

The Daily Star

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Slum Demolition: Lessons Unlearned

IN reopening old wounds and getting these fester with new complications we are perhaps second to none in this world. Manifestly, the case in point is the police demolition of slums resurrected with the attempted bulldozing of Tejaon railgate shanties on Wednesday. A veritable hell broke loose in the area as the police action stumbled on dour dweller resistance causing a serious disorder in public life that also exacted a heavy price in terms of bodily injuries and damages to property.

The issue was deemed to have been settled insofar as the right way to approach it was concerned with a High Court verdict delivered in August last year on a writ filed on the question seeking protection of an endangered fundamental right.

What the HC ruling upheld at that time contained three elements: One, bustee demolition should not be attempted without getting a rehabilitation plan in place and also underway; two, to that end the government must have a master plan ready and start implementing it in phases; and three, the temporary stay order on eviction was vacated. As we interpret the last element of the verdict concerning removal of temporary stay order on eviction, what is required here is that eviction should not amount to demolition of homes and fresh destitution of people.

In this particular case, the Deputy Commissioner of Railway Lands and Buildings who spearheaded the action said that bustees along the railway tracks were an impediment to movement of trains and that several people have been recently run over by trains. We fully understand, and would even reaffirm, the imperative necessity of clearing up the railway tracks for the physical safety of bustee-dwellers and railway passengers alike; but the way the authorities have gone about the task with total unconcern for people on the margins of life is certainly open to question; why did the Tejaon railgate slum grow from the ashes it was consigned to by its earlier demolition in August, 1999? If the HC directives had been followed to rehabilitate the affected people by now the railway authorities would certainly have been spared the predicament of seeing the revival of the shanties which caused them to lose their head on Wednesday last. **This is the crux of the matter; so long as the government fails to give viable alternative habitats to potentially destitute people they will go on rebuilding the slums in the city out of sheer necessity which is but a reflection of their fundamental will or right to live.**

Yes, we agree that we cannot condone any form of illegal occupation of public or private property nor should we take a velvet-glove approach to the criminals and drug addicts that abound in some slums, not quite throwing dusts in the police eye to boot. **Yet, much that we are in sympathy with the government's intention we are wholeheartedly opposed to the method it is bent upon applying unlearning the lessons of the past and flouting the spirit of the HC ban. It has to be kept uppermost in our mind that slum-dwellers are people, they are not criminals in the sweeping sense that they are made out to be. They offer the best opportunity for us to work off poverty where it exists in a really appalling form.**

Friday Mailbox

RAJUK's detailed area plan

Sir, "Time and tide waits for none", so goes an old adage. If someone fails to do the right thing at the right time, his opportunity may be lost forever. In this regard, RAJUK has earned the dubious distinction of preparing and submitting the Master Plan concerning the DND dam area before the government and for public opinion, something that should have been done 25 years ago. Recently the authority concerned has proposed a detailed development plan of the area to the inhabitants of the DND neighbourhood, through acquisition of some land to construct roads. They have also decided to divide the areas into residential, commercial, industrial blocks etc.

This is undoubtedly a positive approach for development but unfortunately, they have missed the bus a long time ago. If we look into the proposed plan, we can easily discover that the RAJUK has planned without proper survey. Where the residential areas exist already, RAJUK has mindlessly declared to turn those into commercial areas. So, if this preposterous plan is implemented, all educational institutions, clinics, mosques, social welfare centers and most importantly all the houses designed as residential homes shall have to be destroyed, directly affecting the Isdar Mouza under Fatullah P.S. and other residential areas around DND.

Most of the multi-storied residential buildings here have been established with financial assistance from HBFC and banks. The then DIT and today's RAJUK has also approved many house-building plans. The people of this area have invested crores of taka. They have also built roads, drains etc at their own cost. The government had given them permission to use gas, electricity, telephone and water supply facilities. People have also bought lands and some have expended all their resources for that. By establishing many social organisations, the inhabitants here have formed a social cohesion. If the RAJUK's plan is not cancelled, the affected people will ultimately be ejected losing their socio-economic, political and cultural entities. Monetary recompense will not repair the wrong committed against them. This may also arouse unwanted reaction in the society. Therefore it would be really unwise for RAJUK to implement this plan. If a proper survey is conducted, the RAJUK may be able to perceive the actual situation which would help them to take necessary steps to stop the implementation of the proposed plan in residential areas especially in Isdar Mouza area.

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Exemplary Bangladesh

Sir, It was pleasant to read the laudatory reference to emerging Bangladesh in the SME (small and medium enterprise) sector in the write-up by the Global Network Institute based in Gujarat, India (DS Feb. 18). Ironically, it is the politicians who are spoiling the show, and delaying Bangladesh from taking off earlier in a tardy region such as South Asia.

The country is fortunate in having a combination of resources centred by compact homogeneity, which the political masters cannot harness due to non-transparent governance and energy-sapping opposition movements. How long this purging will take for salvation to economic development and prosperity? Those unfit to lead should be rejected by the civil society.

The projects for the development of the various infrastructures lack cohesion and speed complain the potential foreign investors. The US and Japan are still waiting to come in, while the BOI and EPZ authorities draft new legal laws

Views expressed in this column are the writers' own. The Editor may or may not subscribe to those views. The Editor reserves the right to decide which letters should be published.

"BLOWBACK" is a CIA term of art for the unintended spilling over of agency tricks abroad onto life in the United States. Such is the opening sentence of Jim Hoagland's column, "Turncoat Terrorists" published in the January 16 issue of the *Washington Post*, in which he questions the practices, and even the existence, of the CIA in this post-Cold War world.

The word 'blowback' was originally coined to counter the wash back into the US information flow of planted phoney news items from overseas. Now, says Hoagland, 'blowback' has assumed a far more deadly form than mere falsified journalism. Washed back into the US itself are terrorist bombs ferried in by the messengers of death linked to the network of leftovers of the single-minded Islamic warriors recruited, funded and trained by the CIA to fight in Afghanistan in the 1980s against the Soviets and their communist supporters. These wars are still being fought, to our detriment, between Afghan and Afghan of different ethnic and sectarian bent, one side still supported and aided by Pakistan and Arab youths trained in the art of fanatic warfare.

The United States may well have hastened the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet empire, but it did so at a terrible future cost to itself and to those, such as Pakistan, who helped it. This cost was either unforeseen or ignored by the CIA which presumably simply wished to get on with the job at hand and let tomorrow take care of itself. Tomorrow came, and with it terrorists, bombings, killings and bloodshed. The thousands of Pakistanis and Arabs sent in did their jobs, fought the holy war against communism, and when that ended they turned their sights to another holy war, on a much grander scale, against those perceived to be enemies of their particular militant version of Islam.

In its zeal to eliminate the bogey of communism the CIA had blundered. It had discounted the possibility of a blowback and the form which that blowback might take. It had also ignored the lessons of recent history, of the aftermath of the break up of the great colonial empires of the Middle East and North Africa.

The Agency's tricks bounced back with a vengeance. The 'holy terrorists', as Hoagland terms them, are now personified by Osama bin Laden, whose operatives in their murderous attacks use bomb-making techniques taught in the training camps for Afghanistan run by the CIA in the 1980s. A recent attempt to smuggle explosives from Canada into the US was intercepted and the smuggler was found to have links with the veterans of the Afghan wars

(now known as 'Afghans') and with Bin Laden. The US is not the only one to suffer from the CIA's games. By 1991, over 100 Algerians recruited to fight in Afghanistan had joined the Islamic Front for Salvation, a particularly violent group responsible for the widespread massacres of innocent Algerians. 'Afghans' have fought in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir, and wherever else the Islamist activists have joined battle with the infidel.

Hoagland cites the presence of George Orwell who in his 1939 essay *Marrakesh* (obviously overlooked by the CIA) related how he asked himself, when watching a column of Senegalese soldiers marching by under the command of French officers, how long the colonialists would continue to kid themselves. How long would they continue to shut their minds to the inevitable? How long would it be before the native soldiers of the colonial lands turned the weapons provided to them by the colonialists upon the colonial masters?

The Afghan adventures of the CIA may have bounced back on the US and on the other powers seen to be opposing the ad-

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Islamabad

Pakistan was awarded posthumous honours for aiding the USA to enter China and Afghanistan. However, foreign policies of nations must be forward-looking and cannot depend upon history and forgotten goodwill. The US acts in its own interest, firmly believing that the means justify the ends; as does India.

ance of the violent brand of Islam, but it is Pakistan which has been the major recipient of the wash back. It serves no purpose to repeat how this country has suffered. We all know too well how the effects have infringed upon every aspect of our lives, law and order being the major casualty, the proliferation of the Kalashnikov, the decline of the economy, drug smuggling and drug addiction being just a few others.

The madrasah system of education has been institutionalised most of which turn out thousands of young blinkered bigots who have been taught only to parrot the misguided teachings of almost illiterate mullahs ignorant of the true tenets of their religion. There are also a sizeable number of madrasahs which send out into the world militant youths, schooled to fight, to kill and to die for the cause.

Politicised and established also are terrorist groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba, and the Harkatul Ansar, funded by the CIA, which was declared a terrorist organisation by the US Department of State last year and promptly changed its name to Harkatul Mujahadeen. These

groups practice their own version of Jihad. The Taliban, sitting on our border, were admittedly created in the main by Pakistan, but at the instigation and with the help of the CIA. That Pakistan is regarded by some as a terrorist state, encouraging and aiding international terrorism, must largely be credited to the CIA.

It is difficult to sympathise with the US in its post-Cold War predicament, particularly when Pakistan has to bear the brunt of accusations in the US press that not only does it aid terrorists but that it took part in the planning and execution of the recent hijacking of the Indian airliner. The ISI which in the past worked closely with and for the CIA is now accused of having links with Osama bin Laden, of masterminding the release of the radical Maulana Masood Azhar from his Indian jail, and of bringing the hijackers of the Indian plane back to Azad Kashmir.

Tariq Ali, once the 'enfant terrible' of left-wing politics, writing on Telebanisation in a recent issue of *Outlook* has this to say:

"With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cold War came to an end, leaving behind or-

phan-states on every continent. The effect in Pakistan was catastrophic. The fundamentalist groups had served their purpose and, unsurprisingly, the US no longer felt the need to supply them with funds and weaponry. Overnight, the US became violently anti-Americanism. Pakistan's political and military leaders, who had served the US loyally and continuously from 1951 onwards, felt humiliated by Washington's indifference.

Pakistan was awarded posthumous honours for aiding the USA to enter China and Afghanistan. However, foreign policies of nations must be forward-looking and cannot depend upon history and forgotten goodwill. The US acts in its own interest, firmly believing that the means justify the ends; as does India. The wise men of India have no wish to subjugate Pakistan and gain borders with countries which are even more unstable, irresponsible and violence-prone. They would rather have a lame, deformed and orphaned Pakistan, barely alive, and we seem to be doing all we can to help them in this preference. The world accepts India's

size and weight, even if we do not. But, then, it takes a confident leader to assess correctly his country's weaknesses.

Russia and Vladimir Putin have their own way of dealing with troublesome fundamentalists, as can be seen from the photograph of Grozny on the day the Russian flag was raised.

China deals quietly with the fundos in its south-west areas, in true inscrutable Chinese manner. Its advice to Pakistan on the 'Kashmir issue' is to wait, have patience, give it time, let changed circumstances come into play. But China has always thought in terms 'eternal'. It waited for 442 years before accepting Macao back into the fold and it is not hurrying to claim Taiwan tomorrow.

By and large, General Pervez Musharraf has chosen his men, civil and military, on merit. His programmes on education and health, both vital issues, are commendable. But should his public relations advisor, Javed Jabbar, not emphasise that what is said in a village in Pakistan, to raise the villagers' applause, is heard worldwide within the hour? The General's Muzaffarabad speech was ill-conceived and counter-productive. Weakened and bankrupted as we have been, should we now not take tangible steps to reduce the tension which has been created? Without major global support we cannot hope to have the Kashmir issue settled in the way we wish. A heightened, hyped nuisance value can only imperil our country and its people.

Bangladesh Television, Neutrality and Victims of Innocence

by M M Rezaul Karim

The present incident of chiding government officials for their inadvertent "follies" has not only generated greater discontent among officials but also left no doubt in the minds of the people in general about the gross violation of acceptable norms and misuse of public institution and resources to attain narrow political purposes.

poor judgement in deciding to telecast it. This alternative was not at all tenable, since the occasion was nothing but the function to celebrate the great Shaheed Day, solemnity of which is beyond dispute.

I was quite perplexed and did not believe that such an absurd allegation could be brought about against the BTv officials on duty. It was one of the rare occasions when I watched the BTv. It was the live proceedings at the Shaheed Minar at midnight struck on the clock, the transports carrying the Hon'ble President and the Hon'ble Prime Minister, along with those of their escorts, appeared on the scene. The disembarkation of the Hon'ble President and the Hon'ble Prime Minister from their respective limousines as well as their walking together thereafter were telecast as much as it was possible, subject, however, to the physical limitation of the TV cameramen to get clear shots of the objects through the huge crowd.

However, both the President and the Prime Minister ap-

proached side by side to the rostrum and took positions at their designated places. The President, walked first and placed the wreath, assisted by some attending members of the Armed Forces, and stood silently to pay homage to the language martyrs before turning and walking back on the rostrum. He was immediately followed by the Prime Minister, who repeated the Presidential drill. I watched the two leaders closely and nowhere found an iota of evidence to suggest that the scenes shot and telecast were not befitting to the occasion. On the contrary, both the leaders maintained dignified postures, corroborating solemnity of the occasion. To me the entire incident of laying wreath by the President and the Prime Minister appeared to have taken place and telecast fully, with no scope for TV cameramen to add more footage to cover these scenes. The cameramen then started to shoot the subsequent scenes of laying wreaths by Ministers, Speakers and other leaders who were following closely on the heads.

Yet, another allegation was

stated to have been made about incongruity in the footage of the TV coverage given to national leaders. In other words, the charge was directed, in fact, to the officials as to how and why Begum Khaleda Zia, leader of the Opposition, got more footage than she deserved and perhaps marginally more than what had been obtained by the Prime Minister. I did not think it was intentional. It transpired that when the Leader of the Opposition arrived at about 0030 hours, important national leaders had already finished their visits and the enclosure was relatively empty, though still guarded. Begum Zia, therefore, got a good coverage of her arrival with other leaders, laying the wreath, standing in solemn silence, and departure in dignified slow pace. Her somber appearance during the entire episode and her presence were more vividly portrayed in close-up shots. Khaleda Zia thus inadvertently received much greater publicity than it was intended for her in a rare scene shot by the BTv. But the wreath fell upon the dutiful BTv officials, who became victims

of their innocence.

This incident of political victimisation of non-political officials, some of whom may have been ardent supporters of the ruling party, glaringly exposes the partisan like operation of the state-run electronic media by the government. It substantiates the claim of the opposition political parties that the BTv is nothing but a free publicity apparatus of the ruling party. The Awami League not only refused to fulfill their election pledge to grant autonomy to the government-run electronic media of TV and Radio, but is continuing to run indiscriminately these two publicly financed institutions to promote their political designs. Even the report of the Commission, appointed by this government on the autonomy of these two bodies and headed by a distinguished retired civil servant has been lying in the waste paper basket for 3 years. Obviously the findings and recommendations, which have been kept closely guarded, did not conform to the desire of the government. However, the present incident of chiding government officials for their inadvertent "follies" has not only generated greater discontent among officials but also left no doubt in the minds of the people in general about the gross violation of acceptable norms and misuse of public institution and resources to attain narrow political purposes.

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Mixing Business with Politics?

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

In both business and politics, one golden rule is to win. It is time we had introduced another golden rule so that politics and business start together and finish together without becoming one entity.

their retirement. But is it possible to pursue private career while holding public office without conflict of interests? Thomas Jefferson told Baron von Humboldt that when a man assumes a public trust he should consider himself as public property. If self-interest is the leitmotif of politics, it turns public trust into a locomotive, which hauls private lust on the wheels of patriotism.

Aristotle professed that every virtue is the golden mean between two extreme vices. Courage is a mean between cowardice and rashness; liberty, between prodigality and meanness; proper pride, between vanity and humanness; ready wit, between buffoonery and boorishness; and modesty, between bashfulness and shamelessness. Truthfulness, Aristotle suggested, was a mean between boastfulness and mock-modesty. But Aristotle subjected ethics to politics when he claimed that the highest virtue was for the few and that a community would be morally satis-

factory if its basic constitution confines the best things to a few and requires the majority to be content with the second-best. In a democracy, the biggest struggle has been to subject politics to ethics and prevent the danger of confusing the extremes with their means. Ideally, politicians are expected to be courageous, liberal, properly proud, modest and truthful. But are these virtues sustainable under the self-seeking impulse of a businessman? True, politicians need businessmen to bankroll their campaigns and businessmen need politicians to endorse their opportunities. What happens, if the same person who bankrolls also does the endorsing? There is a term for that type of government and it is called plutocracy when power and profit are wedded together in the ceremony of politics.

But can politicians hold public office in a democracy and use it for the furtherance of their business benefits? Can a bureaucrat or an army officer be elected to public office and keep his job at the same time?

The answer is no. But a lawyer, a doctor or a businessman is allowed to do so because they are not restricted by service rules. For that matter, can a writer elected to public office continue to write? Perhaps he can so long as he does not use his official clout to get his writings published or receive unusually high honorarium by virtue of his office, and if his writings contribute to increase the common good. Aristotle took the view that virtue were means to an end namely happiness. But can something, which deprives many for the happiness of few, be held as virtue?

That is where we need to draw the line between politics and business. If patriotism is virtue, which is the mean between treason and apathy for one's country, both politicians and businessmen need to have it. But while patriotism is a metaphysical issue in politics, it is only a moral issue in business. For politicians it is an obligation; for businessmen it is an obligation. When a busi-

nessman embraces politics, it means he wants to expand that obligation into an occupation under a higher call of duty. The process is reversed when a politician enters business. Then an altruistic and under-taken the parochial precepts of private needs.

Not to speak of the conflict of interests, when politicians conduct business from public office, it permeates a sense of obligation into the occupation, which requires their total dedication. Unless a businessman feels that sense of dedication for his country, he should not enter politics. Similarly, if a politician feels dedicated to his business, he should not remain in politics. Because, when the powers of a political office are engaged in the passions of a business deal it readily converts the ideals of patriotism into idioms of profligacy.

If we look around us that conversion is incessantly corroding the moral equinox in all walks of life. If politics and business are diluted into a common existence, the extremes toggle with their means where courage is rashness, liberty is meanness, pride is vanity, wit is boorishness, and modesty is shamelessness. Truthfulness, however, remains the most elusive virtue in the courage of pretentious men who boast about their sham modesty.

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English conductor Sir Thomas Beecham once grudgingly said, "There are two golden rules for an orchestra: start together and finish together. The public does not give a damn about what goes on in between." In both business and politics, one golden rule is to win. It is time we had introduced another golden rule so that politics and business start together and finish together without becoming one entity. And that will not happen unless the public gives a damn about what goes on in between.

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