

## Reactivating JRC

That the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) of India and Bangladesh is going to meet for the first time in seven years is welcome news. We expected a meeting much earlier because that would have been quite natural following the signing of the Ganges water treaty between the two countries. As an apex body to oversee matters related to common rivers of India and Bangladesh, the JRC alone can play a decisive role in thrashing out differences and also resolving problems, if any, between them through its expert advice. In this task, the JRC has at its disposal the supporting materials, facts and figures. So the body is in a position to help the two governments to tie the loose ends.

Reactivating the JRC, therefore, augurs well not only for the Ganges water-sharing accord, but also for the whole gamut of sharing the waters of as many as 54 common rivers. The two-day Dhaka meeting of the JRC is expected to concentrate on the problems faced in implementing the Ganges accord reached in December last year and on the permanent sharing of water of the river Teesta. These agenda, considering their importance, show that the parties involved are quite alive to the delicate issue of sharing waters. Unfortunately, however, this awareness was found wanting in releasing details about implementation of the accord, particularly the problems of operational nature, if any, for public consumption. Now that the JRC is once again saddled with the responsibility of monitoring and assessing the overall situation concerning implementation of the treaty and availability of the quantum of water as stipulated, it should review the report submitted by the Joint Committee set up under the provision of the Ganges Accord. It should ensure that facts and figures relating to the operationalisation of the accord are made available on a regular basis to the media for maintaining transparency. This is necessary not only to keep the public informed of the latest developments but also to stop detractors from spreading all kinds of rumours. We understand that the JRC's responsible handling of the situation can help the two countries to adjust their positions if and when desperately necessary. So, we urge the two governments to ensure that JRC holds its meetings regularly so that it can sort out any problem that may arise from time to time.

## Rage after Hartal

What was this nation doing on Tuesday? In the towns and cities and specially in its most hectic patch — the capital city, the nation kept indoors. Dhaka was a near-dead city that day. Why? Well, the nation at large was held a hostage by some designing clerics and self-appointed defenders of the faith. They dared the nation to come out and take on the stigma that it does not feel outraged by the blasphemous poster incident in Israel-occupied Palestinian city Al-Khali. The nation did not take the challenge. For it had already, by a unanimous resolution of the national parliament, condemned the misdemeanor — as has not been done either by that most militant Islamic state of Iran or by the KSA. The design has come out clear — to use our love for Islam and for our Prophet to come back into political focus from the wilderness they have been roaming about for long.

Has this political ploy paid? No, the call was unpopular in the first place. The political motivation was made the more transparent when BNP lent it support without taking any time to examine the merit of the thing. Far from yielding dividends to the zealots, the strong national support to BNP got a good jolt. When the strike came and went without any resistance whatsoever from any quarter the nation experienced a silent rage — more dangerous than one that is vented — over being used or abused — in a very mean game. This will boomerang on whatever pull is left with the fundamentalist zealots and even the BNP will be hurt.

Calling the strike foolish — not one Muslim state went for such action — will be diluting its true nature. By one stroke these elements — most of them anti-Liberation War activists — have grievously eroded strike as an ultimate democratic weapon of the wronged ones and abused religion robbing it in whatever measure of the heavenly hue it has in the hearts of those that try to follow the *siratul mustaqim*. BNP, but for whom this walkover couldn't have been so clean, would be well-advised, for the good of its own health, to desist from playing a second string to rejects of Bangladesh's politics.

## Terrible Circumvention

A pesticide, decidedly bad for our environment, is being imported by local firms and sold to farmers without any caution. This they are doing taking advantage of there being no ban on the brand name of the pesticide. There is a ban on the genre it belongs to and that should have sufficed to keep it out of the country. Unfortunately, the generic name does not appear on the package of the toxic pesticide. So the customs would not prevent its import. What the importers have been doing has been very aptly dubbed by one of their numbers as *moral crime*. In fact, the crime committed is far more heinous and is very much cognizable by the law of the land. You are, quite beknown to you, selling something that is polluting land and water and killing fishes and other forms of life. This is a more dangerous crime than about all cognizable offences in the panel code.

Ours is a small country, too small and overcrowded to hold its 125 million people. There are a myriad chances of this over-pressured land becoming absolutely unlivable if we do not care to become the best in the world about preserving our water and land, air and all forms of life, specially the plants. One big way that guard is being sabotaged is the totally irrational increase in our use of the chemical fertilisers and pesticides. These inputs spurt production over a small time-frame. But as years go by their magic wears away. In the mean time they had taken a heavy toll of the fertility of the land and life-giving purity of water and the insect and worm world but for which agricultural production is impossible.

The government must, indeed, adopt a firm policy of gradually but surely reducing imports of chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

# Appointment of Relatives — Opens up Many Questions

People in general are continually getting disenchanted and dismayed at the unhealthy turn of events also in areas where the government can and does exercise discretion in respect of employment of public officials and termination of their service.

THE Prime Minister appointed a close relative, his newly-wedded daughter's father-in-law, to a high diplomatic post. She sought to ward off criticisms by justifying the action on the floors of the Parliament, saying he was competent. The editor of *The Daily Star* wrote a bold and elaborate piece on this issue a few days ago, dismissing Prime Minister's justification and pointing out the inherent and potential danger underlying such actions. We may briefly touch upon it before dwelling upon, also cursorily, some other questions that follow.

She made no bones about hiding her primary consideration that the appointment was a reward for the bloodshed by her family. It cannot be the total reward and this implies that more such rewards may follow in future. The editor observed, and justifiably so, if all those who hold power like Ministers, Secretaries, etc., decide to reward their competent relatives, arbitrarily determining their competence, there would be no end to this process. The designated institutions and the time-tested procedures devised to select competent persons for some such posts would then outlive their utility and be rendered redundant. Furthermore, competent relatives of millions of martyrs, thousands of rape-victims and numerous other sufferers during the Liberation War, would deserve similar type

of rewards as well. Secondly, one would wonder how competent was the competent? If, in Prime Minister's opinion, employment in some UN agencies abroad qualifies one for appointment as High Commissioner in Canada, which is regarded as one of nation's top diplomatic assignments, there would have been scores, if not hundreds, of such competent persons queuing up for the job. This, unfortunately, is an excuse. Everyone knows that. Finally, as was asked, did those who shed blood do so in anticipation of receiving rewards, and that too for their future relatives? The answer is an emphatic "no". In other words, the Prime Minister was wrongly advised, if at all. And if this is called a folly of nepotism by the common people, could the latter be blamed for it?

The episode brings to focus some of the acts of indiscretion, malaise and injustice committed by the government in respect of senior government officials in general, and those in the Foreign Office in particular. Take for example, our present High Commissioner in Canada. Only a few months ago, orders were issued granting him a contract of service for a further period of two years only to be

rescinded in no time. The only reason for the termination of his service was to provide room for the relative. Did not this deflate our image adversely in Canada and abroad? Is this the way to end the career of a distinguished officer of the diplomatic service having an impeccable service record? Those who know him will vouch he never bestowed any undue grace to one

of their political beliefs and party affiliations. I share the view of others who subscribe to the fact that almost all our diplomats and civil servants try to work impartially and have the interests of the nation, including a bit of their own, foremost in their mind to promote.

In the Foreign Office, another glaring act of injustice and shame was committed by

even associated with any political party. May be his faults lay in the fact that his late mother happened to be a Minister in Zia's government and his late father-in-law the first Foreign Minister from the then East Pakistan.

Another case relates to a senior officer, also from New York, who was recalled abruptly, apparently due to no fault of his, except for the fact that he happened to be a step-son of a former president and first Foreign Minister of the Bangladesh government in exile uttering whose name is almost a taboo at present. These are no fair treatment and are retrogressive, rather vengeful steps, which no government publicly committed to democracy is expected to take.

Even in the Civil Service, several of our efficient officers became victims of governmental wrath merely because of the fact that they had been appointed by and at the behest of the previous government. One well understands termination and recall of the two Ambassadors, in Bangkok and Bahrain, appointed by the BNP government on political grounds. But what wrong was done by the Bangladesh representatives on the Boards of the

World Bank and the Asian Bank to deserve premature recall? The latter, of course, had previously been a Secretary to the Prime Minister and, in the course of duties, obviously became close to the previous incumbent. He was and still is a highly capable officer. Since Prime Ministers do require and must get top officials to assist them almost round the clock. But now he is an OSD, a national waste. This is a system introduced by the new government which needs to be rectified and, one hopes, should not set a dangerous precedent for the future. The BNP claims they had not resorted to such practices and kept the incumbents in their posts till the end of their tenure, even extending service in some cases. Besides, one may cite numerous examples of premature termination of contracts/services of those who were ex-officials and not BNP party members, on the boards of banks, insurance companies and other public enterprises.

People in general are continually getting disenchanted and dismayed at the unhealthy turn of events also in these areas where the government can and does exercise discretion in respect of employment of public officials and termination of their service. Even a belated step in the right direction may help mend some of the follies of the past and be worthy of appreciation of all.

## Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

or the other political party in the course of duty.

A High Commissioner or Ambassador is appointed by the Head of State and accredited to the Head of State of the receiving country. He is commissioned to speak, act and receive on behalf of his own head of state. Evidently, he promotes the policy of his government and is required to implement it ardently. But, he must not be a partisan to the ruling party and must treat all his nationals abroad equally, irrespective of

recalling our Ambassador in New York prematurely, at the advent of the new government, only months before his normal retirement. He had been previously Foreign Secretary and later was assigned as an Officer on Special Duty, with no office, no duty, even no chair and no table. He retired last week both from his service and from this ignominious position. He was one of our top officers in the Foreign Service. He was reputed to be an excellent officer and even a workaholic, but was never known to be close to or

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

# How Guilty is Mike Tyson

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton, USA

The conventional wisdom is that Tyson will be banned for at least 18 months, and fined 3 million dollars! The fans and officials are already clamouring that the punishment is too lenient. Is it?

claimed warrior for Jesus, the gospel-singing heavyweight — that most commentators take him at his word. Yet head-butting would appear to be a strategy of Holyfield's, which is only slightly less despicable (and more sinister in intent) than biting.

On watching the tapes of the fight carefully, one will see how Holyfield, moving in for a body punch, lowers his head for an "unintentional" butt to the vulnerable bridge of the eye. It may be recalled, that Tyson-Holyfield II was postponed for a month when Tyson was cut in training in the same area in training. Nobody, but nobody has condemned Holyfield for the initial butt!

Interestingly, Holyfield stated that his first reaction after Tyson bit him was to bite back. More revealing, Holyfield admitted to once biting an opponent in the shoulder after being knocked down!

Let us also remember that Mike Tyson has been boxing biggest attraction after Muhammad Ali, and over the last 10 years single-handedly kept the heavyweight division interesting and exciting. Four of the most watched fights in history have all been Tyson fights. Clearly, boxing owes Tyson something in return!

A product of the mean streets of New York city, primitivity has been one of Mike Tyson's attractions. Ever since he became the youngest heavyweight Champion over 10 years ago, American men fought with him in the ring the vicariously, women fantasised about his virility. Every one paid handsomely to watch him fight. He married beautiful young actress Robin Givens.

Then things started going

wrong. Givens left him for his brutality. A despondent Tyson tried to commit suicide by driving his car into a tree. He lost his title to Buster Douglas in 1990.

More trouble was to follow. In 1991, a young contestant at a black beauty pageant in Indianapolis, where Tyson was a judge, accused him of rape. To this day, Tyson maintains that it was consensual. He has a point. Desiree Washington, the contestant in question, accompanied Tyson, at that time divorced and wild, willingly to his hotel room at two in the morning. What was she expecting? A professional discourse on boxing? Nevertheless, next to murder, rape is the most heinous crime any one can commit against a woman. And change her mind. Tyson was convicted of rape in 1992 and spent the next three years in jail.

In US jails, religious figures are allowed to teach the inmates moral and religious values. Mike Tyson liked what he heard from such a teacher, Mohammed Siddique, an embittered Islamic. He took the legendary civil rights leader Malcolm X's Muslim name, Malek El Shabazz.

Up on his release from prison in March, 1995, very quickly Tyson regained his heavyweight title. Things were on course until he met, and lost to Holyfield last November, and again this month.

Although it is hard to imagine this in the aftermath of the Holyfield debacle, Mike Tyson is really a changed man now. He is married to a doctor, has a daughter and for the first time his home life is tranquil. His Islamic faith, unfortunately, is not helping him too much.



There is nothing more current of hostility for us having abandoned Christianity in favour of Islam. After the first Holyfield fight, comments such as "the Christian beats the Muslim" were not uncommon. Here is a dispute involving two African-American fighters:

yet there is not a single African-American face on the Nevada Athletic Commission that is going to dish out the punishment. Historically, from Jack Johnson to Muhammad Ali, boxing authorities have punished African boxers severely at the slightest pretext. Let us take a closer look.

Jack Johnson, the first African-American heavyweight Champion around 1910, was punished for his liking for white women. When Muhammad Ali refused, as a conscientious objector, to be inducted to the US Army to fight in Vietnam in 1967, the US Army took him to court. (Ali in his typical direct manner said: "You want me to go get freedom for the Vietnamese, when my own people here do not have freedom!") Led by the state of New York, all state boxing commissions, including the supposedly "World" Boxing Council and "World" Boxing Association did not wait for the verdict. They stripped him of his title and banned him from boxing. In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled in Ali's favour, 8-0, (with the current

Chief Justice William Rehnquist abstaining). Thanks to the moral fervour of the state boxing commissions, Ali was robbed of three and a half years of boxing at his prime!

The world knows of the legendary exploits of Jesse Owens at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where he destroyed Hitler's pet theory of Aryan superiority under the Nazi's very nose, by winning four Olympic gold medals. Very few people know that after the Olympics, Avery Brundage, the dictator of US Olympics Committee, asked Owens to attend several meets in Europe. Since he was given no money, Owens had to pay his way. When his money ran out, Owens returned home. Incensed, Brundage unceremoniously banned Owens, the greatest track and field athlete America ever produced, from track and field for life. No body said a word. Banned from track and field, Owen tried to make a living running against horses.

Mike Tyson can expect not much better. In the letter to *The New York Times*, the writer made the above points, a little more succinctly. The letter was published on July 4 under the caption: "Tyson has already apologized: What more do we want?" The writer is a Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh who currently lives in Princeton, New Jersey, USA.

## OPINION

# Once Bitten, Twice Shy

Alif Zabr

BNP has gone for two mini half-day hartals so far. It is unlikely that the opposition would go for full scale non-stop hartals as we saw two years ago. The latter rather took the form of a civil disobedience movement. Dynamic democracy against chairend democracy.

People have now become conscious of the crippling effect of long-term hartals: which is simply an exploitation of the poor people to satisfy the ego or moonshine of the frustrated political leaders (particularly of the major parties).

The harassed people won't tolerate the imposition of frequent long hartals any longer — once bitten, twice shy. Parties who believe too much in hartals are doomed (it is time to coin the word, which has a strong bearing on political solutions). We Bengalees have a phlegmatic temperament, and are easily roused to sudden bursts of unholy passion at the merest pretext. We have a good head (monitor the entrepreneur spirit behind the law and order situation), but we tend to rule by the heart (the venom of the orator).

Political hartal may be likened to the non-consummation of the political marriage between the politician and the Parliament. There is a reason for this myopia. Dhaka politics has been, for generations, based on agitation, outdoor movements, protests, and hostile

demonstrations against questionable regimes since days of Partition half a century ago; and before that, the Quit India movement, which broke up the Indian empire.

The foundation for peaceful indoor political pursuits has yet to be built up afresh since 1991. The period of six 'democratic' years is too little for politicians who believe a little bit too much in agitative politics. The have-not is always in a hurry, chased by dire necessity, and tormented by conscience — the latter always a nuisance!

The leaders are, unfortunately, like the people. The difference will be apparent when the grain is separated from the chaff — after more practice in thrashing. Are we at present in the thrashing stage of political evolution? Then the trend may be reversed when the leaders will lead, and the people will follow — in a disciplined manner. Discipline, like divine grace, comes from the top, and is generated below.

The current opposition is 'enjoying' one-third of the vote of confidence bestowed by the voters during the last general elections; which means that the people have not totally rejected BNP (as it rejected the Jamaat fundamentalism), but kept it as standby — "if in case".

So the party in power should be wary of widdling the stick; especially when the other side

ing party (JP) cannot be trusted to remain faithful through thick and thin, till death render them apart. There is no death in politics, only eclipses and revival.

The present regime's apparently non-transparent and hurried antics in some areas of governance appear to have shaken the public confidence in a number of critical circles, as gathered from the reports in the press.

The tactics of the opposition is becoming clearer. Some critical sector is selected, with attempts to cripple it temporarily, then shifting to another key point. A new 'sabotage politics' is creeping up due to severe bipolarity in politics. The public have been seen some instances. More may be expected.

Now the critical provisions of the passed budget may be exploited, of which the July third half-day hartal is the beginning of the game. This hartal may be a sort of alert call, for more displays of fireworks of the non-hartal kind.

The major objective should be clear to all: prevent the present regime from completing the mandated five years. Nothing secret in such a surmise — it is the old tit-for-tat game. Hatred creates deeper animosity, longer enmities, and thicker viciousness. It is not political, but human nature. We are not angels.

## Attestation

Mohammad Monir Uddin

scope to work in an office, it is out of question to have any former experience. "No former experience, no job", has been materialised nowadays in our country. So shouldn't the authorities concerned think about this matter? After this, there is a matter of attesting the photo copies. The officers' annoyance knows no bound, when one goes to them to attest their photo copies.

Suppose, you go to a first-class gazetted officer for attesting your photo copies while he or she is gossiping with somebody. On hearing this, he or she will say, "I can't attest anything or I have no time, or come later on." If you go later, he or she will repeat it or may attest. However, it's my question, since

one has to show the authorities one's original certificates, and observing these certificates very keenly, one is given the chance to be appointed or get admitted oneself into a college or a university — so is it very necessary to submit the attested photo copies?

I think no problem will occur if the photo copies are submitted without attestation — because one would be evaluated with one's original certificates. Besides this, there is also a question of character certificate, can anybody know about one's character to see the character certificate? Of course not.

If this is the fact, what is the need for a character certificate? Can the authorities concerned answer these questions?

## To the Editor...

### Wanted: QC week

Sir, The government does not appear to be interested in publicising the Quality Control (QC) concept, to create public awareness in the production, marketing, and consumer sectors; in contrast to vigorous promotion of various 'weeks' and 'days' in other fields (health, women, rights, child, May day, nutrition, environment, birth and death anniversaries, ... the list is too long).

The negligence results in unwarranted demands and movements by trade bodies for concessions from the government on taxes and levies. The latter cannot be made zero, otherwise the state 'revenue' will become zero. The agitators go on chipping away at the marginal taxes to bring it further down, say, from five to 2.5 per cent; or, from the latter to zero (no tax).

Raising the efficiency at the manufacturing or processing end can more than make up the amount spent on paying the levies. But the leaders hardly draw attention on this point. Even the trade bodies and associations avoid mentioning the weaknesses of their members in the areas of management and production efficiencies.

There is another weakness in the employers' associations: they keep quiet about their own weaknesses, and try to exploit the government and squeeze the other agencies for maximum benefits. The leaders in all sectors must have the moral courage to come out with the unpleasant truths and enlighten public opinion. So they must shoulder the blame for the lop-sided publicity we see every week in some sector or other.

Compete, or get lost. Protect the consumers and the users of the products.

Abul M Ahmad  
Dhaka

### Underpass traffic control

Sir, The solution creates problems! The narrow 12-feet wide lanes underground with shops on both sides will create several problems.

The pedestrians will be mainly in two categories — (i) Those who will not do shopping and would like to get across as quickly as possible. They need a fast lane, unobstructed by shoppers, and goods kept outside the shops (not allowed). (ii) Pedestrians who like to shop, and get across. Their movement is random, abrupt, halting, crossing, forming small crowds. Keep them separate.

Traffic control has to be well-planned, and strictly enforced. There may be a 'shopping lane' and a non-stop 'walking lane', separated initially by white lines, later, using rope fences (not fixed). The shopping lane could be at 4-inches higher or lower level (automatic sorting by level). Anyway, two-month monitoring may be analysed.

Overnight stay inside or outside the shops may not be allowed after closure at night (avoid human problems).

Our reputable public toilets! Fifty paise entry fee should be compulsory (no paper "pass" — imitation). All flushes must work; and maintenance staff must be on duty in three shifts.

The main problem still remains: wheeled-traffic density above! So, more projects for vehicular traffic dispersal, and control. Also, separation of traffic lanes speed-wise.

Hope we are getting wiser!

A Zabr  
Dhaka

### Suhrawardy hospital

Sir, On the 28th of June, 1997, I had gone to see one of my