

Minister Serves Himself

ALLOTMENT of 301 residential plots in the posh areas of Gulshan, Banani and Uttara has come under severe media and public criticism for the fact that two-thirds of it has gone to ruling party favourites. It has unmasked the brazen face of politics even in regard to the distribution of plots by Rajuk for residential purposes. Who set the criterion and how was it executed will be our subject of another editorial at an appropriate time.

But for now we register our strongest condemnation for the attitude of the minister concerned reflected by his shameless self-serving act in allotting a plot for himself as a Muktiyoddha (Freedom Fighter). The minister disclosed this piece of information in an interview with BBC (Bangla Service) as reported in the Prothom Alo on Sunday.

As a people's representative and the minister in charge he should have been the last to take such an advantage of his power and position. If he can lay a claim to Rajuk plot as an FF and minister, then are we to think that Tofail Ahmed should, by the same token, get the biggest industry from the Disinvestment Board. Matia Chowdhury should get the Kasimpur Agricultural Farm, Mohammad Nasim should get the largest contract for setting up a T&T exchange and so on and so forth?

Thousands of Freedom Fighters must have applied for Rajuk plots but how many of them were lucky enough to get it? It is a slur on the Freedom Fighters and we strongly demand of the minister to immediately surrender his plot as a mark of healthy image projection for the government.

Height of Irresponsibility

SATURDAY'S meeting of the parliamentary sub-committee on the post and telecommunications ministry probing alleged irregularities perpetrated by cellular phone companies eventually turned out to be an exercise in futility, it seems. The reasons were outrageously simple: the ministry concerned somehow failed to ensure participation of the top executives and technical experts from different cell-phone companies and the government officials had not done their home-work in preparing the documents for the meet. The meeting did not take off. It was altogether a dismal display of callousness. The committee members — legislators from both sides of the aisle — have certainly shown a lot of restraint by letting it pass without any official warning issued against the defaulters. We would have much appreciated it had there been one, though.

Why the ministry failed to carry out its responsibilities remains anybody's guess. Time could not have been the constraint, for the agenda had been outlined in the committee's previous meeting. Even so, assuming it had been, the ministry should have notified the committee members beforehand, thereby requesting a postponement. It didn't do that, either. The ministry's indifference, if not inefficiency, has delayed resolution of a lingering controversy centring the cell-phone companies.

Parliamentary committees such as this are essential ingredients of institutional democracy; for these ensure transparency and accountability in every sphere of the country's socio-economic life. The government machinery must extend full co-operation to make the system work, which it has obviously failed to do in this case. Irresponsible as the ministry's behaviour has been, one only wishes that the officials concerned have learnt their lesson from the slip-up and will make sure that it does not recur in future.

Is This an International Airport?

A leading Bangla daily in a front page report says that Zia International Airport is being held hostage to the tyranny of fraud dollar dealers and overbearing taxi drivers. As hangers-on, pesters and cheats they simply have no parallels. Anybody using the airport or visiting it to see off and receive passengers knows all too well how depressive the atmosphere has lately become at the ZIA.

Arriving passengers from overseas are scavenged upon like locusts gliding down on a crop-land. There is hardly any offence that is not committed on them. They are preyed upon almost as they have come past the immigration counters, the money changers starting to pester them for dollar bills. The whole purpose is to shortchange them, before others of the same ilk did that. Then the taxi drivers pounce on them as they walk into the clearing, each tugging their baggage fiercely in the direction of where his vehicle is parked. At first the passenger would be accosted, but the taxi operator's entreaty failing with him he would not hesitate to haul in the reluctant customer's luggage forcibly. There have been instances of money and baggage of passengers being snatched away, let alone those of fleeing them through variegated ploys.

It is an open secret that without the dubious co-operation of a section of self-seeking personnel belonging to the civil aviation authority, Biman, police and other agencies the racketeering would not have thrived on the course and the outer rim.

It is true that the topside of the administration has often tried its best to streamline unbearably the chaotic situation at ZIA. Also, they have taken some specific steps in that direction from time to time but these have been of little effect. The vested interests have stonewalled their corrective measures almost as soon as these were put in place.

From the look of things today, the international airport is no better than a big railway junction of a developing country. And from what goes inside it, the outlook is even bleaker than that — a racketeering den of thugs going by the jingle of coins. The root cause of the malaise lies in the fact that almost a dozen agencies are at work there, with none feeling centrally answerable to any one boss. It is imperative that we have a unified authority which can be held accountable and answerable to a specified ministry.

The Balkans: Victory and Beyond

By ignoring the plight of Kosovar Albanians for nearly a decade the west already lost much of its credibility before the NATO bombing began. It's image has not been improved by the kind of war it fought for Kosovo.



PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

evidences of widespread atrocities are coming to light. It is believed that at least 10 thousand Kosovar Albanians were massacred during 79-day war when NATO war ran in the sky while there were none to question Serbian authority on the ground. Half of the houses in Kosovo were razed to the ground, crops destroyed and property looted by the Serb marauders. Taking the cover of NATO's enigmatic air war the Serbs reduced Kosovo to a wasteland.

The peace agreement stipulates 'safe return of all displaced persons and refugees' — nearly 1 million in all — to their homes in Kosovo. But will the refugees willingly return to this virtual graveyard. It is just now unclear how the refugees still under the trauma of Serb brutality will react to the ceasefire and the prospects of their return. In Bosnian experience only a few of them returned home even after the Dayton accord. Kosovar Albanians have fewer incentive to return to Kosovo which is now virtually a death trap with the world's highest concentration of land mines. Moreover, many ethnic Albanians were stripped of their identity papers when the Serbs drove them out. With what proof would they return now?

The biggest disincentive for the Albanians is perhaps the looming uncertainty of their fate. To which Kosovo are they expected to return? To them is dangle a vague assurance of restoring the refugees — a million people to their home with no clear idea of what, once they are restored, is to be their destiny. Self-determination for independence which is already ruled out in the agreement? Autonomy under Serbian sovereignty which is rejected by the Kosovo Liberation Army? NATO protectorate only to change their master? These are only a few of the disturbing

questions which are yet to be clearly answered. What then of the Kosovar Serbs, the long time tormentor of the Albanians? Can both co-exist after the total breach of confidence between them? What is the fate of KLA who are to be demilitarised and disarmed according to the agreement?

To Bill Clinton his Balkan war over Kosovo was a 'humanitarian' war to protect the human rights of the Kosovar Albanians. Tony Blair called it a 'war of values and justice'. But was what they did the protection of human right or the promotion of value and justice? By not committing the ground forces to contain Serb military they simply put the lid over Kosovo cauldron for the Albanians to be mercilessly grilled. If one wants to intervene to alleviate the sufferings of another will he, by doing so, make the situation worse for the latter? The NATO exactly did that for the Kosovar Albanians who perforce bore the brunt of Serbian vengeance on them. Had the west been willing to unleash a ground war to secure its human objectives, there could have been room for optimism. But NATO's unwillingness to attack on lands means that the moral claim it is now making for itself needs to be treated with scepticism. It is all very well to talk about the defence of human rights. But such talks ring hollow when the commitment is not permitted to go much below 15,000 feet.

As the peace-keeping forces, known as KFOR, are still pouring into Kosovo after it has been vacated by Serb military, doubts abound if the peace agreement would at all work. The NATO forces arriving in Kosovo made it clear that they were there for a 'long haul'. What would be their equation with the KLA who must be simultaneously arriving in their dreamland — an independent Kosovo? The Kosovar freedom

fighter are supposed to be 'demilitarised'. So far they have not promised to give up their weapon or obey NATO orders. Their clash with the NATO is inevitable if the latter tries to push through its mushy commitment to Kosovo's autonomy within Yugoslavia. At least the US has sufficiently hinted at its willingness to hand over Kosovo to Belgrade if the Milosevic was replaced by someone democratic. The KLA worries that Kosovo may be subjected to the brand of imperialist politics that were pursued in the mandated territories after the first world war.

The western alliance is working feverishly — even as it weaves out the arguments of peace, justice, morality and human rights over Kosovo — to blunt the momentum towards a war of independence. The underlying idea behind creating a theoretically temporary, NATO-enforced military protectorate in Kosovo is to buy

time for a transition period in which ethnic Albanian will be allowed to elect a parliament and other governing bodies, meeting enough of their aspiration hopefully to keep Kosovo from seceding.

It would be a tragedy if west refuses to recognise the fact that the ethnic Albanians can no more remain in Yugoslavia after the horrific recent bloodshed. The Albanians have been radicalised and their new voice is KLA. The KLA fighters are the province's new power broker. Whatever political leadership emerges in Kosovo will come from the KLA ranks, and will be militant, nationalist, uncompromising, and deeply suspicious of all outsiders. By ignoring the plight of Kosovar Albanians for nearly a decade the west already lost much of its credibility before the NATO bombing began. It's image has not been improved by the kind of war it fought for Kosovo. Obviously the ethnic Albanians nourish a deep sense of betrayal from the west. Can the west with such an image of it be trusted by the ethnic Albanians for rebuilding their future?

Art Buchwald's COLUMN



Dole's Selfless Service

IT seems that every time I pick up the newspaper or turn on the television, Bob Dole is discussing erectile dysfunction. What he is really talking about is Viagra, since the Pfizer drug company is paying for the ads.

According to Dole, E D is a far bigger problem in the United States than anyone thinks, and he is merely providing a service to those who suffer from it.

When I first saw the ads the thought occurred to me — if Dole had been elected president, would he have gone public with his condition? Could Americans deal with a leader in the White House who admitted to E D?

Second, if he did not admit it, but the media found out, would they have a right to print it?

Obviously Dole is a private matter, but if Dole hadn't decided to come out of the closet after he lost the election, we couldn't be faulted for revealing it.

What also has gone through my mind is how Liddy Dole handles all this. We know his E D is paying the rent, but since she is hard at work campaigning on other issues, Bob Dole's victory over E D could present problems in the bedroom.

"Bob, don't you dare go into that medicine cabinet."

"I was just looking for the Advil."

"A likely story. Viagra may be the solution to your problems, but it's complicating mine."

"Don't knock it. The fact that I am spokesman for E D sews up the senior citizen vote, which is big plus for your campaign." There is no doubt that politics makes strange bedfellows. No one dreamed when Dole was running for office that he would take on a mission even more important for the future of mankind.

How do women feel about his solving the E D problem? Don't ask.

But as we enter the 21st century, people may decide Viagra was more important than the light bulb.

The next question is, if men solve their E D problems, will women be willing to have children in their 60s and 70s?

I hope so. I they balk, the act of men taking Viagra will just be a waste of time.

There is a great deal of speculation as to whether President Bill Clinton will get Dole's job once Clinton retires from office. Insiders at Pfizer told me when they asked the president if he was interested, his only response was, "You have to be kidding!"

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OPINION

DCC Flattened at Pavement Level

Alif Zabr

The press reports on Dhaka City Corp (DCC) continue to be unflattering. In the two reports in DS of July 3 and 4 (see report on the pavements initiated this commentary). The DCC has apparently taken the policy stand, based on political expediency, that human overcrowding problems are to be ignored, especially with the next municipal elections round the corner.

Question: What type of election would provide the right type of mayoral leadership? It is a basic question, and needs to be publicly debated while analysing the management and administrative drawbacks of running huge municipalities. The DCC cannot and should not run the way it is doing. How to improve matters? Under the existing system, limitless funding would not solve the problems. Therefore the problems are more than monetary. What are the political snags?

Why the government is so lenient with the DCC Mayor? Simply because both the agencies are controlled by one powerful or invincible political party? Matters would not have improved had two different political parties controlled the government and the DCC (we had some experience of that). Therefore the political element is not the sole culprit, but the administrative inefficiency of the DCC has to be critically looked into by authorised probe bodies. The management shortcomings of the DCC has been ventilated by the Mayor himself from time to time. Lack of coordination among different servicing agencies should not be the end of the story. How other big cities are being run 'invisibly'? The problem can be solved, but there is no consensus about it.

The status quo of non-doing cannot be maintained month after month, with the uncollected garbage piling up at the street corners, and the dilapidated pavements invaded by unauthorised vendors and construction materials. Regardless of the administrative system in current operation, the problem appears to be always with the human factor the intruding vendors, the unauthorised rickshaw drivers, the illegal electric and telephone connections, the rent collection network, the godfather dens of operation, the terrorist cadres moving about unchanged, and so forth. Therefore the government ma-

chinery cannot be absolved of the abatement charges.

The Bengalee psyche is traditionally weak in controlling situations, political, administrative, or otherwise. Freedom is not symbolised by the *kochuri pana* (water hyacinth) floating with the ebb and flow tides. The real character is revealed by swimming against the current. Here the authorities cannot cope with against-the-current situation (CBAs, SOEs etc). The hidden culprit may be political nepotism (which won't be admitted by the politicians of any party in power or in the opposition).

Running a megacity like overcrowded Dhaka (pop. 10m plus) situated in a developing country is a nightmare for any municipal administration. Added to anti-people subterfuge of political nepotism, it is not possible even for the best neutral officials to show any visible progress. The stumbling block may be in the approach to the problems of the DCC (and other CCs).

Human eviction is out, to remain politically popular — that is the milk-of-human-kindness message coming through. Administrations sometimes have to take tough and unpleasant and unpopular decisions (like bull dozing the unauthorised occupations of plots, under supervision of magistrate). More than moral courage is involved — sticking to a workable system, which should be backed up by the higher authorities. The political policy needs a reappraisal when dealing with indiscipline trends in the society. The political will is lacking in many areas of unpleasant DCC operations. These have to be thrashed out in the parliament, for public awareness.

Our developing society is not 'discipline-friendly'; therefore the leaders of the society have to use their judgement, in public interest, which side to support. Ethical dereliction of policy responsibility at the top level is tolerated (and practised) beyond the acceptable limit; and, unfortunately, the tone is set by the elected representatives (and not influenced by the bureaucrats or the technocrats).

DCC has to be tough, to be efficient. Someone has to do the dirty jobs, headed by the Mayor. There are no options for the City Corporations.

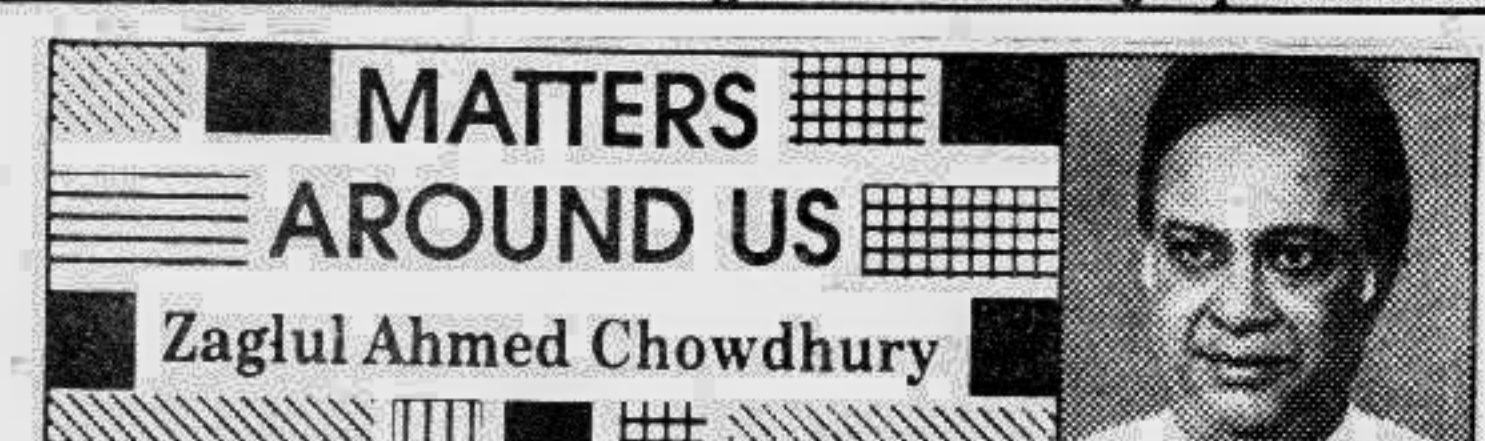
Kargil Issue

Is Nawaz Sharif Fighting for Political Survival?

The Kashmir problem has different dimensions and India and Pakistan have varying interpretations about this. But putting the issue on backburner has not helped either of the two while over all peace in the region has been jeopardised.

THE issue that currently is most talked-about in different circles in Pakistan is not the latest situation in 'Kargil' region of Kashmir but the 'U-turn' by prime minister Nawaz Sharif on the practical problem of 'Kargil' which his government supposedly backed from the day one. Evidently, a person about whom his supporters boasted that he never caved in to pressure, has succumbed to that of the United States and other western countries. The 'G-8' countries and the European Union had already given the indication. Then came Prime minister Nawaz Sharif's air-dash to the United States for talks with President Bill Clinton. A joint statement came out the 'Kargil' issue after the meeting and within 24 hours of this the London Club approved rescheduling of US dollar 677 million for Pakistan.

The prime minister and his foreign minister Sartaz Aziz, who had accompanied him for meetings with President Clinton and later Prime Minister Tony Blair in London, sought to put up a brave face on the 'Kargil' issue after agreeing with the US president that the 'sanctity' of the line of control (LoC) should be maintained and there was a need for 'pull-out' from the areas on the other side of the LoC.



Both said that the decision to 'pullout' from the areas under Indian control would 'facilitate' the solution of the 52-year-old 'Kashmir' problem after this has been significantly 'internationalised' by the 'Kargil' episode.

The powerful defence committee of the Pak cabinet (DCC) has approved the Clinton-Sharif joint statement but the political parties other than the ruling one and the press were in full fury against Sharif and his government for making 'compromise' on the developments in Kashmir. The prime minister found some supporters like Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan and former ISI chief Hamid Gul in his 'peace effort' that 'avoids a full war with India' but most others are vehemently critical of him over the 'understanding' in Washington. When the first news came of Clinton-Sharif statement, — the initial public reaction was of shocked disbelief, — said a commentator in the Daily News. Then the prime minister returned amidst tight

be settled through discussions. While there is no point in buying either Indian or Pakistani version of the dispute, peace loving people would like to see that this nagging problem is removed. Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina, now on a trip to the United Kingdom, has stressed on the need for solution of this problem through dialogue bilaterally. It is also widely acknowledged that putting the issue on the backburner for decades has not helped either of the warring nations in the long run while peace in the region has been jeopardised. However, the 'Kargil' problem specifically is different. Here an 'intrusion' has been made violating the LoC whether by the 'Kashmiri freedom fighters' or by the 'Pakistani army regulars' or by both along with certain segments from Afghan Taliban and Bosnian war veterans. For the sake of peace, the problem should not be aggravated. Rather efforts should be made to contain it. Nawaz Sharif is perhaps in such effort making.

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To the Editor...

Bangladesh stands for ...

Sir, I am not trying to degrade the name of our motherland, but just that the history of this country since independence compels me to write as such: 'B' for Barricades, 'A' for Aid-seeking, 'N' for Non-cooperation, 'G' for Go-slow, 'L' for Load-shedding, 'A' for 'Anti-anti-corruption Bureau', 'D' for Deterioration of Law and Order situation, 'E' for Environmental disasters, 'S' for Strikes and last but not the least, 'H' for Hartals.

An Anxious Observer
Chittagong.

What should we do?

In a calculated way, some beggars monopolise some of the busy streets and traffic points of Dhaka city. Surprisingly, some of the beggars transact differently. I met an elderly woman hardly dressed near the junction of Airport and Bijoy Sarani. In an unfavourable weather, this lady makes her dress more finite and begs. To see an elderly woman in such dress many respond and donate. Unfortunately, this lady fails to change her dress for a long time instead of her begging

business. She does not feel shy to wear tiny dress for begging. No doubt, this dress is her begging capital.

At the Magbazaar crossing, another person severely disfigured with wounds on his face and head begs regularly. People get frightened to see this type of

Burial of the dead

Sir, Jesmine of Tanbazar, Naranyangari was not allowed to be buried for four days because she was a sex worker, if flesh traders, pimps, smugglers, bribe takers, murderers, criminals, children and women traffickers, rapists, child abusers can be buried, then why sex workers would be denied of burial? Where is it written that the sex workers could not be buried? It is an irony that the persons who brought Jesmine to Tanbazar and used her for

No telephone crash project

Sir, The government, monopolising without market justification the main telephone sector (the private cellular mobile telephone is for the moneyed-class) cleverly focuses its

evil purpose now have become very pious men. Shame on them! If a helpless poor person commits a sin then that person is given severe punishment by fatwas. I ask those so-called Mullahs when many high society women residing in posh areas are engaged in anti-social and anti-Islamic activities then where do their fatwas go?

Syedna Maria Ahmed
Dhaka - 1000

injury and donate. Nevertheless, it is impractical for a man with such injury to stand-up and walk in the street. All are role-playing and capital for fraud.

Now my question is: what should we do?

Dr Nadira Sultana
Gulshan Dhaka

propaganda-oriented publicity on telephone development activities restricted mainly to sporadic change-overs from analogue to digital system; and goes on repeating the same data with monotonous regularity. With today's hi-tech, it may not be necessary to dig up streets to lay cables; and less linemen would be required (thank good-