

Hanif Comes Stuck

Mayor Hanif has courted jabs like a boxing sack by failing to turn Dhaka into gem of a metropolis by the end of his third year in office, something he is believed to have promised earlier on adding that he wouldn't even mind resigning if it did not materialise. To no one's surprise, he has retracted from this at a stock-taking press conference on Wednesday saying that he had only pledged to try and that he would carry on his efforts during the remaining two years of his tenure to present us with a new Dhaka.

Hanif has a way of raising high expectations and seeing them belied in alternating patterns with the cosmetic result that while he has remained in the news, living conditions in Dhaka have only gone from bad to worse.

Both in terms of style and substance there are certain facets to his leadership that cannot but call for comments. In setting goals for improving the quality of city life he has shown a fancy for catch-phrases and for a martyr complex to top it off with rather than being pragmatic, fail-safe and result-oriented. By his own admission, he has failed in the areas of mosquito eradication and law and order. The two other problems affecting civic life have been water-logging and garbage-piling which are intertwined with the anti-mosquito drive if one were to extend one's mental horizon beyond the narrowly perceived aerial spraying or ground-spraying of insecticides which Hanif seems obsessed with. His predicament about law and order and, to some extent, water-logging can be understood, even perhaps be evocative of sympathy as these have to do with law enforcement and WASA's professional efficiency. But his failure in garbage-cleaning and eradication of mosquitoes is simply incomprehensible.

By seeking control over metropolitan police, health department, etc. Hanif has made a pointer to their not extending the required cooperation to him. We urge the agencies concerned with city life to give their version on this point to set the records straight in public interest. With the coordination committee working to synchronise the activities of various utility bodies there should not be anymore passing of the buck and the making of excuses we have grown so very wary of. Let a successful coordinating body be the harbinger of a metropolitan government.

A Woman's Tragedy

Fake peers have burnt alive a woman in the name of exorcism at a village under Shibchar thana in Madaripur. Two pervers who, according to a report, had failed to win over the young and recently married woman to satisfy their carnal lust however succeeded in poisoning the relationship between her and her husband. Young Shafali Begum had to return to her parental home where those two things posed as peers feigning the ability to exorcise evil spirits which they said held sway over her. Taking advantage of her parents' simplicity, the two evil incarnates engaged in a bizarre ritual. They implanted Shafali's feet one foot deep in a hole dug for the purpose, massaged an oily substance all over her body, then wrapped her in a white sheet of cloth, doused her with kerosene and put her to flame.

The wicked never runs short of ploys when they are after someone, who is moreover weak and a woman. Chaatakchhara's Nurjahan was put on a trial by crafty men whose religious teachings were distorted. Here the two debauches took a different line to exact revenge on a young woman whom they could not manage for their debauchery. This is just one example of how women are treated by a section of men. Society can neither be too prudish or conservative nor has it any scope to be unduly lenient. The problem is that our society has indeed been accustomed to applying different value judgments for the male and the female. So this inherent perception of gender discrimination, of which few men and even women are aware, needs changing.

Why men of loose character are not put on trial when women guilty of lighter offenses are put to the ordeals called village trials? The fact is that men's debauchery or even sexual violation often gets rewarded rather than punished. This has to change and the government's proposed village courts must take a very tough stand on the issue. Girls or women for no fault of their own should ever be subjected to public humiliation and they must be provided with all possible legal aid and protection before such tragedies actually happen.

Fatherly Act

For a father to produce his criminal son before the police after a manhunt carried all by himself is a rare incident. Abul Hashem, father of Chan Miah who threw acid on a school girl named Sonia on Saturday night, has done us proud by exactly doing this. Earlier we have come across stories about fathers handing over their drug-addicted sons to thanas. The punishment for acid-throwing and repression of women or girls has been made severe. We do not know whether Abul Hashem was aware of this when turning his son over to the police.

Whatever it is, the old man spending most of his life as a school peon has done a marvellous job — one that is worth emulating by indulging parents at some point. We are sure he had been torn between the fatherly instinct for the progeny and his yearning for doing the right thing. This sentiment came up in a flash when he observed that all his life was spent among small children in a primary school and it was inconceivable that a lovely young girl should be such a victim of his son's cruelty.

The old man is already rewarded in that he has earned everyone's commendation. No material reward can match that. After all, he is a father who has taken a very hard decision with pains in his bosom. We believe if guardians all across the country showed equal firmness in dealing with their wayward children, juvenile crime might have shown a remarkable decline.

You Mean Phoolan Devi?

As many as 180 MLAs, more than one-third of the house, are with criminal background. This is the maximum number in an assembly in any state. UP beats its own record of 150 in 1993. Records also show that the criminals in the state were returned in a substantial number for the first time in 1985.

"YOU mean Phoolan Devi" was the answer of a UP top lawyer when asked how he would describe the situation in his state. I visited Lucknow a few days ago to find out how correct Home Minister Jaganjit Gupta was in saying that the state was heading towards "anarchy", chaos and destruction. My impression is that the situation is worse than the home minister's apprehension.

There is a facade of law and order which the mafia and criminal gangs rip open whenever they want. The extort money, kidnap people for ransom, loot without fear and kill on bidding. There are regular paid assassins. The students are joining criminals because it is remunerative. Police is mixed up either because of payment it receives regularly or because of caste considerations. Crime figures are fudged. Only a fraction of cases are registered to keep the statistics impressive. Still the incidents of murder in 1995 were 8,549, nearly 25 a day, and of house breaking 10,861, almost 30 per day.

Thirty per cent of policemen are reportedly criminals, 5 to 10 per cent of the force are under suspension in the 69 districts the state now has. The suspended ones indulge in crime openly and some even sleep in police barracks. There is yet another reason why the law and order is neglected: thousands of policemen are engaged in "VIP" duties. As many as 2,500 jeeps were purchased last year for patrolling highways, which are nests of dacoity. All the jeeps are now attached to the growing number of persons given "protection". The governor's entourage has claimed some of these jeeps.

The misuse of jeeps is not so recognisable as the misuse of policemen. They are employed to beat up the critics, to lathi-charge peaceful demonstrators, as happened during the Uttarakashi agitation, and to supervise murderous attacks on political opponents. Mayawati, leader of Bahujan Samaj Party, escaped by inches a day before she was sworn in as the UP chief minister.

And there is no action taken against such policemen as participate in illegal acts which a chief minister orders them to carry out to teach his enemies a lesson. Attackers on the state high court are yet to be punished.

Murderers of Muslims at Mallana, near Meerut, have not been touched. And those policemen who connived at the demolition of the Babri Masjid are scotfree. The force or, for that matter, the administration is divided on the basis of community or caste.

When Mulayam Singh Yadav of Samajwadi Party came to power, he posted Yadavs on key positions. His successor, Kalyan Singh of the Bharatiya Janata Party, shunted out Muslim officials from important positions and had Brahmins to run the administration. Mayawati's rule, a four-month-old wonder, saw the blatant misuse of caste. In fact, the entire bureaucracy, including the police, has got so contaminated over the years that the word 'objectivity' has been excluded from official jargon. Govern-

There are many reasons for it. Illiteracy is one of them. UP is 59 per cent illiterate, the larger chunk is that of women, 76 per cent. Growth rate is around two per cent as against population's three per cent. Probably, the most convincing explanation is that the state has seldom been involved in anything worthwhile. Movements have been initiated to pander to communal or caste propensities. There is no leader in the state, none rises above parochialism. The language which most politicians use is unprintable. They believe the filthier the words they use, the stronger is their impact.

UP is the only state where even the bureaucrats, much less politicians, find it healthy if they can find out who is the most corrupt among them. Even that exercise was not taken to

been given a chance to form the government. It would have been defeated on the floor of the house.

Governor Romesh Bhandari is to blame for the situation in the sense that he has done nothing to stop the state from going down the hill. In truth, he has become a party to the forces which are destroying UP. Criminals and the state have become one. He has done nothing to break the nexus. An easy-going person as he is, he does not seem inclined to take up the task which required courage and objectivity.

The most charitable explanation is that he found the crust too hard. All political parties which have been in power at Lucknow since 1969 have contributed to the situation, seemingly irretrievable. The Congress party, which ruled the state for almost four decades, was a millstone round the state's neck. There was neither any development nor any vision. The Samajwadi Party, the Congress successor, gave protection to criminals. The BJP, when it came to power, lessened the crime but could not get over its communal bias. The BSP brought caste to the fore. All did their bit to make the scene murkier and murkier.

Gupta was quite right in his appeal to all political parties to rise above petty considerations and think of what was in store for the state. Their problem is that they hate one another so much that they have forgotten even the love of the country. Unless they disband their gangs and come out of the psychological satisfaction of being more powerful than their opponents, they cannot help the state. People are sick of their divisions and their despotic behaviour. Probably a new leadership, a break from the past, is required. But who is there to take up the cudgels on behalf of morality and values?

Romesh Bhandari is a non-event. All parties have come to focus their attention on him so as to cover up their mistakes. His removal will help. It will give yet another opportunity to the Centre to plan what it wants to do with the state. What UP wants is the rekindling of idealism which motivated the state during the independence struggle. If it is allowed to dither, as is happening, it may pull down the entire country with it. Time is ticking away.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

ment servants are guided either by considerations of corruption or caste. And so remuneration have become certain jobs that officers openly join hands with politicians (also pay them) to get them.

A police thana is sold for Rs. 4 to Rs. 4 lakh and the position of chief development officer for a recurring price of five per cent of money allocated for development (the officer charges 10 per cent). On the top of it, all the political parties nourish gangs of criminals. A pre-assembly election report prepared by a top police official identified 136 such gangs, 55 of which were patronised by political parties. Of course, the Mulayam Singh party had the lead with 25 gangs. Congress was second with 13 and the BSP behind it with eight. The BJP maintained seven of them. The other two were in the ND Tewari's Congress tow.

As many as 180 MLAs, more than one-third of the house, are with criminal background. This is the maximum number in an assembly in any state. UP beats its own record of 150 in 1993. Records also show that the criminals in the state were returned in a substantial number for the first time in 1985.

the logical end, last year because they did not want to single out the black sheep. Castes and other considerations came in the way. The fact is that the ethical considerations inherent in public behaviour have become generally dim and in many cases beyond the grasp of several government servants. Anxiety to survive at any cost forms the key-note of approach to the problems that come before many of them.

Yet if the people in UP are to preserve the fundamental values of a democratic society they have to display a degree of vigilance and willingness to sacrifice. They appear to have lost the will to fight tyranny or corruption. They are unable to realise the full implications of the government's action and those of its functionaries. They must demand a popular rule. If the present assembly cannot find any party which can command a majority, fresh elections should be held without further loss of time. Extending President's rule is undemocratic. It denies people the right to govern themselves. Because of petty politics, 180 million people, the state's population, are suffering. Heavens would not have fallen if the BJP had

To the Editor...

Student politics

Sir, It is encouraging to me that I started writing in this column on the subject of opinion against students, participation in national politics. Since then many have written supporting it along with a very powerful voice coming from no other than the office of the President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed. I feel happy to see that we are moving (slowly though) towards a national consensus on this issue. Supporting the issue, I like to add a few more words.

This is a part of the address delivered by Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, the then Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University at the convocation of 1908. The part of his lecture dealing on the subject reads as follows:

"Students of the University, please do not allow yourself to be distracted from your studies by getting involved in external affairs. Do not forget, so long you shall remain students your natural duty shall be to study, not politics, not to get involved in political life. It is my deepest conviction that politics is a subject of elders, not of boys. You have not yet acquired the absolutely necessary firmness of political life, matured experience and faultless judgement of human conduct. Because these virtues could be achieved only through the life struggle and through the discharge of responsible actions of one's active life. Boys, educate yourself first in Political Science, Economic, Political Philosophy, Law and Constitutional rules, acquire the vision through the great teachings of history. But do not deceive yourselves by considering it is possible to discuss and criticise actively the different aspects of governing a state without preparations subject to hard labour. You shall remember further that if you become associated with any party, your individual liberty, self education and cultural development shall be affected. Apart from that, the onslaughts of political life may pose serious danger to your mental health. Please accept these words as my serious warning to you."

(The above extract is a translation from Bangla by the writer. The Bangla version is the courtesy of "Shatabdhar Khanthashar" by Md Shahjahan page 248-249.)

But unfortunately most of "our" political leaders guided the students in the wrong direction. Among these, one exception was our Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazul Haque, who he reproduced the above lecture of Sir Ashutosh while he addressed the students of Dhaka University in 1937. Unfortunately and of course not unexpectedly, he was criticised from many quarters contrary to his views and that of Sir Ashutosh. However, like this issue many of the ideals of Sher-e-Bangla had been based on wisdom and universal truth, the path from which we have shifted quite far through the efforts of some charismatic but hollow and unwise leadership. Only time will prove that we shall have to

revert back to many of the ideals and visions of the Sher-e-Bangla for our emancipation as a nation.

Only few days back, I was listening to US President's address to the nation on CNN. President Clinton was discussing the policies on national issues for his 2nd term. Among many, the most important was "education". He categorically declared participation in national politics by the students as a non-subject. A child shall start learning from the age of 5 and then on, he or she shall continue to learn throughout his or her life, as the American national policy henceforth.

As I have expressed at the outset that a public opinion is in the formative stage and sooner or later, our government should take up the matter in real earnest in association with the opposition. Both the position and the opposition should understand that the nation-building is more important a duty than to look at the party interests.

Nurul Bashir
Khilgong, Dhaka

Protecting drinking water sources

Sir, In most countries, use of water grows faster than the population growth. Consequently, the number of countries facing shortages is likely to increase and acute problems are expected to arise more frequently over the coming years. Lack of adequate water sources heavily affect human health. It is recognised that water quality can be ensured more effectively when the risk for contamination by human waste, agricultural chemicals, livestock faces and industrial discharge can be avoided.

In Bangladesh, the three major environmental problems affecting the quality of water sources appear to be the pollution of the sources by industrial waste products, contamination by pesticides and fertilisers and pollution from domestic sewage. Many district towns have no treatment facilities at all or ones that are antiquated or poorly maintained. Discharge of untreated industrial waste is a major problem for many riverine communities causing skin and abdominal health problems.

Most important considerations are: 1) water pollution has a long-lasting effect, 2) remedial action often not feasible or very expensive, 3) there are not only immediate but also chronic health implications from pathogenic or toxic pollutants, 4) intensive pumping of freshwater aquifers adjacent to saltwater sources result in saltwater intrusion.

Environmental factors affecting small water sources such as spring and local aquifers most seriously are polluted by source users, contamination from on-site sanitation, regular supply-site manufacturing, competing demand for a limited water supply and the

effects of local land-use changes.

There is a general lack of awareness of these environmental issues among planners and decisions makers, and often among the water users themselves. But water sources could be protected by using simple tools and methods and using community resources and skills. Health and hygiene education activities can help prevent many water source contamination problems through measures such as: a) preventing open-air defecation, b) disposing safely of human waste by the introduction and regular use of sanitation systems, such as pit latrines, c) using clean buckets and ropes to extract water (from well), d) excluding washing of laundry, bathing and livestock watering in the drinking water sources, and e) improving people's understanding of the mechanisms that transmit and cause disease.

There is an urgent need for protection of drinking water sources and water resource management in Bangladesh and all over the world.

M Jahangir Alam
M Phil research fellow, DU & Mrs Khurshida Begum
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Weekly holiday on Sunday

Sir, I read in your newspaper of 25th instant that the newly-elected Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr Nawaz Sharif ordered Pakistan's return to weekly holiday on Sunday instead of Friday after more than 20 years.

I think this is a very practical and useful decision, especially to synchronise with the present-day shrinking world. One can easily visualise the benefit this will bring to the business and thus finally to the economy.

It left us alone among the SAARC nations to have weekly holiday on Friday. None of our neighbouring countries has weekly holiday on Friday.

If we revert to weekly holiday on Sunday, it will be convenient for our international dealing, including trade, which is so vital to prosperity in economic field and which may help turn Bangladesh to a 'Sonar Bangla'. This change will also be good for weekly rest and recuperation from weekly fatigue, especially when we are aiming for full industrial development.

Old system of half-day office on a Friday or alternative 2-hour break for Jumma prayers may be introduced. I strongly urge our Prime Minister and other authorities to ponder over it.

K Anwar
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Smuggling by train

Sir, On the 13th February I was making a journey by an inter-city train — the Padma Ex-

press — from Rajshahi to Sirajganj. Near Nandangachhi, the train slowed down and stopped without any schedule. Peeping through the window, I saw a number of people running to and fro, some of them carrying large, gunny-wrapped package on their head. The packs were pushed into the compartment for the guard hurriedly, some persons made signals with their hands and the train started moving again.

Just beyond the outer signal of Ishwardi station, it stopped again in spite of flickering green signal. Making a huge noise, some people and rickshaw-vans approached the said compartment. The packs were taken out and placed on the vans. Having asked a person involved, I could gather that the packs were of Indian saris(es). However, the train regained motion, passed the Railway Security Force office within a short distance and entered the platform.

I recalled the experience of witnessing the sight of phenidyl smuggling about one-and-a-half year back in the same way on the same route. One government is followed by another. Each claims the credit for stopping smuggling. However, without making high sounds, effective measures should be taken in this respect.

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Separate institute for FMRT

Sir, The Khulna University, a newly-established university in Bangladesh is proud of with its curricula of relatively modern subjects like Business Administration, Computer Science and others which enrich the higher educational arena of our country. Fisheries and Marine Resource Technology (FMRT) is one of those important subjects, lessons on which are being imparted here by experienced teachers.

But, unfortunately, the students of this subject are deprived of proper practical knowledge due to the lack of adequate equipments and a separate place for research.

It is to be mentioned here that a Marine Institute which was established many years ago occupying vast areas is now contiguous to the university and is in a miserable condition. It will be wise to bring this Marine Institute under the supervision of Khulna University with sufficient monetary allocation and make it a separate institute for Fisheries and Marine Resource Technology discipline of the Khulna University.

I would request the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor of the university to take such an initiative immediately for the betterment of the students as well as Khulna University.

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Dhaka Day by Day

To-Let, but not Quite Vacant

by Ayesha Fariha



What with the high-rise boom, flats are springing up all over the city, and one is always bumping into people on the lookout for tenants. Or are they? A person who is a kind of, sort-of, an acquaintance said to me some months ago that he had been desperately looking for suitable tenants for his apartment, and if I knew of anyone, I should suggest his flat. He added that he really needed the money and that he would be willing to negotiate the rent. So, when a friend of mine mentioned that she was looking for a living space, of course, who should I think of but the desperate tenant-seeking person. I gave my friend the particulars, and she and her husband assured me that they would get in touch with him as soon as possible.

A few days later, she called me, thoroughly disgusted with the desperate tenant-seeking person. She said that he asked for some phenomenal amount in advance against rent and that he did not seem in the least bit interested in showing her the place or discussing the rent.

Strange, I thought, but dismissed the incident. Perhaps he was in a bad mood, or perhaps my friend did not make the right approach. About a month later, a young couple I know mentioned that they were looking for a place to live in. Once again I thought of the desperate tenant-seeking person, and once again it was the same story. The couple informed me that he was most reluctant to even talk to them. Very fishy, I thought, and decided that I would ask him why he was behaving in this peculiar manner. This man, I should add, is married with children. Last week, I was on my way to work, when I passed by the apartment owned by the desperate tenant-seeking person, and what did I see? Him, coming out of the complex, with his arms around a young female companion. In a flash I realised why he was not keen to find occupants for his love nest, oops sorry, flat. As I looked away, I saw a To-Let sign dangling from his verandah. Do all such signs serve the real purpose, I wondered.

OPINION

Dhaka-Delhi: Traffic Contrast

Yassir Husain

Of late, much has been said about the level of pollution, the dismal traffic condition in our capital city and the extent to which these cause inconvenience to the public. It has also been noted that the mechanised public transport (PT), i.e. autorickshaws, tempos, minibuses, and heavy transport vehicles (HTV) such as the trucks and buses plying the streets cause a bulk of the city's pollution and inconvenience. Then the market is installed with catalytic converters for increased fuel efficiency using unleaded fuel. In contrast in our city, there is possibly only a marginal number of people who are aware of the effects of pollution and can only do so much as maintain their cars to reduce it.

The traffic situation in Delhi is quite organised as compared to Dhaka's because of the strict enforcement of traffic laws and a minimal level of corruption at the primary level. On the streets of Delhi one will notice there is at least one police jeep on surveillance at every crossing. There are fines for crossing the white line at red lights, cutting red lights, riding motorcycles without helmets etc. In contrast, in our country if a traffic crime occurs, all the police can do is to either take away licences or confiscate the vehicle papers which in the process are easily returned because everyone has some connection or the other with the authorities. The police in Delhi don't even want to hear your sad story, they just hold out their hand and start writing the receipt for the fine. It would be a frightfully lucky day if one got away scot-free.

Another basic problem we face in our country is that of faulty traffic lights. The traffic situation goes berserk as soon as they know that the lights are not functioning properly, so they easily have their way around the crossings (and everyone wants to go first) without worrying about the authorities, having a reasonably valid excuse for their misconduct. (I would be glad and this country would probably be a hundred times more prosperous if the general public showed as much impatience in their work). In contrast, the Delhi traffic lights are not dependent on the electricity in the area. The system has a dedicated electricity line which the authorities make sure does not fail. Therefore no matter what the electricity situation in the city, the traffic lights are always functioning.

We can see from this short overview that although the traffic situations in both the cities are quite the same, the problems in our country are mostly external and must be addressed separately. The infrastructure of the traffic system needs a thorough check-up and necessary renovation. The authorities cannot be as dumb as not to know these simple methods of traffic control, after all they are supposed to be very respected and knowledgeable people.