

No Stopping Half-way

A public institution in this land rarely lives up to people's expectations around any of its commitments. Welcomely, Dhaka City Corporation has. But only so far.

Reports make it evident that the demolition drive against illegal structures in the capital, a programme only four days old, is going on in full swing. It looks like the DCC has taken the theme of 'deconstruction' quite seriously.

Given the habitual streak of non-performance of the government bodies and the interruptions caused by the disruptive nature of our politics, it has been a commendable display of persistence by the Corporation. We hope it sticks to the same steely brand of resolve till the job is done fully.

But it has not been an unblemished tale of delivering goods on the part of the DCC. Its demolishers reportedly pulled their horns in from some 'targets' just because the land happened to belong to some government agencies. For they feared it might lead to legal disputes. Why should such an impression prevail in the first place? An illegal construction is an illegal construction. It does not matter whether it is on a tract of land belonging to Railway, PDB or PWD.

We feel once a programme is undertaken it should not be allowed to languish half-way due to any prohibitory notices or things like that. The DCC authorities would do well to ensure the green signal on this issue from the concerned government departments and agencies so that this fear of legal wrangle does not loom at all. And it would be unwise to bide time on it. There is no way the DCC can allow administrative indecisiveness to leave an attenuating impact on a useful programme.

So far it has been a fairly brisk and efficient display of professionalism by the DCC. Credit should also go to the ruling party for playing a vital and positive role in ensuring fairness of a project that kept from kicking up an all-too-familiar dispute and controversy. In fact, it has so far been such an honest-faced piece of professionalism that all concerned in the future of the city and its dwellers should imbibe one lesson without any ado: a good intention practised with steadfast fairness simply cannot go awry.

Welcome to Wolfensohn

This is World Bank season in Bangladesh. Dhaka has the privilege of hosting the august presence of WB President James D Wolfensohn, his wife Elaine, reputed for her 30 years' service in the field of education, and Vice President South Asia region MS Miekko Nishimizu. Rashad Kaldany, the Asian functionary of the IFC is a member of the contingent. Dhaka is also, very much as part of the same process that is headed for staging the aid consortium meet for the first time in Bangladesh, an avid listener to the WB's sharply evaluative reports on her economy.

The World Bank's Public Expenditure Review has been laudatory of the shifting of public resources in Bangladesh to social sectors and infrastructure development at a rate higher than is perceptible in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Bangladesh's allocation of resources to this sector stands at more than 24 per cent compared with India's 16 per cent, Pakistan's 14 to 16 per cent, and Sri Lanka's 12 to 14 per cent.

The allocational shift praiseworthy though it certainly is, will be of little value, unless there is public expenditure management of a kind that ensures the quality of government expenditure. The review cited the instances of 'unapproved projects' upsetting the ADP and absorption of personnel of the completed ADP projects in to the recurrent budget. The project approval formalities need simplification, and the time-lag between pledge and commitment as well as between commitment and release of funds will have to be bridged.

In its Country Economic Memorandum released ahead of the donors' consortium scheduled for November 4-5 in Dhaka, the World Bank has warned us against 'crowding out' of the private sector by weaknesses in the macro-economic framework as induced by foreign exchange depletion and increased government borrowing from the banking system. The dilemma is, stepping up industrial production from the record low level would involve a higher import bill causing a further dip in the 1.7b forex reserve. The IMF balance of payment support is warranted. We reckon that the master key to privatisation is held by speedy financial reform and containment of trade unionism.

Snuff These Acts Out

Pooja, the great autumnal festival, was this year celebrated with great eclat. There were, however, untoward incidents in places this year and this cannot at all be ignored. Although these did not mar the overall happy celebration, these must be gone into seriously so that we can understand and ably prevent any repetition.

This year it was sheer *mastani* that struck mandaps and villages in Mirzapur, Manikganj, Tangail, Rangpur, Bauphal etc. These were isolated cases of extortionists demanding money for a no-molestation promise. It may be that some mandaps relented and no incident occurred. Some of those that resisted were attacked. At some places the attack spread out to surrounding villages. This is plain terror and communalism is not involved. One evil less. But why target the mandaps and the Hindu villages?

Not because they are heathens or infidels — it is quite good at this point — but as the followers of any religion other than Islam are, in the perception of the mastans and other assorted bullies and criminals, they could be vulnerable and easier preys to blackmail. From here to slide to a belief that it is, as such, paying to be communal — is only a frog's leap. The mastans must be punished and disciplined before they can take this jump.

The district administrations should be good enough to snuff the abominable eruptions out but it would spur them to know that the government takes these to be a national shame. While the action should be the local administrations', the responsibility of ridding our nation of such double-edged crimes lie with the government.

'What Kingdoms are but Great Gangs of ...'

by Dr. Khandakar Quadrat-I Elahi

Alexander the Great, "Pirate, what is your idea in infesting the sea?"
The Pirate, "The same as yours in infesting the earth! But because I do it with a small craft, I'm called a pirate; because you have a mighty navy, you're called an emperor."

A gang — a band of criminals — is organized — and commanded by one whose wickedness surpasses that of other members. The only motive of the gang is to acquire riches through plunder. The gang is abhorred and abjured by the society and punishable by laws.

A political party in democracy is organized by like-minded citizens interested in politics, which is led by the person whose integrity, wisdom and generosity generally excel those of other party members. The primary purpose of a political party is the most important task in the society — running the government. Thus, a political party, which is a purely voluntary and non-profit social institution, is approved and supported by the state.

When a political party behaves more like a gang, the differences between them tend to disappear.

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These dialogues took place, legend says, between the Macedonian King Alexander the Great and a captured pirate. St. Augustine, honoured as one of the four Doctors of the Western Church, quotes these dialogues in his famous book, *The City of God*.

St. Augustine was born at Thagaste in North Africa in the year 354 A.D. The son of a pagan father and a Christian mother, he was brought up as a Christian. In 375, he became deeply interested in philosophy after reading Cicero's book, *Hortensius*. (Cicero was a Roman orator and statesman of first century B.C. who is widely respected in philosophy.) He was converted to the Manichean religion, but became catholic again and was

baptized in 387. In 391, he was ordained priest and was chosen the Bishop of Hippo five years later.

In 410 A.D., when Rome was sacked by the Goths (members of a Germanic tribe that invaded the Roman Empire in the 3rd-5th century A.D.), the Pagans attributed this disaster to the abandonment of the ancient gods. They accused that Rome remained powerful so long as Romans worshipped Jupiter, but he withdrew his favours for the Romans when the emperors turned away from him, and embraced Christianity.

This pagan argument called for an answer that was exactly what St. Augustine gave in *The City of God*. In his own words: At that time, Rome was overwhelmed in disaster after its capture by Goths under their King Alaric. Those who worship the multitude of false gods, whom we usually call pagans, tried to lay blame for this disaster on the Christian religion and began to blaspheme the true God more fiercely and bitterly than before. This fire me with zeal for the house of God and I began to confute their blasphemies and falsehood.

He very cogently argued that Rome's fall to its slaves had a multiplicity of causes, but acceptance of Christianity by the Roman emperors was certainly not one of them. He held that the most vital cause of the fall of Roman Empire was its wickedness: Rome was an out-and-out wicked kingdom that practised little justice; kingdoms without justice are like gangs of criminals.

Remove Justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale? What are criminal gangs but petty kingdoms? A gang is a group of men under the com-

mand of a leader, bound by a compact of association, in which the plunder is divided according to an agreed convention.

If this villainy wins so many recruits from the ranks of the demoralized, that it acquires territory, establishes a base, captures cities, and subdues peoples, it then openly arrogates the title of kingdom, which is conferred on it in the eyes of the world, not by renouncing aggression, but by the attainment of impunity.

In St. Augustine's time, the political system in the known world was monarchy. In other words, the sovereign authority of the state rested with the hereditary monarchs who ruled according to laws established by religious and social traditions and superstitions; the non-members of the royal family were their subjects. Whatever laws there were, St. Augustine insists, if the monarch does not obey them and perpetrates atrocities and injustices, then the difference between a gang and a kingdom vanishes except that a gang must work under the law and therefore punishable if caught; but the monarch operates above the laws and has no fear of being punished.

Long gone are the days of St. Augustine; we now live in a world that is very modern and much more civilized. The political systems responsible for managing the state affairs have also perfected significantly, although not in the same rate all over the world. And the dominant political system now reigns the world is democracy.

The ideas of democracy is indeed very old; the system flourished in the ancient Greece during the 5th century B.C. But the conception of modern democracy is fairly recent; it

originated in the immortal work of the seventeenth century English Philosopher John Locke, *Treatises on Government*.

In the seventeenth century Europe, the political speculations that justified and upheld monarchism was the divine theory of government. This view sanctions the sentiments of immemorial antiquity; in almost all civilizations, the king is a sacred person. According to the theory: God, the Creator of the universe, had bestowed power on certain persons, or their heirs to rule the earth; they therefore alone constituted the legitimate government, rebellion against which was not only treason, but impiety.

John Locke dismissed this divine theory and originated the idea that the civil government is the result of a contract and is an affair purely of this world, not something established by a divine authority.

And the contract was not between the ruler and the ruled; the contract was among free men with equal rights. The fundamental aim of the contract was the protection of freedom and rights of all men in the society. Finally, the government was appointed with the legislative and executive power to implement the contract. But the real power remained with the people as they could dismiss the government if it violated the contract.

John Locke's philosophy of people's sovereignty and representative government gradually permeated in the social consciousness of the Western world and eventually led to the development of the current multiparty political system of democracy. The idea is simple: The sovereign authority of the

party leaders are elected in the convention by the representatives of basic party units who have to seek reelection after every defined period. This prevents the ruling leaders from behaving autocratically and at the same time provides opportunity for development of new leadership.

Third, the sacred trust is that politics includes very noble activities and is wholly unrelated to material considerations. Thus, political parties, by social consciousness, are voluntary organizations created to serve a very important social purpose — run the business of the government. Accordingly, the general expectation is that people choose political careers for making name and fame, but not for making money.

In short, the three attributes of political parties described above are: (i) political parties represent and reflect the wishes of the people, and therefore their actions and activities are guided by the perceived welfare of the people; (ii) they are ruled by party constitutions and leaders are elected in the party conventions; and (iii) people choose political careers not for monetary gains, but for social recognition.

How would we characterise a political party that does not exhibit the above attributes? What if (i) people disapprove the activities and policies of the party, because they mainly cause their sufferings; (ii) party constitution and party convention play little role in the management and functioning of the party; and (iii) the primary motives of the party leaders and members are to make money instead of serving the society?

If the above are true, then the political party exhibits all the characteristics of a gang. If this is the case, then democracy as we are told to understand needs to be redefined.

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LAW AND ORDER

Disturbing Trend of Increasing Immunity

by Md Asadullah Khan

People, these days, seem disillusioned with the police behaviour and mentality. Battered, oppressed and mostly traumatized people seek the help of law enforcers for redress of their sufferings and grievances. But when they suffer a further beating in the hands of these people, what hope remains there for them?

become rampant. The whole endeavour ends up being a tortuous process, with no support coming to the victims from any quarters. What is worse is that the law enforcers seem to have relaxed their control over without being booked because they can twist laws, invent loopholes and manipulate tricky factors or points in their favour. The sad part of these cases is that when these continue to be dragged in the court for years, the victims are taken to be guilty until proved innocent. That actually happened in the case of Yasmin murder in Dinajpur and Sheema murder in Chittagong, both in police custody. Surprisingly the judiciary has never booked any one in the law enforcement agency for any wrong doing even when that seemed glaringly visible.

Worse, as the case history in the Yasmin murder case suggests, these sorts of atrocities were allegedly perpetrated on the instigation and active indulgence of the members in the officer rank. May be, there is no dearth of police officers these days willing to junk the concept of human rights. There is also an increasing tendency in the law enforcers now to extort confessions through torture and extra-legal methods. They may even go to the extent of violating women prisoners simply because they are helpless, poor and are at their mercy.

The police personnel are aware of the gravest allegations levelled against them by different civil rights organisations like Naril Pokkho, Human Rights groups etc. Most shocking, even the senior police officers are reportedly cynical of the rule of law, they have little regard for the efficacy of the courts and National Human Rights Commission that are increasingly trying to project these cases through the media for redress of people's sufferings.

Experts and social scientists point out their police's capacity to do damage is incalculable because of the vital positions they occupy in the law enforcement machinery. And it is at this point that the administration at the top has delved deep into such degeneration of its vital forces that are responsible for curbing lawlessness, terrorism drug addiction, drug trafficking and abuse of women and children. People are now ques-

tioning if there is anything grotesquely wrong in their training inputs, other wise how this menacing trend of organizational sub-culture takes over? As a natural corollary, these people want to have accountability of their excesses.

The disturbing figures of police atrocities, excesses and grotesque violation of human rights reinforce a suggestion made by the conscious citizens that the National Police Academy should conduct a psychological profile of all its officers, at least periodically, to locate and cure the endemic tendencies. There is an increasing feeling among the citizenry for employing trained personnel to undertake the highly sensitive task of treating negative traits.

The bestiality of the Galachipa Thana Police Officer as reported in almost all the dailies published from Dhaka dwarfs the carnage, brutality and savagery inflicted by the Serbs on the Bosnian Muslims in the recent past. There are of course, standard excuses for resorting to extra-legal methods or in denying fundamental rights to certain groups of hardened criminals, terrorists or insurgents. But this is not a case that this couple shot at the personnel on duty or set some houses ablaze or murdered any one for any reason whatsoever. In a situation when none of the above parameters comes up as a cause, how one can compromise such human rights violation in a democratic society where accountability comes foremost for all actions resorted to.

People, these days, seem disillusioned with the police behaviour and mentality. Battered, oppressed and mostly traumatized people seek the help of law enforcers for redress of their sufferings and grievances. But when they suffer a further beating in the hands of these people, what hope remains there for them? A close scrutiny of the incidence of death of 20 persons in the last nine months in police custody and rape of five helpless girls by the law enforcers does indeed reveal a disturbing trend of the increasing immunity of this long arm of the law.

Further, it has driven home the message to the public that the law enforcement agency in the country has acquired primacy without any correspond-

ing accountability. Apart from sticking with the rule of law, discipline and restraint in the face of highest provocations, there is an alarming tendency to ride roughshod with human dignity compounded with abuse

of power. If things are allowed to go like this, that will only fuel public disenchantment and apathy for such a vital force of the nation bringing in its wake chaos, disorder and total indiscipline in the society.

"Lest We Forget" Justice Muhammad Ibrahim

by Aziz-Ul-Haq

BORN in 1898 at Bishnupur village of Sadarpur thana in Faridpur district, Justice Muhammad Ibrahim breathed his last at Dhaka in 1966.

He lost his mother in his boyhood. His father took special care in imparting appropriate education to his gifted son — who showed signs of extraordinary talent early in his life.

After initial education at his village school and Balshrohi High English School, he was admitted to the Barisal Zilla School. He passed the Matriculation examination in first division with distinction marks in Mathematics, English and History. He then passed his I.Sc. examination from Dhaka College and graduated with Honours in English literature.

Inspired by the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, Moulana Muhammad Ali and Shukrat Ali, he was attracted to their political activities. His association with politics firmed up his faith in unified action by all sections of our people against foreign rule. During that period he came in close contact with a distinguished educationist and lawyer, Dr Naresh Chandra Sengupta (1892-1961), who was Vice Principal of Dhaka Law College and later became Professor of Law at the Dhaka University. Dr Sengupta was impressed by young Ibrahim's natural talent, his freedom of thought and his urge to serve his people. With Dr Sengupta's encouragement and guidance Ibrahim seriously studied Law. He joined the legal profession and practised initially at Faridpur and then moved on to Dhaka.

While practising law at Dhaka he also started teaching law, as a part time teacher, in the Dhaka University. He was appointed Public Prosecutor in 1939. In 1943 he was made Additional District and Sessions Judge and was posted at Barisal. He was then promoted as a District and Sessions Judge of Jessore. He was District Judge in Barisal at the time of partition in 1947. In 1950, he was elevated to the position of a Judge of the Dhaka High Court. After retiring from Judiciary, he was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dhaka from November 1956 to October 1958.

Following the promulgation of martial law in Pakistan in October 1958, President Ayub Khan promised a new constitution to his people. Invited by the President, Justice Ibrahim agreed to be the Law Minister of Pakistan in the hope of contributing something concrete to the stability and prosperity of his people. But the trend of political activities in Pakistan soon disappointed him. Serious difference developed between

him and the administration dominated by the army, the bureaucracy and self-seeking politicians.

He was uncompromising in his opinion on essential changes in Pakistan's constitutional and administrative structure in the interest of democracy, rule of law, good governance and stability of the state torn apart by a thousand miles of foreign territory and with deep-seated differences in language, culture and conditions of life. He emphasized the point that the majority of people lived in East Pakistan in serious poverty and afflicted by visible discriminations, and insisted on political autonomy, adequate participation in governance and fair allocation of resources for development of East Pakistan. He exercised his wisdom and authority in giving practical shape to the Muslim Family Law Ordinance of 1961 which came as a great boon to the women population in our tradition-bound society.

When he was Vice-Chancellor, the Rotary Club of Dhaka invited him to address them on an important occasion. Among other things, he told us that 'juvenile delinquency in any society is the reflection of adult inadequacies and indifference in that society'.

While living in the Dhanmondi Residential Area he used to visit us once in a while. On one occasion, he told my toddler son that he comes to see his young friend rather than his parents. This made an instant impression on the child and they went on talking on the flowers and vegetables in our garden. Real warmth of heart dispels distance of age and status.

On one occasion, he asked me if I had a vision on how I would want my life to be. I failed to provide a vision. He then narrated what vision he had. He said, early in his life he had a dream when a revered looking elder asked him if he would like to be rewarded most in this life or hereafter. His answer, he said, was, herein. He lived a full life of success and eminence.

He was not enjoying good health during his last days. I used to occasionally visit him at his Purana Paltan residence. During our talks he often used to ask how we were preparing ourselves to have a democratic society where human values of co-existence, cooperation and mutual respect would be the guiding principles.

Like a good scout, Mr Ibrahim was a man of integrity — clean in thoughts, words and deeds. He usually was a man of few words but very effective in presenting his ideas in a nutshell. He was soft-spoken and an endearing elder. To listen to him was to learn without being unnered. Those who were known to him closely still miss him. May his departed soul rest in eternal peace.

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Bridge in politics

Sir, In our domestic politics, sometimes many negligible issues occupy the limelight. And now an innocent bridge is the latest victim of an unscrupulous decision. The precinct of the 'Jatiya Shangshad Bhaban' is the oasis of slum-thriving Dhaka city. This paradise attracts tourists and it is the perfect place to get some fresh air.

The floating bridge enhanced glamour of the Crescent Lake. It connects south bank of the lake to north and Chandrima Uddan as well as the grave of late president Ziaur Rahman is situated. It was sheerly a political decision. Why the ruination and shifting of the bridge took place in the mid-night with tight security measures? Be-

cause government had apprehension to face obstruction from BNP activists as well as conscious city-dwellers. Besides it is a pedestrian bridge — it can't carry vehicles. Notwithstanding why the bridge is shifted to Savestaganj where the road-bridge over Khowari river disrupted several months ago?

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Petroleum price-hike

Sir, Mrs Momtaz Jahan of Fulbari, Sylhet in a letter published in your esteemed daily on 24th September said: There is no doubt that there has been a

steep rise of prices of petroleum products in the international markets and government was left with no option but to raise the prices.

For Mrs Momtaz's kind information and to clarify a nationwide mist of ambiguity I beg to state that, there has been a sharp decline of prices of petroleum products in the international markets since January this year. The price of North-Sea crude declined from \$25 to \$18.5 per barrel up to August when our government decided to raise the prices. The naivety of the writer reminded me a Goebblesian maxim: "If you reiterate a lie vigorously for some time, it becomes a truth."

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