

A Good Outcome

With an improved self-esteem born off a fresh realisation that Commonwealth remains important despite the presence of dominant world bodies, the 54-nation constellation has hitched its wagon to some new aspirations. The cementing feeling of self-importance also comes from a trend reflective of the relative obsolescence of NAM and a somewhat water-shed outlook of the OIC.

The Commonwealth, a home to 1.7 billion consumers and a 20 per cent share of world trade is a veritable source of riches. But that is a view with a top trading angle which has been markedly balanced this time around by a resolve that the number of absolute poor in the Commonwealth constituting a larger segment of the 2.4 billion global poor will have to be halved by 2015.

How is this to be done? The CHOGM Declaration offers a package which if it materialises could mean a new deal to the developing countries, especially the LDCs and smaller states within the commonwealth.

The key aim is to steer small states on to the global market-place. This requires translation of the vocal opposition to "new tariff barriers and the use of unilateral actions and bilateral pressures which run counter to the spirit of fair and equitable trade" into an actual removal of these within a specified time-frame. Laudably, a trade and investment access facility under the Commonwealth umbrella would help developing countries through the processes of their adjustment with globalisation and taking advantage of the opportunities presented by it.

By way of acquiring structural depth it augurs well that a Commonwealth business forum is to do the bridge-building between private and public sectors and foster vibrant business links for the private sector.

The Edinburgh theme bore a Tony Blair hallmark in that the Commonwealth has apparently tried to project itself as a cohesive trade body. The outcome in part also bore the stamp of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina whose stance on duty-free market and micro-credit facility has been endorsed by the other heads of government. The launch of a US\$ 200 million investment fund to finance businesses in Bangladesh, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka has been a solid step forward.

Notably, the causes of democracy, good governance and political stability have been served well by the signal of condemnation sent out to Nigeria's military government.

Sanctity of the Highway

On Saturday night dacoits travelling as passengers attacked a Dhaka-Bogra bus and beat up the genuine ones at random. Eight were injured and one of them is struggling for life at a Bogra clinic. As the passengers did not offer any resistance, all of them were eased of whatever valuables they had. The driver of the bus was ejected and one in the gang took over. They decamped at their convenience.

So night-coach dacoity is back in full swing! The technique used here is more in use in launch dacoities. Bus and trucks were subjected to road-block dacoity. The Saturday night crime was committed with quite a show of daredevilry. A sizeable gang of around 10 should be identifiable in a passenger strength of about 60. This only proves criminals are inching towards a virtual takeover of the land.

Securing our waterways or the Bay against dacoity is a formidable task. No amount of policing can prevent it on a frontal engagement basis. But highways are a different proposition. These should be supremely insurable against molestation. Highways should be treated as sacred as a religious object and positively beyond any violation. If the government can do nothing to curb this crime and uphold the sanctity of the highway, it should altogether put a stop to night-time busing.

Logic demands this. As well as a little care for human life. But the government that fails to stop buses from carrying passengers on the roof may not be ideally placed to ban night coaches; but they can at least deploy well-equipped guards into them.

We urge the government to embrace the sanctity of the highway as a core principle of their administration. Otherwise they would be pushing themselves and indeed the whole nation to great peril.

Falling Apart

What happened day before yesterday in Barishal is a frightening reminder of our sure-footed march towards chaos and anarchy. For over five hours terror reigned in this vibrant town of southern Bangladesh as widespread clashes occurred between rival groups. Though no death was reported 17 policemen were injured in the skirmishes. Explosives and bombs rocked the town with wartime regularity; school and college authorities were forced to suspend exams and both school-goers and their guardians, it was reported, had to go through the hoop of miscellaneous nature at various parts of the town. What did the denizens of Barishal do to deserve such a Donnybrook? Well, the fire, so to speak, was reportedly caused by a tempowallah who damaged a rickshaw. In an incredibly intolerant, restive and tundry society like ours that was more than enough to make a big fire. Battle lines were quickly drawn as rickshaw-pullers stood for their 'community brother' and tempowallahs for theirs.

What really amazes one is the inexorability with which a personal clash transforms into such a devastating group or gang conflict. No doubt man is a herd animal by instinct but the reason such collective violence has become order of the day here is the destructive political schism that has become the warp and woof of our national existence. No wonder this mental freedom coupled with the plentiful share of our poverty, frustration and disillusionment are making fatal commotions almost every day.

TRUISMS do not constitute programmes. Political parties in Bangladesh will not be capable of inducting their followers into a new political culture or of guiding change effectively unless they become ideological parties. This, however, sounds like a recipe for profound mischief. Few would disagree that what gives ideology its force is its passion. A social movement can rouse people when it can do three things: simplify ideas, establish a claim to truth, and, in the union of the two, demand a commitment to action. However, by assuming that politics should be conducted from the viewpoint of a coherent, comprehensive set of beliefs which must override every other consideration, ideologists often make impossible the pursuit of civil politics based on the virtue of the citizen who shares responsibility in his own government with the understanding that no virtue is final and that every virtue costs something in terms of other virtues.

A passion for dogmas that will once and for all fix loyalties and shape decisions has often been the bent of ideological politics. Much of political doctrine in Bangladesh, as elsewhere in the sub-continent, consists of basic symbols of sentiment and identification whose function it is to arouse shared emotions of enthusiasm, faith, and loyalty, and plausibly to explain situations which leaders have not been able to predict or control in a fashion that can sustain morale. For some time to come such emotionally inciting and arrational doctrines may well remain an inescapable aspect of Bangladesh politics. However, whenever they are allowed to become the core of political ideologies, they can easily produce a mood that becomes a substrate for constructive action, as in ultra-nationalism, or engender a spirit of dogmatic rigidity in the midst of rapid change, as in religious extremism, or be used to justify mass agitation (hartal), sacrificing all other values for expediency.

Yet there is another aspect of ideology which is not merely analytical but reflects concrete differences in actual practice in many Asian societies: the explicitly formulated framework of means and ends, the programmatic element in political ideas. This demonstrates that the two aspects of ideology — the rational and the passionate — can both be utilised politically, but in a style and combination which minimises the corruption of reason. Two forms of rationalisation are at work here — the sociological and the psychological. Sociological rationalisation refers to the way in which a social process becomes organised and systematised. Psychological rationalisation is the construction of plausible explanations for one's action. When the latter is socially patterned, it has the potential to become an ideology. In political practice, ideology usually contains both kinds of rationalisation, and the crucial question is — how much of each?

An ideology that passionately fuses political myth and political requirements can devour even its adherents. A party that offers merely a set of political planks may not possess enough that is relevant to an age in which not only political power but the sense, spirit, and survival of the whole society are at stake. All political parties are preparing themselves to face the challenges of the new century. But our campus violence and the involvement of students and teachers directly or indirectly in politics, continuously deteriorating the condition of our education system. It has become impossible to provide right education, thus creating a huge gap between educational knowledge and its application.

To fill up this vacancy, it is needed to set up this type of professional institutions and thus our professionals, trainees and future helmsmen may be able to get specialised knowledge, integrity and professional excellence.

To fulfill the objective of this institution the government should come forward and should enhance its allocation of fund to this institutions and that will proceed to play a vital role to promote and develop prestigious career in Bangladesh.

Mohammed Mohashin  
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Don't go for the cheapest  
Sir, A few days back a news in your daily grabbed my attention. There, it was mentioned that some private firms have taken up the initiative to import cars and use them as taxi services in Dhaka. A very commendable move in the right direction, I must admit. Because at the moment what our city needs the most is effective transportation to cut down the impossible traffic congestion. But the part where it mentioned that Indian Ambassadors will be the vehicles coming in, my heart skipped a beat. I do understand that economically those cars are the cheapest to run and maintain.

On the other hand, Ambassadors are the ugliest cars to known to mankind. I think our auto-rickshaws are much smaller than those. I do not believe that we are in such an economic state where we have to import prehistoric vehicles like those and change our modern city looks into those of Calcutta. Even Premium buses were a reject items from Sri Lanka where the authorities over there found out that the air-conditioning unit didn't quite adjust with the engine, and at the end we ended up buying them.

But I still think that Premium buses, though small in size for a city like ours, it is still not a sore to the eyes. Ambassadors will be. Please, try to understand when everyone is looking forward, even the Indians are either abandoning or upgrading these vehicles themselves, for them getting a market over here would be a shame for us.

Masroor Ahmed Deepak  
Dhaka.

Civil servants  
Sir, It refers to an article written by Mr C A F Dowlat titled "Just how poorly are the civil servants paid in Bangladesh?" published in your paper on the 17th September. The writer has described in detail about the misuse of cars, telephones, real estate and fleet of automobile etc., with a suggestion for private

The Uses and Abuses of Ideology

by Khaled Ehsan

As long as extremist movements — of any colour — are not kept decisively out of power, the freedom to choose future courses may come to an end.

tute for constructive action, as in ultra-nationalism, or engender a spirit of dogmatic rigidity in the midst of rapid change, as in religious extremism, or be used to justify mass agitation (hartal), sacrificing all other values for expediency.

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An ideology that passionately fuses political myth and political requirements can devour even its adherents. A party that offers merely a set of political planks may not possess enough that is relevant to an age in which not only political power but the sense, spirit, and survival of the whole society are at stake. All political parties

ties in Bangladesh, implicitly or explicitly, express the aims of a vested interest group, or of a traditional class, or else the perpetuation and opportunistic exploitation of existing popular preconceptions. None of these will save a party or a country for long. They differ only on how our independence was won, and all of them have singularly failed to demonstrate a desire to come to grips with the massive internal changes thereafter.

If a political party accepts the task of becoming one of the principal agents of social transformation, its success would depend upon the adoption of an ideology in tune with rapid change. This requires a framework of values, methods and direction concerned with all issues of modernisation, and therefore without a final comprehensiveness, a final coherence, or a final intensity. Such an ideology is not likely to be the intellectual creation of a single person. In practice it is more likely to emerge as the product of continual and intense discussion and bargaining among leading members of the new middle class. Organisation and accountability to a larger constituency must accompany the tempting powers of charisma and ideology if the vital encounter with political realities is to be maintained.

In today's Bangladesh, however, there is a tendency to infuse ideology with too much passion and also, obversely, to ignore the task of clarifying political doctrines intellectually. The daily, unexpected exigencies of power that confront any elite, whatever the class from which it springs and the ideology it cherishes, are bound to

muffle the clarity and consistency of thought and expression of party leadership. One particular obstacle to ideological clarification looms large — the dominant role of nationalism amongst the competing political parties. When independence was gained by Awami League uniting many different political and social views under one nationalist banner, there was initially a reluctance to split such a large and comprehensive political vehicle by refining its ideological orientation, although ultimately new groups and ideologies did emerge. Our political leaders prefer to speak in the name of all the "people".

In an area of great scarcities and inequalities, and in an era of plurality of rapidly, but unevenly changing values, populism can be a mask for almost any programme, or else a nostalgic emotionalism for no programme but immediate satisfaction. An argument for a qualitatively different ideological approach in Bangladesh politics now hinges upon the premise that positive change can only come from effective national leadership, one that is less preoccupied with the ideology of nationalism in favour of an ideology of change which, in turn, might lead to a stronger national leadership and genuine consensus on urgent issues.

The fervour of nationalism draws not only upon the compulsion of necessity but also on fundamental psychological mechanisms. In the midst of all the uncertainties as to status, ideas, and goals that accompany social transformation, no other ideology demands fewer commitments. It can assert it-

self without at the same time demanding loyalty to any particular form of government or society, economic organisation or value, or any particular religious belief. A strong nationalist movement was indeed necessary and desirable to gain our independence, but today no other ideology presents as cheap a bargain. It offers and demands the most intense form of "togetherness" even before there has been a genuine encounter of individuals and issues, which allows people to expand their powers by concerning themselves, not so much with the morality of what is being done in society, but who does them and how.

Identification with a movement is stimulated by the feeling, often enough a reflection of reality, that neither the individual, nor this nation has yet attained status in the world. To define one's self in terms of the group — even though this group is composed of people no more secure than one's self — is nonetheless to benefit from a sense of organised insecurity. Each can then agree what he is even before any has discovered, or in the midst of change rediscovered, who he is. As this fictitious, corporate personality emerges, not only is there the greater strength of number, but also number renders faceless and hence acceptable deeds that no individual would dare commit for himself. However, an ideology concerned not only with nationalism but also with social reform cannot help iden-

tifying domestic enemies. As long as a privileged few dominate the state and exploit the majority of its people, for instance, there will be no opportunity for important reforms. As long as education remains a frozen concept, irrelevant or inaccessible, only the past will be memorised. As long as the underprivileged, women and children are denied basic human rights, there can be no development. As long as extremist movements — of any colour — are not kept decisively out of power, the freedom to choose future courses may come to an end. Bribery and nepotism may be endemic these days, but it takes political courage to name names and take action. A call for sacrifices to be made for future investments will find many unwilling to subject themselves to an equality of wants. Thus, however prudently and shrewdly a party may proceed in transforming society, it cannot avoid making domestic enemies. And however reluctant it may be to publish this fact by formalising its ideology, a party's leadership will find it difficult to win and keep the kind of following it requires unless its path and purpose are made clear. Events in Bangladesh seem to repeat the past. Yet the social and economic issues and the context in which they are fought are entirely new and present a much greater need to make choices than has confronted any previous generation. The stakes are greater, too, because there are more children and young people alive today than at any time in our history.

The author is Head of Advocacy, Policy Analysis & Research, Save the Children Fund UK

To the Editor  
Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Stop unauthorised "services"  
Sir, It is good to find that The Daily Star is becoming more and more critical of poor and unprofessional administrative standards prevailing nowadays at all levels and sectors. One such letter (DS, Oct 16) described the horrifying story of the wheel of an owner-driven car chained by an unauthorised car park operator in government land, namely the ZIA BPC garden restaurant (a security zone).

The DCC authorities (or is it the Police?) have issued licences of authority to private parties to operate car parks in the market and shopping areas. To ensure transparency, signboards should be prominently displayed, issued by the authority, on such leases, and the rates must be clearly mentioned for public information. There are too many illegal and unauthorised services being offered by private and self-designated parties, backed by threats of violence or damages to public/private property (cars, for example). The 'approved' rate charts are not displayed at the private telephone centres, thousands of which are operating all over the country. Why then, these petty routines through the letters columns?

The DCC PR department should be active and tell the public the dos and don'ts, and where to report. In fact, DCC coloured booths should be installed at prominent places for lodging instant complaints for immediate action by uniformed DCC personnel on patrol duty (a standard practice, and not at all high-tech or expensive).

A Zabr  
Dhaka

Congratulations to ICSMB  
Sir, I congratulate the newly formed Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Managers of Bangladesh and its founder members.

In England the Chartered Institute of Secretaries and Administrators was founded in 1891, in India it has been functioning since mid-'60s and in Pakistan it was established in 1984. To impart requisite education, training and expertise to our professionals and trainees, to strengthen our position in the world professionals arena and to enhance network of our trade, commerce, industry and other corporate services at home and abroad the importance of this type of institute needs no elaboration.

Nowadays the function of a company secretary and a corporate manager is complex. To promote, develop and cultivate the profession of company secretary and corporate administrators gradually, the role of this institution is expected to be very wide and pragmatic.

Today's world is rapidly changing and demand for professional men is highly increasing. In the Commonwealth and English-speaking world it has strong institutional framework to impart formal professional education. So it is high time to think closely about our higher education and to think more about to formulate effective policy to face the 21st century. The developing na-

sector. The most important factor is service standard, accountability and transparency. Here, we like to point out the following matter for further consideration:

- a) The implementation of pay commission may reduce the misuse as painted out by the writer.
- b) The identification of number plate of government, semi-government and private cars should be reintroduced.
- c) Price level will prevail even if pay hike is not implemented.
- d) There are controlling authorities who should see the financial involvement strictly.
- e) The last but not the least point is that if the head of the family wishes, the desire may quickly be implemented in service standard, accountability and transparency everywhere for our emancipation.

M Ali  
Dhaka

I cannot relate  
Sir, Thousands of people sacrificed in many ways during the Liberation War but now without any hesitation many of them are cooperating with the anti-liberation forces for political gains. The people of our country stand up to show respect to our national flag when it is being relayed on the screen of the cinema halls, but they forget it when they burn any public property during hartals.

The politicians know that the academic standard of our country is deteriorating day by day due to student politics and the politicians are sending their wards abroad for higher education without taking any steps to ban student politics here. Both Awami League and BNP know merits and demerits of hartal. I don't really understand what they are up to?

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Dhaka University.

Khulna University promotes smoking?  
Sir, "Take on the World Champion challenge and win exciting prizes. To find out more join the John Player Gold Leaf Carnival tent at the Khulna University Ground on October 6, 1997. Have fun. Player's Gold Leaf Racing Team..."

The above-mentioned advertisement appeared on the page of a vernacular daily of Khulna on Oct 6, 1997. It is surprising how a university dared to allow the said carnival within its premises for promotion of smoking, while throughout the world anti-smoking campaign is going on in full swing.

A university is not supposed to be partner of any cigarette-manufacturing company in promotion of smoking at any cost.

Khulna University has not yet started functioning fully, but it has already earned bad name. Continued disputes amongst the students, management, and Vice Chancellor have resulted in several clashes. Reportedly, the university is still called a kindergarten by most of the people.

By allowing its premises for holding carnival for promotion of smoking, the university has done a great mistake and the students and the dwellers of Khulna would like to have an explanation from the authorities concerned as to how they allowed the said carnival.

K R Zakhami  
Khulna

"Sunday Ya Monday" "Roj Khao Undey"  
Sir, One of the cable TV channels is currently showing this advert on the mini screen. Well, until recently doctors all over the world were advising people to ration on the use of eggs because of high cholesterol content in their yolks that contribute to the creation/aggravation of heart diseases, hypertension etc.

But recently the scientists have discovered that eggs are among the best nutritional foods. According to a report published in The New York Times (dt. 24.9.97), each egg on average carries 80 calories, 6 grams of protein and has more than adequate amount of vitamins A, D, E and K. Most importantly egg contains "Omega-3", a fatty acid which can help reduce the risk of heart diseases, high blood pressure, tumour growth and diabetes.

Scientists at the international conference on nutrition held recently in Bethesda, Maryland had however opined that the egg-yolks are indeed a source of high cholesterol but they also observed that our body metabolism can balance the cholesterol level.

So, Sunday or Monday, take 'one' egg everyday — I think, there's no problem in it!

M Zahidul Haque  
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OPINION Save the Sugarcane Research Institute

Sugarcane Research and Training Institute (SRTI), Ishwardi, Pabna was an enterprise of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) under the Ministry of Industries. SRTI was placed under the Ministry of Agriculture from BSFIC on 11.10.89 to upgrade it as an autonomous organisation. Being an enterprise of BSFIC, a Takeover Implementation Committee was lawfully constituted by the Ministry of Agriculture on 21.10.89. The Committee made estimate of assets and liabilities of SRTI and completed the takeover process on 23.10.89. The Committee also recommended to implement transfer of personnel serving in SRTI at that time based on their application (option) and also recommended to give promotion to the eligible scientists and officers before completion of the takeover. The Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture sent a written request to the Chairman BSFIC on 24.10.89. BSFIC did the needful in the greater interest of SRTI and sugar industry and the cane farmers at large.

Md Dider Ali

per law, officers and scientists were allowed the option to return back to their parent organisation BAEC; assets and liabilities of BINA were determined and final settlement was made before completion of its separation. The same principle was followed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Industries before complete takeover of SRTI from BSFIC. But as the decision was not lawful, neither the Ministry of Agriculture nor the Ministry of Industries issued any executive order to implement the lock stock and barrel decision and as such it remained ineffective. In such a situation, the institute itself has become a victim to the detriment of the very sugar industry of the country. Administrative malfunction relating to the post of its chief executive is continuing to the misuse of public money as well.

ment Ministry which is the lawful appointing authority of the chief executive of BSRI. On the other hand, BSFIC informed Ministry of Agriculture on 23.4.97 that if it took unilateral decision on lock stock and barrel basis transfer of SRTI giving post-facto effect from 11.10.89 all the orders and actions of BSFIC regarding SRTI from 11.10.89 to 31.12.90 would become illegal and as such are to be cancelled. Promotion of 35 scientists who were absorbed in SRTI based on a special decision of BSFIC (June 1990) would also lose their jobs. 18 former scientists and officers of SRTI who were transferred to BSFIC during the separation period (1990) are to be reverted back to BSRI. Such a situation would create serious administrative, financial and personnel management problems causing adverse effects on research, training and technology transfer.

Now a sense of considerable resentment is prevailing among the scientists of BSRI. The implementation of BSRI component of World Bank-supported Agriculture Research Management Project (ARMP) is greatly suffering. Would the authorities please do the needful?

According to legal experts, all the administrative and financial activities of the DG have little legal basis. The Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh is requested to look into the matter as also Chairman and Members of the Management Board of BSRI are requested to constitute an inter-ministerial Committee headed by the Law Secretary to review the legal validity of the lock stock and barrel decision and its implications if implemented after 7 years with effect from 11.10.89 and legal status of promotions given to Erfan Ali and other seven persons by BSFIC in its set-up after their transfer to BSFIC during March 90 to December 90.

According to reports, the present DG of SRTI Dr Erfan Ali is holding the post without legal authority, since his contract expired in January, while the substantive DG Mr M Yasin Ali, surely in his humiliation, has been kept hanging as OSD for last 26 months. But both of them are drawing salary and other benefits against the same post of DG, SRTI!

Keeping lien to his substantive post of BSFIC Dr Erfan Ali was appointed to the post of Director, SRTI on contract basis for period of two years by the Ministry of Establishment. His contract terminated on 29/1/95. He became a regular officer of BSFIC by way of his promotion on 26/1/91. As per service rules and fundamental rules there is no legal basis to restore his lien at BSRI anymore. BSFIC made a request to the Ministry of Establishment through Ministry of Industries in July 1996 to issue release order and send Erfan Ali back to BSFIC, but no action has been taken so far by the Establish-

Art Buchwald's COLUMN Billions, Up in Smoke  
I realize that I may be the only one, but I am very confused by the recent tobacco settlements and the amounts of money the campaigners are willing to shell out so they can stay in business. The last one is US\$ 11.3 billion that manufacturers have offered to pay the state of Florida. Mississippi accepted US\$ 3 billion a few months ago, and other states are waiting in line for offers they can't afford to refuse. All I can gather from this is that, even with billion-dollar payouts, the tobacco companies have no fears about being forced out of business — even though everyone now agrees that cigarettes will kill you. The irony of this came to mind when I read that Hudson Foods Inc had apparently distributed tons of tainted meat that had caused an outbreak of illnesses in those areas where the meat was sold. They cry of "I've went up immediately. Hudson announced the largest recall of any food company in America. Burger King cancelled its contract. The government issued warnings to people not to consume the meat. Hudson may well have a problem staying in business. Felix Rendacker, a spokesman for the tobacco forces, told me, "We have always known that bad beef can cause stomach-aches and nausea. But there is still some question about whether tobacco can make you sick." "If this is true, why are you paying billions to keep the states from suing you?" I asked. "They need the money and we don't." "Is there any tainted chopped meat in your cigarettes?" "That is trade secret. Our competitors would like nothing better than to know if our product contained inedible beef or not." "Would you consider a recall if it turned out that cigarettes caused as much cancer as tainted meat?" "We'd give it serious consideration and then reject it. Everybody is picking on tobacco these days. But how many people are willing to put up US\$ 11 billion to make peace with those who don't like it as much as frozen yogurt?" This is not the end of the cigarette damage cases. As long as there are lawyers, there will be unhappy smokers, and as long as there are unhappy lawyers, there will be smokers. By arrangement with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB