of such is astounding — 60. Third, MPs and former MPs long notified to vacate their rooms and suites are mostly not complying with the requirement.

One cannot read these accusations without recalling the scandal of the arrears telephone bills of many MPs of different Parliaments — running into tens of crores of Taka. And one doesn't know what happened to those unpaid bills. No one has the authority to waive them really and no one of the delinquent MPs has either been declared bankrupt by the court.

The MP Hostel is possibly the highest prized accommodation in the land, and rightly so. And rightly too it is housed in the Jatiya Sangsad complex. The supreme honour, dignity and prestige that is due to the JS, should in fairness visit the hostel, in whatever quantum. It is expected that those having accommodation there — by way of rooms or suites — should be mindful of the sanctity of their residence there. The present state of affairs very sadly dashes such expectations. Soon after the swearing in of MPs of this Parliament, an MP was found to be host to two street-workers in his hostel room. Harsh police reaction followed by his prosecution does not seem to have discouraged the practice, as reported by a national daily. And the hostel is largely being abused as a safety zone for assorted terrorists, many of whom cannot visit their own areas for fear of being nabbed. They make very good use of the rooms that MPs have taken out for residence but do not live there. It can be argued that this is done by courtesy of the MPs and not against their wish.

What happens when lawmakers become law-breakers? Law, first of all, loses its hold on society. There cannot be another more certain beginning of a lawless society. A lawless society is no society, and man does not exist in society. A criminal cannot contribute to lawlessness as much as a lawmaker can if he or she breaks the law. Not all lawbreaking is immoral but a lawgiver's infraction of the letters of law is wholly so.

The JS complex is the Speaker's special preserve. We want to believe he will rid the complex of such mean things with tact and patience and persistence and do it before the JS further loses in honour and sanctity.

Disband Them

Even in a country like ours where law is more of a scarecrow than an adequate and effectual measure to protect the good and punish the bad, terrorists do get caught and incidents of terrorism to protest their nabbing do not take place often. But the arrest of an alleged terrorist did trigger off a violent form of protest yesterday. Quite a few shops and vehicles at the Farmgate area and its neighbourhood bore the brunt of the wrath of a group of vandals who according to reports published, were enraged at the arrest of one Anwar, a hardened criminal and an alleged BNP activist.

Now, the point is there can be a few Robinhood in the society who despite being outlaws and wanted persons in the hunting list of the law enforcers, can command popular support of particular pocket. But what rules out all possibilities of a second thought in condemning the incidents in the involvement of a political party, and no mean party with the second largest representation in Parliament after the party in power. From the reports published it is clear that the nabbed terrorist is no new entrant in the world of crime and the leadership of the party to which he is alleged to belong in all likelihood knew his background. Why then should it allow a criminal to be a member of the party? Even if the membership originated in the past, why should it not hand him over now to the law-enforcing agency to express the party's solidarity with anti-terrorist drive.

The BNP is not the butt of this particular piece of criticism. Awami League, the ruling party, is as vulnerable to similar criticism. Probably the vulnerability is more in its case. We condemn all kinds of political patronage of criminals. If we are sincere about the crusade against terrorism, if we want to match our words with action about flushing the anti-socials out, then the initiative has to come from the political parties with the ruling party in the vanguard. Without the umbrella of political influence, criminal or terrorist activities hardly have any chance to thrive, at least with the monstrosity of the present.

Violence or terrorism to protest the arrest of terrorists shows how deep political patronage of criminals has gone. Our politicians would do well to read the writing on the wall. It is time they disbanded the musclemen and terrorists. Otherwise, the time is not very far when they will be consumed by their own Frankenstines.

Thinking Radically

Saturday evening's unexpected shower was not all relief. The three-hour 33mm downpour flooded the city in its most crowded traffic zones — for the umpteenth time. To compound it all, the timing — six to nine — came as a cruel joke.

Everyone knows what's at the root of this. But no one seems to know the way out. A nightmarish real estate development of the city abetted by engineers and agencies in authority largely choked all the outlets of rain water of the city. Today's unrelenting waterlogging after any spell of shower is in a big way the working of a curse called the filling up of the Dholaikhal.

Days back a government directive spoke of excavating old waterways and reservoirs. There is no alternative to that. But shall we take it seriously? How can we when RAJUK persists in its old ways of thinking and closing its eyes to flagrant violations of its behests? There is another reason for treating big engineering plans as mere talk. For Dhaka to have lots of open-space and ponds and pools and numerous canals crisscrossing it, the government will fall foul of the realtors' ardent dreams — of mountains of profit. These quarters have so long been humoured endlessly by successive governments. How will the government handle them now? Enacting laws and issuing directives may not be enough. There must be some true innovation, some radical thinking and some mad people to stake their lives on making a liveable city of this present abomination — to overcome all the problems however insuperable they seemingly are.

As the Holy Quran says: LEMA TAKULUNA MALATAF ALUN. KABURA MAKTAN INDALLAH — you do not utter anything that you cannot observe in your life. Allah does not like these people. Holy Quran also enjoins that Allah created man for 'IBADAT'. Ibadat is a very comprehensive word. Its resonance is almost transcendental. It means prayer, fast, hajj and charity. It means that a human being must devote himself or herself from birth to death to fulfill these objectives and make a successful life. Ibadat also means modesty par excellence, total submission, obedience and devotion to Allah, the Almighty and Compassionate.

Every Muslim must, therefore, make a pilgrimage to Makkah and Madina Monowara if possible. The visit brings a Muslim face to face with the reality of the magnificence and the spiritual greatness of Islam. After our life here we all look towards our life hereafter. Even in Christianity the Christian sees the City of Destruction and flees out for the Celestial City beyond the Wicket-gate. The English Puritans who sailed to America on the Mayflower are called the Mayflower Pilgrims. Those pilgrims set out in search of the New World, America, and they got it.

The Guardian protector of the Holy places in Islam — Haram Sharif in Makkah and Madina, his majesty the king of Saudi Arabia has shown great wisdom and statesmanship in facilitating pilgrims from various Muslim countries. They have shown particular courtesy to the leaders of the Muslim world in visiting the Holy places from time to time. But sometimes the Saudi leaders have been embarrassed — although they never said it publicly.

President Idi Amin of Uganda is one such example. After humbling his former colonial Army commander by making him stoop to cross the threshold of a special contrivance of a gate, he himself wished to be humbled in the House of God in Haram Sharif. At least he did not build the extravaganza of a cathedral of Yamasukro, by the president of Ivory Coast to humble other cathedrals of the Christian world. For a Muslim to be in Al Quds Al Sharif in Jerusalem or in the mosque of Hazrat Abdul Quader Gilani (peace be on him) in Baghdad is equally ennobling and edifying.

Two presidents have been objects of considerable historical curiosity. President Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia and President Saddam Hussain of Iraq. Habib Bourguiba, a great son of Tunisia and a great patriot, who often visited the Holy places, successfully secured independence for his country from the French but in the late eighties he lost his utility. To save the country his defence minister, Ben Ali visited the president with a motley crowd of advisors including a number of doctors and made a plea to Bourguiba to take life easy. Washed by the shimmering waters of the Mediterranean, Bourguiba rested well and withered into oblivion — to the benefit of his own country of course. President Saddam Hussain of Iraq has shown many qualities. In the pre-war days, Iraq had the best social and human development index through the utilization of petrodollars. The proud Iraqis were on a march to successful economic development. But alas, that was not to be. Ambition and lack of arithmetic brought lot of misfortune to the people of Iraq.

Bangladesh political leaders have always been extended royal courtesies by his majesty's government. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina paid her first visit after taking over as prime minister, to the Haram Sharif, to seek blessings and benediction of Allah the Almighty and All Merciful. She had a good meeting with King Fahad and other Saudi leaders. Recently the leader of the opposition and chairperson of BNP was also in Saudi Arabia as the guest of the Royal House.

This pilgrimage was of a different kind though. The opposition leader used the sacred soil of the Holy Places, it appeared, for politics as much as for pilgrimage. A good politician must not be oblivious to the fact that 'the first law of politics is arithmetic'. She said, according to many observers, more than she could have said, on a foreign land. As a matter of fact, the umpteenth number of political gatherings she had attended, were too many to count. But most of what she said were less than correct. Factually on both transit, power and of course water she was on the wrong side. Just water sharing

is a national necessity of Bangladesh and we will get our share as a matter of our right. What was lacking since August 1975 was the necessary political will. The present government has clearly shown that they are ready and willing to come to grips with the problem of water sharing. The Indian government of Prime Minister Deve Gowda has also given similar vibes. We expect to get the water in time and that too without linkage to any other issue. As regards transit, SAPTA agreement signed by her Begum Zia's own Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman together with Dawu Tsering of Bhutan, Dinesh Singh of India, Fatullah

Jameel of Maldives, Mahesh Acharya of Nepal, Mohammand Siddique Khan Kanji of Pakistan and Harold Herat of Sri Lanka on 11 & 1993 in Dhaka. Article 12 of agreement on SAARC Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) reads as follows: Contracting parties agree to undertake appropriate steps and measures for developing and improving communication system, transport, infrastructure and transit facilities for accelerating the growth of trade within the region. On reservations Article 23 says, 'This agreement may not be signed with reservations nor shall reservations be admitted

at the time of notification to the SAARC Secretariat on the completion of the formalities.' Besides, her own government, between April 1992 ESCAP Relaxation on Road and Rail Transport Modes in Relation to Facilitation Measures and the ESCAP expert group meeting of Nov 29-Dec 3, 1993 had done considerable work towards improvement of regional infrastructure. The ESCAP meeting now in New Delhi will be addressed, inter alia, by the President of Asian Development Bank. The Proposed Action Plan envisages Asian land transport infrastructure development (ALTID) project, comprising the Asian Highway (AH) and Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) projects and facilitation of land transport is amid at the development and improvement of intra-regional and interregional transport linkages to facilitate international and bilateral trade and tourism.

One fails to understand why Begum Zia and her putative party leaders are so nervous about any step that would help Bangladesh become politically stable and economically viable. It was just like her futile propaganda war on its 25-year Friendship Treaty. When her own Foreign Minister informed the Parliament that it was a Friendship Treaty, she kept on harping that it was a slavery treaty. On Water sharing the less said the better. In five years her government never dealt with the issue seriously. She even did not raise the issue during her visit to Delhi in 1992. She raised the water issue in UNGA in October 1993 but forgot to insert it in the UN

Agenda. She allowed the unprotected Bangladesh market to be flooded with Indian goods, but is talking about patriotism as Islam's injunction. The Holy Quran says 'do not utter anything that you cannot observe in your own life'. And she is very often talking about an imaginary apparition of 'Masters'! Is she talking about herself when she gathered around her some foreign envoys including that of Pakistan on the holy land of Saudi Arabia? Her choice of a foreign land to preach about SAARC is indeed bizarre.

It sounds pathetic when the BNP leaders so fondly talk about the golden rule of their time. Justice Sattar dissolved his cabinet for corruption and terrorism. Notorious Imdu was found a BNP Minister's House. Bangladesh now occupies 4th place in the hall of fame of corruption after Nigeria, Pakistan and Kenya. In that order, as tabulated by German-based Transparency International. With the distortion of the history of Bangladesh, her government almost destroyed the education system in the country. She was perhaps right in her mind when she told the boys of Chhatria Dal at Shapla Chatter in 1994 that they were 'good enough to deal with the opposition! And then she presented the nation with the February, 15 phoney election.

Politics and Pilgrimage

Let us be serious about our national agenda. We need a bipartisan approach to all national issues. If you try foul at everything that the government does, nobody will take you seriously. With the 21st century knocking at our door, we need to move fast

After its own revolution, Portugal abruptly withdrew in August, 1975, even as independence-minded factions began waging war. Indonesian forces invaded four months later, with Jakarta declaring that it was necessary to restore order and crush Communist movement on its border. The following year, Indonesia made East Timor its 27th province, saying the annexation came in response to a request by East Timorese, although pro-independence forces derided the request as a sham. In the invasion and the fighting and the famine that continued into the 1980s, 100,000 to 200,000 people died, according to international estimates, which Indonesia disputes.

While its rule has often been authoritarian and brutal, Indonesia has poured resources into East Timor, modernizing roads, hospitals and schools in ways that Portugal never did during its colonial rule. A guerrilla movement, the Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor, known by its Portuguese acronym, Fretilin, has continued to resist, but it has largely been crushed. In 1992, Indonesia captured the movement's leader, Jose Alexandre (Xanana) Gusmao, and sentenced him to 20 years in prison.

Forty-eight-year-old Bishop Belo often acts as an intermediary in case of disputes between the locals and the Indonesians. Mr Ramos Horta, 46, on the other hand worked for East Timorese independence even before the Portuguese pulled out of the country in 1975. In 1970, the Portuguese exiled him to Mozambique, then a Portuguese colony, because of his involvement in the independence movement. He returned home in 1972, only to flee three days before the Indonesian invasion. Currently he is a member of the law faculty of the University of New South Wales in Australia, travelling the world to promote East Timor's independence.

Although Indonesia is predominantly Muslim, a significant number of its citizens are Buddhist of Chinese origin and

Hindus of Indian origin. They have coexisted and flourished with the Muslim majority for centuries. In fact, one of the pet peeves of the world's Muslims is that Indonesian Muslims have not been able to shake themselves free of the Buddhist and Hindu influence. There is no reason to suspect that Roman Catholics cannot exist with the majority Indonesian Muslims. Indonesia must continue to make sure that all its citizens are free to practice the religion of their choice, as Islam ordains. There is no compulsion in religion, the Holy Quran says.

The more pressing question is whether the current Indonesian regime is serious about improving its human rights record. It has been abundantly clear to the Muslims of the world that ever since the fall of Communism, many in the West have been working extremely hard to paint the Muslims as the new enemy. Muslim nations must be vigilant. By allowing detractors opportunities to deride them, Muslim nations run the risk of enabling their enemies to take a swipe at the religion itself!

The writer, a Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh, currently lives in Princeton Junction, New Jersey, USA.

citizens no less harshly than the East Timorese. The only positive comment that can be made about Indonesia is that unlike the Portuguese colonizers who gave the locals their Catholic religions, the Indonesians spent lavishly to bring East Timor up to par economically with the rest of Indonesia. Timor is an island in the Indonesian archipelago, whose western part has been an integral part of Indonesia.

The suffering of the East Timorese is not in question, the real question is why the Nobel Peace Committee decided to fume over their suffering selectively. For three years, under the Nobel Peace Committee's very nose in Europe, the Serbs raped Bosnian Muslim women, ethnically cleansed Muslim families, destroyed mosques and massacred Muslim men, women and children at will. Where was the Nobel Peace Committee's outrage?

For two years, Russian bear unleashed its might on the tiny Muslim republic of Chechnya, mauling men, women and children, destroying its capital Grozny, making half the population flee to neighbouring republics and luring their President Dzhokar Dudayev out of his bunker on the pretext of negotiation, and killing him. Where was the Nobel Peace Committee's protestations?

Ever since 1947, India has refused to honour the UN resolution to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir, and since 1990 has engaged in systematic mayhem against Muslims. Where is the Nobel Peace Committee's expression of condemnation? The annexation of East Timor by Indonesia is similar to India's annexation of another Portuguese colony — Goa, in 1961.

The only outrage emanating from that invasion came from Lisbon, the Portuguese capital! Now, a little bit of the history of East Timor. In 1975, as Portugal's colonial empire abruptly ended with the independence of Angola and Mozambique in Africa, East Timor won independence after more than 400 years of foreign rule. But within months civil war plunged it into chaos and Indonesia invaded, annexing the country a year later. The other half of the island, West Timor, was already a part of Indonesia.

For centuries, the island of Timor has been a focus of international rivalries and divisions. The Portuguese, in search of spices, first settled it in 1520. By the 18th century the Dutch arrived, settling the western half of the island. A treaty in 1859 formalized the division. During the Second World War, the island became the site of fierce battles between the Japanese and the Australian forces. After the War, the Netherlands granted independence to Dutch East Indies, and West Timor became a part of Indonesia. Portugal, however, resumed its colonial rule of East Timor.

The United States has not contested Indonesia's annexation, although it maintains that there was never an act of self-determination by the Timorese. East Timor is a predominantly Roman Catholic region — a legacy of Portugal's rule on the far edge of the world's most populous Muslim nation. Despite increasing development and business, its people and culture remain set apart.

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It is important to note that the growth rate of ICB's IA's activities this year is 363 per cent in account opening, 257 per cent in deposit, 229 per cent in sanction of loan and 224 per cent in purchase of shares as compared to the same period of last year. Moreover, the customer movements, requirements for information and statements, application to initial public offer, withdrawal of securities and other related activities have increased many fold in the recent times. Even though to meet the customers' requirements, most of the officers and employees have been working very

hard from 9.00am to 9.00 pm almost everyday which Mr Rahman has also recognised.

With due respect to Mr Rahman we are sorry to mention that he is confused with the SEC guidelines as regards settlement of share transactions. He is not also an investor to ICB. Moreover, he maintains margin account with the ICB which the other stock brokers do not. Other stock brokers are not supposed to give him facilities of IPO application, retaining and safe custody of securities, interest and dividend collection from different companies, splitting of shares and host of other services as ICB does. ICB should and must protect the interest of small investors as well as its fund that lends to the common investors. So an investor account holder is not like the seller and buyer taking part in the O/C market or a broker of the stock exchange as defined by the writer. We believe, as margin account holder of ICB he certainly enjoys some advantages of investors account which the investors in O/C market and stock market cannot provide. Moreover, in the free economy and his wisdom, he has every right to decide on the basis of his Opportunity Cost of investments, where to invest.

Our assessment is that most of our investors feel the limitation of ICB, appreciate the unprecedented demand of ICB's service and the efforts of ICB to meet the needs of its customers. They also very often acknowledge the enormous contribution of ICB to the country's securities market. Experts on international capital markets on different occasions opined that ICB is still the mainstay of capital market. It is important that ICB has been able to give its services to hundreds of thousands of investors through different scheme. The writer has indicated privatisation of ICB on the assumption that the services of share transaction will improve dramatically as in

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The Politics of Nobel Peace Prize

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton, USA

When Yassir Arafat was awarded the Nobel Prize, along with Israel's Rabin and Peres in 1994 for making peace in the Middle East, a Norwegian member of the Nobel Peace Prize committee resigned in protest. It was stated that he was a staunch supporter of Israel and wanted only Rabin and Peres to share the Prize.

Indonesia's annexation of East Timor, a rugged place about the size of the state of New Jersey in the US, has never received wide international recognition. Many of the 750,000 Timorese still chafe under Indonesia's domination, which has led to periodic uprisings and subsequent reprisals. Even now, with the awarding of Nobel Peace Prize to two Timorese who have challenged Indonesian rule, the question of East Timor has remained unsettled, creating political obstacles to Indonesia's effort to expand its role in international affairs.

The United Nations, which still recognises Portugal's sovereignty, has tried several times to forge a solution acceptable to Portugal and Indonesia, but with little success. Indonesia has also found itself strongly condemned for human rights violations in East Timor, including arrests, beatings and executions. In 1989, Pope John Paul II issued a pointed rebuke during a visit, the first by a world leader after the annexation. In 1991, Indonesian troops reportedly gunned down protesters who had gathered in cemetery in Dili, the capital, stirring new round of condemnation.

The United States has not contested Indonesia's annexation, although it maintains that there was never an act of self-determination by the Timorese. East Timor is a predominantly Roman Catholic region — a legacy of Portugal's rule on the far edge of the world's most populous Muslim nation. Despite increasing development and business, its people and culture remain set apart.

For centuries, the island of Timor has been a focus of international rivalries and divisions. The Portuguese, in search of spices, first settled it in 1520. By the 18th century the Dutch arrived, settling the western half of the island. A treaty in 1859 formalized the division. During the Second World War, the island became the site of fierce battles between the Japanese and the Australian forces. After the War, the Netherlands granted independence to Dutch East Indies, and West Timor became a part of Indonesia. Portugal, however, resumed its colonial rule of East Timor.

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OPINION "ICB's Share-deal Service and Account Holders' Sufferings"

Our attention has been drawn to the opinion of Dr. K.M. Maqsoodur Rahman of North Circle, Dhaka-1212, published in your esteemed daily on 19th October, 1996 on the caption 'ICB's Share-deal Service and Account Holders' Sufferings'.

In the opinion Mr. Rahman has put forward some good suggestions for improving the present share transaction system of ICB which includes 100 per cent automation through computerisation. He, however, expected instant service as Airline companies do (but how can an Airline company be compared with an Investment Bank is not clear). It appears that Mr. Rahman is well aware of the activities of ICB. So he must have learnt that ICB has already undertaken the scheme for 100 per cent computerisation of all its activities with an adequate provision for next 10 year's expected growth.

Through the computerisation, it indeed will improve the information system in share transaction but no guarantee for magical change in purchase and sale position, if not supported by other external factors like adequate and persistent demand and supply of securities in the stock markets. So if there be a fluid sharemarket, we believe that by the end of this year through total computerisation the customer service position of ICB will improve substantially.

It is important to note that the growth rate of ICB's IA's activities this year is 363 per cent in account opening, 257 per cent in deposit, 229 per cent in sanction of loan and 224 per cent in purchase of shares as compared to the same period of last year. Moreover, the customer movements, requirements for information and statements, application to initial public offer, withdrawal of securities and other related activities have increased many fold in the recent times. Even though to meet the customers' requirements, most of the officers and employees have been working very

hard from 9.00am to 9.00 pm almost everyday which Mr Rahman has also recognised.

With due respect to Mr Rahman we are sorry to mention that he is confused with the SEC guidelines as regards settlement of share transactions. He is not also an investor to ICB. Moreover, he maintains margin account with the ICB which the other stock brokers do not. Other stock brokers are not supposed to give him facilities of IPO application, retaining and safe custody of securities, interest and dividend collection from different companies, splitting of shares and host of other services as ICB does. ICB should and must protect the interest of small investors as well as its fund that lends to the common investors. So an investor account holder is not like the seller and buyer taking part in the O/C market or a broker of the stock exchange as defined by the writer. We believe, as margin account holder of ICB he certainly enjoys some advantages of investors account which the investors in O/C market and stock market cannot provide. Moreover, in the free economy and his wisdom, he has every right to decide on the basis of his Opportunity Cost of investments, where to invest.

Our assessment is that most of our investors feel the limitation of ICB, appreciate the unprecedented demand of ICB's service and the efforts of ICB to meet the needs of its customers. They also very often acknowledge the enormous contribution of ICB to the country's securities market. Experts on international capital markets on different occasions opined that ICB is still the mainstay of capital market. It is important that ICB has been able to give its services to hundreds of thousands of investors through different scheme. The writer has indicated privatisation of ICB on the assumption that the services of share transaction will improve dramatically as in

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