

Protect Historic Sites

Vandalism is a crime. Not always only the criminally minded indulge in it. Most of our rich national heirloom in the shape of objects of art and of archeological interest, including ancient monuments have been grossly vandalised through sheer ignorance. It is a sad commentary on our people's awareness of their own achievements in the past years. It is a shame we do not know the value of our own creations of high intrinsic value.

Add to this the work of the criminal vandals who have stumbled somehow on the knowledge that these are things of value and actually some of such are invaluable. And realising the price these can fetch they keep on draining the country of all relict riches, specially images of Buddhist and Hindu gods. It cannot be said that the illicit trading in such things has been arrested in any meaningful manner.

In a break-out to new dimension, state vandalism is now all poised to destroy ancient Dhamrai. The Daily Star front-page exposure of the design on Thursday referred to *political engineering* that in 1992 initiated the move to widen a road in a manner destroying old buildings and temples of true historic, religious and artistic value. Why could not this be stopped even after change of government? Perhaps because those that took over in 1996 are as ignorant of Dhamrai's glory as their predecessors were. Although nothing of that remains, Dhamrai is diminutive of Dharmarajika of Emperor Asoka's time. The savant emperor, lord of a realm far larger than Akbar's or Aurangzeb's India, not to speak of British India, marked 84 sites of special merit throughout his empire. And Dhamrai was one of them.

There can be no question about government's giving up this project. May be government has been harming many other such sites and things of value, quite unknowingly. Let there be no repetition of such insensitivity to historic sites.

Secretariat Creaking

Droves of favour-seeking visitors are making the national secretariat into a sort of madhouse. The hub of government decision-making is only a short distance away from being ravingly dysfunctional.

Like butterflies beholden to flower, they gravitate to the secretariat — thanks to over-centralisation of administration. They seek entry into the government complex by means more foul than fair and on gaining it spill all over transforming into locust. They are descending abominably on the place all right, yet they are not to be principally blamed; for if their intent to get in were not indulged, they wouldn't have made it to the secretariat to be sure.

The Bangla daily which shed some new light on the invasive crowding of the secretariat referred to a Home Ministry Circular and a report on the latest situation filed by the Special Branch to the Police Headquarters. Three things come out of these write-ups from those who know at firsthand what has been happening within the four walls of secretariat. We knew that a paltry bribe of Tk 20 at the gate was enough to see one through the main hurdle but what we didn't know much about is the high incidence of *tadbir* (favour-seeking) by people giving the identity of journalists, but mostly belonging to non-descript newspapers.

Many of the passes meant for the visitors were not dated, did not contain their names, and where they did, more than one name appeared. Those who are authorised to sign the passes mustn't as a rule issue more than ten and that too strictly for an hour at the most. The fact of having a pass does not mean a right to free and indefinite loitering. It is only when the counterfoil of the pass is deposited at the gate when leaving that the authority will be able to regulate traffic into the secretariat.

Address this Absurdity

The report published in a leading vernacular daily last week on two young girls' sufferings over their SSC examination results served as a pointer to a long endured absurdity in our evaluative system. Both the students despite their obvious ability were reckoned as failures in the first major exam of their life apparently for no fault of their own.

The most absurd part of it all was that though the teachers unanimously agreed on reexamination that neither deserved the treatment they actually got, the stigma of failure could not be cleared. An ordinance since 1961, it was referred, has kept the possibility of revaluation in all board examinations barred. Now the question that has been aired by the parents of one of these girls and should also bother the authorities is what is the point of keeping the provision of reexamination if there be not any method to address an injustice? What is the necessity of this grand tamasha of ineffectuality and frustration?

We do not share the smug indifference of a Board official quoted in the report that for the greater cause some individuals always suffer. Neither do we buy his defence of the law that changing it would mean an open invitation to all sorts of power pressure and manipulation. Is the situation any better now? The recent investigative press reports have already proved that country's education boards are dens of all sorts of corruption. So how the picture can be any worse than what it is now?

Above all the present law tends to make a mockery of the question of accountability. What about the punitive measure for the teachers whose lack of professionalism, incompetence and carelessness play havoc with students' lives? Under the present system the questionable section of teachers' community can and is actually getting away with murder.

The present government seems pretty keen on reforms in country's moth-eaten education sector. We urge its Education Ministry to review this antiquated, meaningless and dangerously painful piece of absurdity immediately.

THE Daily Star in its editorial remarks threw a voice of grave concern 'over not merely a rapid-fire deterioration of political violence in the country but also a tendentious eruption of it without any direct provocation or incitement given to the same' (DS November 13, 1997). Other newspaper reports and analysis on the recent Chittagong episode also tend to hit home the impression that all that occurred there were more spontaneous than planned.

It is not beyond the realm of reality that the opposition parties of a country would oppose government policies and actions in the event they find these against people's interest. Democracy walks on two legs: opposition and government. So when people voted Awami League to power by a razor-thin margin during the last general election, opposition was vested with the responsibility of keeping the government on track through the use of its instruments judiciously.

From the day the present government was sworn in, the issues that opposition harped on to discredit and destabilize the government do not appear to be in consonance with the wisdom of an opposition in a parliamentary democracy. Haral

While we are looking around for more investments and employment, to uplift socio-economic status of our people, it is sensible politics that we are expecting from both government and opposition parties.

— the most slated instrument of ventilating political grievances — has been used off and on by the party which once upon a time considered haral as an anti-state activity. Abstention from the parliament goes on by the major opposition party despite the recorded view that, while in power, they themselves wanted every political hitch to be resolved in the parliament.

BNP seems to live with the impression that abstention from parliament and continuous haral might cause a fall of the government. Because it is through this process, allegedly, that Awami League — now in power — once made its way through. Unfortunately, what BNP misses at this point of argument is the fact that their power scrambled not so much due to the then opposition's politics but more so due to their own follies to cling to power. The Magura election and the 12 February election triggered the downfall. So, basically it is the right issue at the right moment that could help BNP to regain some of its lost grounds.

Are the current issues with which BNP and its allies are grappling with right? Take the

examples of two of the most widely used citations: making Bangladesh a *bazaar* of Indian commodities and sell-out of a part of Bangladesh through signing a peace accord with the rebels in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). It was in 1990 — with BNP in power — when a massive cut in our import duties was allowed in the name of import

and who has actually initiated the process, one needs to compare the differences in import duty levels (a sign of protection for own commodities) between (a) pre- and post-BNP regime and (b) pre- and post-Awami League regime. Further, the impression could also be driven home by a comparison of the accrued bilateral trade balances

pertinent question is: were the reforms enunciated by the erstwhile regime credible? Or to put it bluntly, did they have teeth on the reforms they themselves orchestrated?

The fiery second issue hovers around the peace treaty in CHT. It was BNP, as documents tend to show, which initiated the peace process. Reports say that a parliamentary committee was formed then to carry out the peace process. The then Minister Col. (Rtd) Oli Ahmed and others also visited the rebels in Agartala quite a few times. How far the complaint that 'terrorists have been brought to Dhaka' by the present government is tenable when the complainants themselves visited 'terrorists' house at Agartala? Again, the most disconcerting part of the whole argument is that BNP members in that committee formed to eke out ways and means, reportedly, never ever attended any meeting. We strongly feel that these honourable members should have attended the meetings, recorded their note of dis-sents (if any) and then possibly could make a solid ground to oppose the treaty. What BNP is

saying is that they are quite in the dark about the whole treaty. Nevertheless, in darkness, they seem to have discovered that a part of Bangladesh 'has been sold to India'.

Of course, we would fully sympathize with some of the demands they have been making and we want that these demands should be met by the government. For example, more space for opposition in government controlled media, withdrawal of such political actions as to harass their activists and others. The government should leave no stone unturned to fulfill those demands. But as in the past, we continue to argue that parliament is the best place for resolving these crises.

Politics without substantive issues are pyromaniac politics. Pyromaniac politics had been impinging adverse impacts on our economy and society. While we are looking around for more investments and employment, to uplift socio-economic status of our people, it is sensible politics that we are expecting from both government and opposition parties. The bell is chiming for a pragmatic step into the next millennium. We are after good governance, sensible opposition and against pyromaniac politics.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes

liberalization and open economy. M Saifur Rahman — the then Finance Minister — rightly boasted of a transition from an inward-looking to outward-looking trade strategy. From then on relatively cheaper Indian goods started flowing into Bangladesh markets through legal channels. To know as to what extent Bangladesh has been turned into a 'captive market' of India

during those comparable periods of time. A prior, we could, perhaps, hypothesize that the degree of the alleged captivity has not increased, if not waned, during the present regime. Let's not lose sight of another grotesque implication of the 'theory of captive market' argument: while in power, you supported trade liberalization and now in opposition you grizzle over the outcome. The most

BANGABANDHU MURDER CASE

Verbatim Text of Cross Examination of 42nd Prosecution Witness

Following are excerpts from cross-examination of Major (dismissed) AH Ziauddin Ahmed by Advocate Khan Saifur Rahman, defence counsel for Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooque Rahman.

Q: You know something about the incident.

A: Yes. And I have told what I know.

Q: The field of operation of DGFI is confined to the armed forces.

A: Primarily to the defence services, but it can expand to civilian matters and even outside the country, depending on assignments.

Q: CIA may also come into it.

A: ISI may also come into it.

Q: What about Rawf?

A: I don't have any knowledge.

Q: Was there any condolence message from India after the August 15 incident?

A: I don't have any knowledge.

Q: Did India recognise Mushatque government?

A: I don't remember.

Q: Did you know anything about a letter written by Indira Gandhi to famous Indian writer Ananda Sankar Roy about the August 15 incident?

A: No.

Q: Were you a concerned officer for which Brig Rouf told you about a conspiracy against the government 8 to 10 days before the August 15 incident?

A: I was in DGFI.

Q: He told you about toppling of the government by the army?

A: No. He named some particular officers, he (Rouf) didn't tell about the involvement of army.

Q: With reference to names of some army officers Brig Rouf

told you because you were one of the concerned officers of DGFI.

A: Yes.

Q: Was any measure taken to foil the conspiracy?

A: It was the matter of the DG. There were many cells, which cell he would activate was his matter.

Q: Constant surveillance of DGFI was there inside and in the adjoining areas of the cantonment.

A: There was no provision of constant surveillance.

Q: Did surveillance take place in rotation?

A: There was no such provision.

Q: You got the news of conspiracy, didn't it deserve constant surveillance?

A: That was the matter of the policy makers.

Q: Didn't you receive any order after you were told about the conspiracy?

A: No.

Q: Was your movement before going to Bangabandhu's house at 11 am as per the order of your higher authority?

A: Some movements were under order and some for responsibility.

Q: Going to the Rakkhi Bahini HQ, you saw the jawans in battle dress.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you feel insecure?

A: Although there were some risks I had to go there to perform my duty. As a DGFI man I went there in civil dress and by a white car of DGFI.

Q: You were bound to go there as there was an order from your superior.

A: Yes.

Q: Did you need to pursue JRB (Jatiya Rakkhi Bahini) Di-

rector Hasan for not going for any offensive role or found him reconciled as persuaded by the Army HQ?

A: I found him prepared for going to the radio station with me.

Q: You had taken Hasan to the radio station by your white jeep.

A: By DGFI's white jeep.

Q: Before leaving the JRB HQ did Hasan tell anything to the jawans of the Rakkhi Bahini?

A: I didn't remember.

Q: Tofael Ahmed was the political controller of Rakkhi Bahini.

A: Is not known to me.

Q: As per JRB organogram was Hasan in charge of Rakkhi Bahini or there was some one superior to him on August 15.

A: I don't know.

Q: Who was acting as DG Rakkhi Bahini on August 15?

A: I don't know.

Q: Before going to Bangabandhu's residence did you take pictures you came across 12 mentioned places, which places you visited under order and which for self-imposed responsibility.

A: I went to the radio station and to the DGFI office as part of my self-imposed responsibility. Because going to the office at that time was not my duty as I was supposed to be in the university area at that time.

Q: Self-imposed responsibility was part of preventing a civil war.

A: I performed self-imposed responsibility to verify the truth.

Q: That is one of our basic jobs. There was no apprehension of civil war at that moment.

Q: You had an expectation that going back to the DGFI of-

fice from radio station that you would get all the facts there.

A: Not at all.

Q: All other activities you did after going back to the DGFI office from radio station was under order.

A: Yes.

Q: When does the DGFI surveillance start?

A: The time is fixed depending on a mission.

Q: Duty of going to the university and acting as the personal body guard of Bangabandhu was a mission.

A: Yes.

Q: The beginning and the finishing of that mission was the intelligence surveillance time.

A: Yes.

Q: Intelligence surveillance

is related to a mission not to time.

A: Certain timing is with the mission and certain timing is for other activities.

Q: Can an attempt to foil the conspiracy, about which Brig Rouf said, termed as a mission?

A: I don't know.

Q: The stage Judge Kazi Golam Rasul wanted to know whether he (witness) knows of any measure taken to foil the conspiracy. The witness said in his level he was not supposed to know.

Q: The places you visited, except the radio station and the DGFI office, were within your mission.

A: Those were my duty.

Q: University mission was your duty also.

A: Yes but all duties are not mission.

Q: Was going to Rakkhi Bahini HQ and taking Hasan to the radio station a mission?

A: No, that was duty. which is followed up by order.

Q: Was the activities that you did after going back to the DGFI office a mission or duty?

A: Duty.

Q: Did you play a catalytic role by taking Hasan to the radio station to achieve the goal of avoiding bloodshed and preventing any attempt of offensive role by the Rakkhi Bahini.

A: Catalyst is not applicable under military language. I only did my duty. — UNB

Further texts of cross examination will be published as and when received.

OPINION

No Tit-for-Tat, Please

Hamida Rahman

The latest commentary by Mahfuz Anam on 'Boycotting the Parliament...' was so appealing that I felt inspired to write this opinion of mine.

I am not politically involved, but I always wonder why lay people, understand what the Parliament is and all voices should be focused through it. What has gone wrong with our political leaders? Just because AL did something doesn't mean BNP should do it as well. Instead of tit-for-tat tactics, if BNP behaves differently which will prove their patriotism, we will put BNP in such high esteem that they cannot even imagine.

The opposition and the ruling party must not underestimate the electorate. And accordingly we only want leaders who feel for the country and act in a way which is for national interest. Enough is enough. I was extremely angry with political parties which encouraged non-cooperation movement, work stoppage at Chittagong port and frequent hartals in the country.

These are all right against foreign rulers, but just for coming to power, if they take this

sort of course of action, then they should not be forgiven. Don't they (the leaders) understand how much harm these laws have caused to the country? November 4, '97 hartal. In my opinion, it was justified, because police unnecessarily harassed the opposition rallies, we all know — but when it coincided with Aid Group opening day meeting and when there was so much request from every quarter to withdraw it, BNP should have withdrawn it. Khaleda Zia could have said, 'We are postponing it because of Aid Group meeting'. That would have increased her respect in the eyes of the public. Maybe she isn't that far-sighted or doesn't understand much, but what about her advisers?

Just because AL did it, they have to do as well is not the proper attitude. We are all watching it — there may be argument that even after doing so much wrong (like boycotting the Parliament, non-cooperation movement, frequent hartals) how could AL come to power? Then it is also true that

BNP has come as a strongest opposition ever in the history of Bangladesh. People have voted for them and we will expect them to focus our problems and bring about all faults of ruling party through the Parliament.

Here I would like to send my heartfelt thanks to Mr Saifur Rahman, our former finance minister and Mr Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, BNP MP, for attending the international investment conference. From the news, it seems they had objection from their own party but they ignored it. It gives some ray of hope that there are some people in the opposition who still think of the country and its people.

Being a woman myself, I am fed up of these two women because of their personal jealousy and enmity. They are destroying the country. I sincerely feel some new force should come who are free of all these. Or let these two ladies come to an agreement that they would come to power in every 3 or 4 years. Maybe that will give them peace and leave us (poor people) alone.

Processions and Gatherings Allowed

After showering tear gas on processionists, particularly those displaying the BNP banner, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police have called a cease fire, namely: 'Processions will be allowed if peaceful'. There was also a press note declaring the harmless effect of tear gas. Members of the public with streaming noses, digging headachings and continual vomiting will certainly testify to the beneficial nature of tear gas! Rumours have it that the current crop of tear gas shells deployed are a beamed up version of such potency that the earlier batch is likened to air purifiers. Ex-PM Begum Khaleda Zia is given the dubious credit of ordering these tear gas shells priced at Taka 300 each. Why did she not order them used just as widely as at present? Is it because she believed in some form of democracy... If this letter stating my views does not get printed or this sentence is 'wiped out' on the computer, the inevitable conclusion will be that the freedom of press we enjoyed in Khaleda Zia's time like criticising the wastage of public money at her lavish litar parties which write-ups caused the parties to be diverted from frequent vote-purchasing purposes to a few charitable functions, is surely lacking. Can we write similarly these days in the hope that our PM or her advisers will pay heed? The BNP did not heed all that the public voiced — so they could neither last, nor come back. But since they did accept some of the suggestions they did a little better than the AL is doing. In the political one-day-innationals we are having in Bangladesh, the BNP's 50 allotted overs produced some runs, here we see AL mis-fielding, dropping catches, getting bowled.

The best example is the PM's and the ministerial handling of the police. Using costly tear gas shells during an Abahani-Mohemmadan match? In the history of Bangladesh there is no

such example. Rather it is the stadium crowd, the public and the shopkeepers feared. So Ershad banished them to the 'Ershad' stadium! On the ground that now the rowdy supporters would have difficulty in grouping. But lobbing tear gas shells — only AL ministers can do that.

So we can see that the police — who have been replaced right and left with officers and constables who do not live here, belong here or have any genuine feeling for the citizens of Dhaka are any more lenient with the baton (lathi), fortified by fibre glass shields and protective helmets than with tear gas shells. In fact they have been positively lavish with their baton charges — female garments workers in beds of various clinics and hospitals are proof of this kindness to processionists however peaceful. And earlier at the BNP Naya Paltan HQ, activists could not take even the first step to march out from their own premises where the police had no right of entry and far less the right to lob tear gas shells (why don't the BNP go to the High Court or to the JS for redressing such constitutional violations?). Coloured water was also fired from the water cannons.

Processionists in any democratic country have the right to march through the streets like other users. Only they cannot impede the travelling of passengers riding any vehicles on the streets. BNP as the Opposition does not belong to the streets anymore than their militant JCD. Let them so to the Sangsad as they were voted to do. They took the mandate to sit in the JS in the manner besitting lawmakers not mastaan god-fathers. In the August majority of the Sangsad, pandemonium and walk out is not the procedure. Nor rabble-rousing rambling speeches. They must be witty. They must make their points. And the speaker will have to give them the floor. Bringing down the government

is not what they were voted to do, but to corner the AL in the Sangsad. Whatever concessions have been made must be seized. Israel got the Palestinians to the negotiation table with concessions. The AL must do the same. BNP must be brought to the Sangsad, not pummeled in the streets. That is, if the AL wants to survive.

No party — JP, BNP, AL — follow democratic principles and elect their representatives. So we get people like Kibria and Tofail who destroy their own party as did their BNP counterparts. And both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina play the suicidal role of slitting their own throats or destroying their party. The businessmen in their federations, the lawyers in their association have democratic elections. But political parties practice dictatorship, leaders are nominated not elected. Then why summon the grassroots and district leaders? And why don't the grassroots and district leaders rebel and put up their OWN Sangsad representatives, not those nominated for their countless armed musclemen and black money? Let us have democracy.

And as for the police, are they defenders of the law or practitioners of 'spare the rod and spoil the child' advocates out to teach civic behaviour to opposition political parties — and citizens in general? We certainly want to be informed over BTV, Bangladesh Betar and the print media (weeklies and dailies) what training they receive at the Police Academy — and if the training is deficient, why it is not being upgraded to international standard? We do not hear of the photographer hit on the head by a tear gas shell. Is he alive in CMH? Will an open press note be released? If the authorities would be so kind.

Nizhat Sumona
13/6 Rakrail, Dhaka

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.

Red-handed

Sir, That day I caught a culprit red handed! Catching a culprit is quite common but catching one red-handed is quite a feat. Therefore, I should've felt very pleased with myself, but I wasn't. I was rather saddened by my achievement because the culprit happened to be a government employee. It is a disgrace and sorrow for the whole nation that its government employees have gone to the extent of cheating their countrymen in broad daylight without any fear or remorse.

The incidence took place in a post office. The postman after weighing my two letters said that I have to give Tk 22 for each. Then he stamped the letters in the machine and dropped them on the floor, on a heap of letters. I requested him to show my stamped letters. But he refused to do so after my repeated requests he finally picked up my letters and stamped another Tk 4 on each letter, and only then handed them back to me. Can you imagine, he fleeced me of Tk 8 in two letters. Likewise he must be fleecing everybody taking extra money from hundreds of thousands of people — what a profit! Many citizens with fixed income are unable to bear this extra expense which is wrongly taken from them.

I then called the officer and asked him to weigh the letters, which he did after some hesitation. Then he said that one did cost Tk 22, but the other one cost Tk 18. This was worse still. For it means that the postman had cheated a citizen of Tk 4, and the government of Tk 4. So, this is how our government employees work. Which this very small example shows. Do they get sacked for cheating or punished in any other way? No, not at all.

That is the sole reason why everybody is busy in making some extra money at the cost of our poor people and also our poor government. They are so busy with this that most of the

time they neglect their main job and duty in pursuing the extra money made wrongly out of their position or post. This has got to stop, if we want our country's development and prosperity. For this type of corruption at all levels from clerks to high officials has bled our government white!

Dr Sarah,
Dhaka

Hartal to hunger strike

Sir, Unabated intolerance and violence, corruption and irregularities, wastage and squandering of public money are impediments to democracy, peace and progress of the country and welfare of the people. We want accountability, transparency, human rights, economic development and justice to lead a blissful life.

We express our shock and resentment over observance of hartal by BNP on the day of the Aid Group meeting. We also discard observance of two-day weekly holiday by the AL government. We believe and strongly feel that observance of a half-day hartal by BNP in opposition and the observance of two-day weekly holiday by Awami League government are almost equal and same in terms of economic loss and the sufferings of the people. The economy, trade and commerce, works in the government offices and public services are tremendously affected and the sufferings of the people know no bound due to hartals and two-day government holiday.

Can't our political leaders give up observing hartals and switch over to observing hunger strikes to demonstrate their political rights, complaints and grievances? Can't the Awami League government return to one-day weekly holiday from two-day weekly holiday in the greater interest of the country? We would our Awami League, BNP, JP, JI MPs/law makers

Defence of greater Sylhet

Sir, At present there is an Army Division in Comilla, and defence of greater Sylhet comes within the jurisdiction of that Division. But Sylhet is too far away (nearly 130 miles) from Comilla.

So practically there is no defence of Sylhet. There is an Army Division at Mymensingh with one Brigade at Ghatail and another at Mymensingh. It is learnt that another Brigade will be there at Trisal, a few miles away from Mymensingh. This seems to be superfluous. Instead at least a Brigade, if not a Division, should be raised at Sylhet to have a semblance of defence of greater Sylhet area. Will the prime minister, who is also the defence minister, look into it?