

Inheritance Laws

The position of women in religion has always been the subject of some debate, in some form or another. This is more so in societies where religious scriptures are the guiding force for civil laws.

State Minister for Planning Muiyuddin Khan Alamgir, addressing a seminar organised by the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Saturday, alluded to the economic as well as family aspect of inheritance laws, and suggested that these need to be reformed.

However, since these laws are based on the Islamic traditions, any reform would require a great deal of consultation with theologians both at home and abroad. Important lessons may also be drawn from experiences in other Muslim countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia etc.

Jolt to Primary Enrolment

In some Third World countries the child contributes substantially to its family's struggle for survival. To take it away and make it go to school is pushing the family to an impossible situation, unaffordable to the hilt.

We have done good in the matter. Our primary students get a free dole of 15 kg of rice each month. It is said that the boom in primary enrolment is greatly a result of that.

The authorities have so far failed to go either way or decide on a third. Neither money nor food has travelled to the primaries. A national daily has reported that this has already occasioned a large-scale school-leaving.

Cannot the harm be contained and then reversed by early and resolute action?

A Timely Good Thought

The government is said to be thinking about introducing a facility for consumers to pay telephone, electricity and gas bills — at a time. This is a very rare and most welcome brainwave.

Such a consumer-friendly, or user-friendly thought rarely occurs to product manufacturers and marketers. Sale of a consumer item could go up substantially if bulk of it could be available without the need to buy the packing everytime — a user-friendly thing because of cheaper cost that could plough in higher profit for the manufacturer.

With such a background, that the government has thought of making things easy for the consumers of its services of gas, electricity and telephone is indeed a kind of unexpected gift. It can make it more charming and satisfying by including water bill in the deal.

To maximise the benefit of the facility certain days of the month, necessarily more than one, should be fixed for such payment. And all these payments should be received by one among the many authorised to do so. One stop bill payment — that should be the idea.

Now who is going to pay the banks for their service of receiving the payments and reaching it to government coffers, all properly accounted for? The answer is all too obvious — government. It must not pass on the buck to buyers of its services at rates already among the highest in the world.

One thing the government must not do: now that the consumers are already feeling relieved at the prospect of doing it all at one go, the arrangement should not be delayed at any cost. Or it will forfeit the goodwill the good work could accrue.

Awaiting Democracy's 'Critical Mass' to Explode

OUR era of romantic democracy — the democracy of egalitarianism, equality, welfare and social justice — is long over. We yearned for that democracy for years without ever tasting it.

Ostensibly, the country after one and half decades of direct and indirect military rule, is now back in its democratic frame with representative government in power. There are assemblies, cabinet, political parties, relatively free press and other trappings of democracy.

THE Government has finally shown its hand with respect to its future policy trends — the economic and foreign affairs fronts. While chest-beating has its moments, it does not bring food to the table.

Recently, the Foreign Office confirmed that the PM has been invited by US President Bill Clinton to a State visit in early December, primarily to focus on Pakistan's economic travails.

Almost simultaneously Foreign Minister Senator Sartaj Aziz confirmed that the government was seriously contemplating signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and other international protocols such as the Fissile Material Control Treaty (FMCT) etc.

A firm direction is now apparent in our foreign policy, with the US backing off from its sanctions, for which the US President now has the authority from the US Congress for a waiver.

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The informed sections of this country may swing between the extremes of views but our ordinary men seldom fail in their judgement on any issue facing the polity.

of the ruling party. Participation — of a sort — is there but with mere changes of people who actually participate after each change of the government.

Under the creamy layer it is full of sleaze. The hands of the successive governments are also smeared with stark abuse of power and repression of civil rights as were experienced during the autocratic regimes just preceding the 'democratic spring'.

The symbols may be good enough for the donor agencies of the West to consider aid grant to their client but not for the polity itself.

A Glimmer Perhaps?

We make inveterate "enemies" and inveterate "friends", without even attempting to balance the obvious against the public good.

overstated. Pakistan enjoys a very special rapport with the Kingdom, a relationship that has been very beneficial to Pakistan over the years.

Other than the fact that almost half of the repatriation of funds by Pakistani migrant workers comes from Saudi Arabia, the Saudis have repeatedly given us grants and credits at very easy terms.

Will this be enough to stem the tide of red ink engulfing the economy? While the agriculture sector has been performing very well, the manufacturing sector is almost at a standstill.

While debt rescheduling seems to be on the cards, in the absence of revenue generation the problem of our debt servicing will become worse.

There are horrible exceptions who do get through (e.g. Qazi Sahib's namesake) but they are very few and far between.

To the Editor...

Après Moi... Sir, The article by MM Rezaul Karim on the current political situation in our country published in DS on 29.10.98 has shocked us for a number of reasons.

It appears from the article that the writer's one and only mission is to uphold the wrong policies of the BNP. It is unfortunate that he overlooked the alleged misdeeds and crimes perpetrated by the young BNP workers.

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professed democracy there was no dearth of symbols. Unless restored with its spirits, principles and tolerances, the democracy is not only inadequate, it can be dangerous bringing with its revival also all erosion of liberty and a new wave of tyranny.



by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

racy but not many people with democratic principles produced to make it work. Even if the country was headed by the Generals for more than half of its life span, it was, in fact, the politicians and the civil bureaucrats who were behind the scene to steer the nation's destiny.

We pride on having now, after all, an elected government. But also in a 'democratic' elec-

tion it is the same known corrupt people — the tax evaders, the bank defaulters, the smugglers, the criminals and robbers — who are foisted upon an illiterate poor electorate unable to make an informed political choice.

and even the entire election machinery, when the election can be rigged with coercion and intimidation and votes can be purchased with money? It is thus axiomatic that elections alone, even if they are fair and impartial, do not make a political democracy.

Besides, a bitter and blind interparty confrontation, the absence of intra-organisational democracy and the antiques of our political leadership continue to impede the growth of democratic culture in our country.

the political opponents are hounded, harassed and persecuted in the name of rule of law while acts of gross misconduct, betrayal of people's trust and abuse of power and rampant corruption go unpunished.

One of the most troubling deficiencies in our democracy today is the absence of a moral authority that was once exercised by our leaders imbued with the ideas and ideal of service.

Today's self-serving politicians cannot exercise that authority. There is no more an ethical compass to guide us in our conduct as responsible citizens making inevitable, for example, the shameful episode of Jahangirnagar University.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

come up empty. Addressing a huge gathering in Islamabad, Qazi Hussain Ahmad of the Jamat-i-Islami (JI) lambasted the government.

To maintain a standard of living commensurate to his rank, a senior officer is invariably under greater financial pressure than his subordinates. This may sound ludicrous but it is true, as a major I was in hock to the Canteen Contractor (like most of my colleagues) when I left the Army. It was unbecoming of Qazi Sahib to disparage

out of the pomp and show, particularly because of the facility of a staff car and a driver, all returnable on retirement. To maintain a standard of living commensurate to his rank, a senior officer is invariably under greater financial pressure than his subordinates.

The promotion process in the Armed Forces is on merit and is exceptional, ordinary officers do not rise to the rank of Lieutenant Generals, one or maybe two from a Course, exceptionally three or four.

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OPINION

Stalemate in CHT

SK Tripura

I have been closely following the implementation of the CHT Accord since it was signed on 2 December 1997. The Accord was widely acclaimed at home and abroad. Felicitations were received from many distinguished world leaders.

There were numerous parleys in Dhaka and CHT between the government and JSS while preparing the four bills before placing them in the Parliament. It was reported that at the intervention of the Prime Minister it was agreed that the bills would be prepared as per the provisions of the CHT Accord.

The formation of the much talked about Interim Regional Council (RC) is also uncertain. News of disagreement between the government and JSS regarding its composition was published in several dailies.

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Prime Minister!

Criticism should be objective, unfortunately in Pakistan as in many other countries where there is an "us" and "them" syndrome, criticism is usually destructive. In such an environment it is difficult for people to understand how you can criticise one's friends unless you are an "enemy".

After I had sent the article came the news about the breakthrough in the investigation into Hakim Said's assassination. Very rightly the PM has given the MQM three days to hand over the killers or face a parting of the ways.

The present Chairman and members of the three interim Hill District Councils were appointed from the members of Awami League. Recently Mr Bir Bahadur, an Awami League MP, was appointed as the Chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB). The appointment of Bir Bahadur MP, as Chairman of CHTDB is yet another example of AL-isation of the various posts in CHT.

Even the succession of the Circle Chiefs (Rajaks) are not spared from the interference. After the death of the Bohmong Raja, Maung Shwe Prue Chowdhury of Bandarban, every one in CHT expected that Mr A S Prue would be the Raja as per customary law and law of succession.

Eventually the signing of the CHT Accord is a milestone towards the recognition and preservation of the diversified cultures of the peoples of CHT. It was indeed sheer courage, conviction and wisdom on the part of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, which culminated in the signing of the Accord when many parts of the world were and are still agonised with ethnic conflicts.

There is no Andrei Sakharov or Solzhenitsyn in our midst to go to prison or on exile. There is no Nelson Mandela to rise above his personal anguish only for his country's sake.

Yet an efflorescence of democratic spring is possible in this country. But that and the spread and quality of democracy depend heavily on the quality of democrats of the country. The democratic efflorescence has been likened to the explosion of a critical mass.