

Good Counsel to Policemen

PRESIDENT Shahabuddin Ahmed had some crystallised ideas to get across to a delegation of police top-brass who met him on Tuesday as part of the police week observance programme.

Basically the President's exhortations began with a very relevant emphasis on the fact that law and order cannot be ensured merely by the formulation of new laws. In other words, if the existent corpus of laws could not guarantee peace and order in our society then the mere fact of adding newer legal instrumentalities to it, other things remaining the same, wouldn't simply make any difference in the situation. To our understanding, when a government looks like raring to go for tougher laws all it is in effect signalling to the audience is an indirect admission of its failure to apply the extant criminal laws of the country.

In dealing with the applied side of law the police force ought to be mentally conditioned to consciously work for securing 'public cooperation' without which they simply cannot discharge their duties properly. They often seek public cooperation through words, but in deeds, many of them seem to scare away people from police stations in particular when they refuse to entertain complaints for some reason or the other. And if the allegations would be against any police personnel the difference could be pathological.

The President has reminded the policemen of the fact that people in utter distress only turn to them, so that it is their bounden duty to see that they are not denied police assistance on approach. Several deaths in police custody have cast a darker shadow over their credibility which has already been under clouds from other forms of abuse of power. Furthermore, what has stained the police image in the public mind is the visible incidents of palm-greasing one gets to see here and there. This spoils the impression of good work that other policemen do elsewhere. The danger with toll payment is that a payer can get away with any offence resulting in an aided proliferation of crimes in the society.

The President's advice to policemen that they study the laws carefully to avoid their misapplication or abuse needs no doubt to be heeded.

The bottomline is that the police have to shore up the shaken public confidence in them by a change in their working style.

Engineers' Accountability

AT the 44th convention of the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has underscored a fact that we have all known for long — development expenditure goes waste much of the country's due to professional negligence of builders or engineers. There is a corruption factor involved in almost each and every big development project that the country has undertaken. It is a truism that a big chunk of project allocations finds its way into the pockets of top-notch government functionaries or engineers. The equation is very simple: unqualified bidders may get approval for infrastructural undertakings in return for hefty amount routed to the 'right source'. By the broader notion of 'wastage', we are sure, she has meant the shady deals that take place at each twist and turn of these projects, from feasibility study through use of substandard materials in construction work to payment of bills. Her talks about establishing 'accountability' and 'transparency' amongst the engineers will be really meaningful when she succeeds in reining in those elements who stop short of nothing to monopolise government work orders.

Indeed, corruption, mismanagement, professional negligence, etc. have all contributed to wastage of huge amounts of money committed to country's different development projects. Professional negligence and unethical dealings have had a chain impact on the projects, on its quality first and foremost. Basically, therefore, it is imperative that there should be a set of rules — code of conduct, if one may wish to call it — for the engineers to strictly go by. Transparency and accountability are of grave importance where utilisation of limited national resources and that of scarce external assistance are involved. The sooner the prime minister has a Charter Engineers Act in place the better it will be for the profession and the country at large.

The problems are somewhat common to many a Third World country. This is why the engineers of different countries need to cooperate with each other in devising ways to curb wastage.

The Mozambique Misery

OUR hearts are with the people of Mozambique who are suffering the onslaught of the worst flooding of the country in a century. Officially, the death toll is put at several thousands while the number of missing could be very high. Thousands are at risk of dying in water-borne diseases over the next few weeks, fear the experts. As marooned people look desperately to be rescued, helicopter crews, mostly from neighbouring South Africa, are still plucking people from trees and rooftops to safety. The misery of the affected people can be seen on the electronic media worldwide made the more poignant with appeals floated for help. Rescue operations over a vast area in this south eastern state of the African continent, are still inadequate and relief efforts must continue for a long period of time if casualties have to be minimised. Torrential rains following a cyclone have been the cause of the flooding and an estimated two hundred thousand are believed to be left homeless in this impoverished African nation.

The prospect of immediate relief through the recession of floodwaters appears to be bleak raising the fear for prolonged sufferings of the victims. We ourselves went through the worst deluge in our history in 1998. We can very well understand the predicament facing our Mozambiquean brethren. We can only hope and pray for their quick recovery from this natural scourge and appeal to them to have patience in the face of this calamity. In the meantime we request our government to help the suffering Mozambiqueans as generously as possible.

For ME Peace, Palestinians and Israelis Must Share Jerusalem

Once Jerusalem is shared on an agreed basis, other issues may not pose serious problems. Let Jerusalem be divided into East and New (West) Jerusalem on the basis of overwhelming presence of Arabs and Israelis in each part - accommodate capitals of both the groups, the distant cousins - so that cousin President and cousin Prime Minister can have the unique opportunity of driving to each other's offices for a cup of coffee together any time they desire - something that can bring the distant cousins somewhat nearer, thus diminishing the distance and the rivalry that existed for thousands of years. This is what the Middle East peace is all about.

thority to insist on holding on to East of Jerusalem including Arab quarters and Holy places like Masjid Al-Aksa and Dome of the Rock and areas around the Mosque. Israelis have no control over the area even now.

In my earlier comment on my return from Jerusalem and West Bank some time back, I clearly made this point. Israel can never rule East Jerusalem with the Holy Mosque and adjacent places; it is completely a different world so far as Israeli administration is concerned. Municipal rules and practices are different and are really based on rules, regulations and practices are being following for hundreds of years. These cannot be changed just by occupying land. It would be immensely prudent for Israel to hand over these places along with areas around them to the Palestinians. Let Palestinians make these areas their capital. A suitable dividing line could be drawn that may be practical and acceptable to both Palestinians and Israelis. New (West) Jerusalem having overwhelming Israeli population should remain with Israel as Palestinians would never be in a position to control Israeli part. Thus Jerusalem stands to be divided whether Israelis like it or not. It is no use for the Israelis to unnecessarily lament over biblical 'Promised

Land" which was indeed the land of Canaan where both Palestinians and Children of Israel (Bani Israel) lived.

"Palestine (with part of Syria and Lebanon) was known as the land of Canaan. This was the first name given to Palestine. Hebrews are the sons of Abraham (peace be upon him). Israelites are the sons of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, who was known as 'Israel' (Ref: Al-Quds - A Historical Document). These tribes migrated

ther of Zionism proposed in the first Jewish Conference in Basel, Germany in 1897 'home secured by law' for the Jewish people in Palestine. He did not dare asking for a Jewish state probably for political reason and as also the Jewish people originally did not belong to the land of Canaan - Palestine.

However, it's a fact that King David established a Kingdom in a part of Palestine. Thus Jewish claim on Jerusalem as an undivided

Jerusalem along with Holy Places and Arab Quarters and adjacent areas to go to the Palestinians. New (West) Jerusalem to go to the Israelis.

It is always dangerous and counterproductive to occupy somebody else's land and clinging on to it. Israelis occupied southern part of Lebanon over a decade-and-a-half ago and declared this as the security zone for Israel. This never gave any security to Israel. Indeed, Northern Israel has been suffering badly because of the self-declared security zone in South Lebanon. This was a crucial mistake and Israel paid heavily for this mistake in terms of men and materials.

Only in last two weeks, seven Israeli soldiers were killed by Hezbollah guerrillas. This was despite Prime Minister Barak's unilateral declaration to pull out of the self-styled security zone by July this year. Of course, one can detect an invisible hand of Syria in this. But this is inevitable if somebody else's land is occupied.

The same will be repeated in Jerusalem if East Jerusalem and adjacent areas are not returned to the Palestinians. There cannot be any peace in the Middle East until and unless occupied territories with acceptable adjustments are returned to the Arabs. For the



Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad

from Egypt under the leadership of Moses to the land of Canaan at the end of 13th century BC. These Israelites ultimately set up a kingdom on a part of Palestine - the land of Canaan. Thus Israelites though originally migrated from Egypt with Moses lived in Palestine with the people of Palestine. Thus their claim on the land of Palestine over that of the people of Palestine could not get precedence.

This is why when Jewish leader Theodore Herzl, the fa-

capital for the present Jewish state, which was established only in May 1948, does not seem to be based on historical facts.

Indeed, Jerusalem being the Holy place for all three religions -- Islam, Christianity and Judaism -- changed hands through invasions by different invaders including Romans, Turks, etc. Therefore, only the Jewish people cannot have any exclusive right over the Holy land. Thus Jerusalem stands to be divided as before -- East

The Chechens Deserve Better

by Mohammad Auwal

Last week, a television broadcast showed footage of Russian soldiers piling mutilated Chechen bodies into a mass grave. The men's ankles were bound with metal wires, some bodies had missing ears, and a military truck was dragging a dead man across a field.

everywhere. On October 22, 1999, for example, Russian missiles killed 140 and wounded 400 civilians at a market place, a hospital and other areas of the Chechen capital, Grozny.

When Russian forces took over Grozny after blazing it out of the landscape, HRW reported that Russian soldiers had executed at least 38 civilians. Earlier, HRW and other human rights observers reported that Russian forces were killing civilians en masse, raping Muslim women and plundering Chechen properties.

On February 12, *Agence France Presse* reported ruthless Russian bombing of villages through which the Chechen freedom fighters passed. "Each village was bombed by Russian forces, killing a total of at least 400 civilians, while the rebels, seeking to avoid drawing Russian fire on inhabited areas, did not shoot back, the witnesses said." Furthermore, Russian forces have implemented a process by which all Chechen males from the ages of 10 to 70 are swept into concentration camps called 'filtration' centres, barring them from travelling in or out of Chechnya. Human rights workers have reported that many such men de-

tained at Russian checkpoints have disappeared.

Furthermore, Physicians for Human Rights reported Sunday that it had medical evidence of torture, abuse and summary executions of Chechen civilians by Russian forces. The group interviewed 326 Chechen civilians and used physical exams to corroborate the claims of these civilians. Because of the Russian blockade of information flow to and from Chechnya, we do not know the magnitude of Russian war crimes. We do not know how many of the 40,000 people trapped in Grozny have perished and how many more have perished in the rest of Chechnya. Like Andrei Babitsky, the reporter who worked for the US-funded Radio Liberty, journalists who dare to tell the truth risk being detained or harassed by the Russian forces. Yet, international governments are not matching their words of criticism with action. The Council of Europe has sent another envoy—its human rights commissioner Alvaro Gil-Robles—"to visit refugee camps in Ingushetia." They know fully well that, like Lord Russell-Johnston, the Council's president who visited the Russian occupied areas of Chechnya in January, Gil-Robles will see what the Russians

want or tell him to see. He will not see the remnants of Russian war crimes, nor will he talk to any Chechen government official.

The US government has called the video footage "very troubling" and limited its "outrage" to a sympathetic call for an independent inquiry into the allegations of ongoing Russian abuses in Chechnya. Earlier, when Russia announced the institution of 'filtration centers' the United States simply asked for a "clarification" of this policy. And the Canadian government welcomed Russian assurances that the video would be handed over to military prosecutors for investigation. That is no better than asking rapists and thugs to be their own judges. The western governments' criticisms of Russia are nothing more than spin to manage their own images as the defenders of human rights. They have consistently ignored the Chechen people's pleas for help and instead have supported both the 1994-96 and current invasions of Chechnya by giving Russia unabated foreign aid.

More disturbingly, Muslim world voices have remained as mute as ever. Even in Muslim countries that have democratic environments, people have re-

mained largely uninformed as to the magnitude of Russian war crimes. We must not forget that Russia remains a last bastion of colonial imperialism in current post-colonial world. Russia conquered Chechnya in 1859 and has since killed tens of thousands of Chechens every time they have demanded freedom.

In 1944, for example, Stalin's Russia killed 250,000 of 800,000 Chechens while deporting the entire population to central Asia in freezing cargo trains. Stalin accused the Chechens of 'collaborating with the Nazis', though it was he who in 1939 had entered into a secret agreement with Nazi Germany that recognised Soviet hegemony over the Baltic States (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1999).

The Chechens declared independence from Russia in 1991 when the other former Soviet republics broke with Russia. The West swiftly recognised the Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) but mysteriously ignored the call of Chechnya to be free. Remember, Russia conquered both the Baltic and the North Caucasus regions in the 18th century. Heeding the West's warning, Russia did not invade the Baltic states. As the West did not

sake of Middle East peace, Jerusalem has to be shared by both Palestinians and Israelis on the basis of agreed criteria which must be agreed to before the final negotiations take place.

This is why the Framework agreement was necessary. But even now the basic criteria could be worked out by the top leaders with the help of the facilitator - the US. It would be necessary for President Clinton to organise an appropriate stage, another exclusive Shepherds town - like meeting with the top Palestinian and Israeli leaders with a view to convincing them of the need to share Jerusalem on some agreed basis which could be acceptable to both Israelis and Arabs. With Prime Minister Barak on Israeli side the chances of a deal are bright. It is he who captured the land in six days war in 1967 and he knows to whom the land belongs. He also knows that though it is extremely 'painful' without ceding the land to the real owners, there could be no peace in Middle East.

Once Jerusalem is shared on an agreed basis, other issues may not pose serious problems. Let Jerusalem be divided into East and New (West) Jerusalem on the basis of overwhelming presence of Arabs and Israelis in each part - accommodate capitals of both the groups, the distant cousins - so that cousin President and cousin Prime Minister can have the unique opportunity of driving to each other's offices for a cup of coffee together any time they desire - something that can bring the distant cousins somewhat nearer and thus diminishing the distance and the rivalry that existed for thousands of years. This is what the Middle East peace is all about.

support Chechnya. Russia maintained an economic blockade on the republic until invading it on December 11, 1994. In that invasion, the Kremlin killed another 80,000 people, destroyed Chechnya's infrastructure, but eventually withdrew forces from Chechnya by signing a peace treaty in August 1996. The Chechens elected their present government in internationally monitored democratic elections held in 1997.

Russia reneged on the treaty and began the current invasion in October 1999. They accused the Chechens of crimes in Chechnya and of terrorist attacks in Russia without providing evidence. Yet, the crimes that happened in Chechnya were a minuscule fraction of those happening in Moscow itself. And, according to numerous Russian citizens, the Kremlin itself staged the terrorist bombings in Russian cities to justify their military campaign in Chechnya.

By committing the atrocities, the Russians have lost whatever claim they have there. Like the peoples of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and East Timor, the Chechens deserve what they want. It is unfair for humanity to support the freedom of all these peoples and ignore that of the Chechens.

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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.

'Face the People'

Sir, As a layman, I could say that nothing worthy or relishing we have seen from the much hyped PM's face the people TV programme. Neither her answer to any question was felicitous, nor propitious and indicative of any improving change over the present socio-political mess and economic malaise.

Her replies fell short of any objectivity with marked lack of political acumen which was unexpected from a matured politician like her. What we viewed and heard was all dismaying, as she harped on the same string—that what she has kept telling us for the last three years. Besides, her dragging of the honourable president into a fracas over whether the PSA is a money bill or not was/is unsavoury. By and large, the PM could hardly live up to our expectations and we simply felt let-down.

A H Dewan
Dhaka.

Hartal against the politicians!

Sir, Prof Rehman Sobhan has proposed (DS Feb 18) intervention by the civil society to find a way out of the bipolar political deadlock the country is facing since a long period.

If the sustained mediation effort fails, the political parties might be weakened due to loss of public support, opening the way for an additional outside group to take over the reins of running the government. It

might be different from what the country had witnessed for many years, but there can be no firm forecast of the shape of things to emerge.

If the reforms in the political ethics succeed, then the present ad hoc caretaker form of government will have to go, because it is not norm anywhere in the world practising democratic concepts. In fact, this type of alternative governance was initiated by the politicians themselves by seeking the assistance of the civic society in forming CTG.

The JS will then get a new face-lift, but it is doubtful whether bipolar politics will remain in place, competing with the concept of multi-party political governance. The latter is the trend in the new millennium (with New Delhi as a glaring example; Islamabad trying to rise again with different political activities; and Colombo unable to find a political solution to its internal problems).

The main cause of the emergence of the two-party system is the eagerness of the fossilised politicians to fall back upon the alluring aura of past charismatic leadership. This type of politics cannot last long, as the new generations will consider it from the historical point of view, rather than sentimentally and passionately with the heart. Those with first-hand experience have aged long enough, and should be mentally prepared to phase out (as Mandela did).

The heart has to take the back seat when the head reigns.

It looks like that this and the coming decades will encourage multi-party system of politics (coalitions); which means that some of the smaller political parties have to grow up in a healthy constitutional environment. Tolerance cannot return in a bipolar setting, at least initially, as the environment has been poisoned to an unacceptable level.

The patience of the civil society may reach a point of no-return at any time now, and then a situation might arise when the politicians may be chased out of power. The political instability is being created by the politicians themselves, and they cannot blame the non-politicians when the latter combine for a clear and positive sense of direction to the muddled political culture of Dhaka.

Since hartal is the fashion of the day, why not try it against the bad politics? The fed up and frustrated people of our country need some diversion.

Alif Zabr
Dhaka.

Hartal spree

Sir, The oppositions have again resort to hartal and according to different dailies, fresh programmes are going to be announced soon. We really do not have any idea what the oppositions are up to. Never in the past, one could expect hartal during Ramadan. But now-a-days, the scenario has changed.

Recently, the PSA has been enacted and the oppositions have strongly condemned it, terming it as a 'black law'. Taking this as an issue, the oppositions have been calling hartals and creating untold sufferings to millions of people.

The SSC examination is due this month and so are the HSC and GCE. But due to this political fiasco, the examinees are very much in a state of

dilemma. The students are the future citizens of this country but unfortunately, their own future is bleak due to political crisis. We did not expect such uncertainty from our hard-earned democracy. Don't the oppositions realise that this crisis would never end by calling hartal rather it would create more chaos and economic hardship?

Therefore, I appeal to the oppositions to negotiate with the ruling party and save the country from ruin. Nothing but negotiation can help solve this crisis and thereby shower upon a better tomorrow.

Nitisha

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"Plantation on road-dividers"

Sir, This refers to the letter of Mr MAS Molla dt 25/2/2000 which he has written in reference to my letter dt 26/1/2000 on the above subject.

I do agree to some of his contradictions with my views on plantation of green-grass, shrubs on road-dividers but still I stand by my proposal not to plant big trees on such small spaces although Mr Molla has suggested that space will not be a problem for the roots of the trees to grow beyond the concrete road. But such growth of roots may cause crack on roads plus there will always be a risk of the tree to fall down because of its weak attachment to the ground which may cause serious accidents. On the other hand, the green grass and small plants could easily be maintained against fading away through providing sprinkler irrigation forthrightly by means of water-tankers. Actually, it needs a little maintenance to keep grass and small plants green and healthy. One would find such type of maintenance

in the Cantonment areas.

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Digital telephone system

Sir, Dhaka digital telephone system has been recently switched into 7-digit ones. Since then, the existing digital phone system, which was otherwise performing satisfactorily has become totally unbearable. Particularly when one is trying to call from one exchange area to another. Even 8 to 8 exchange calls (e.g., Uttara-Gulshan) also do not work most of the times.

I would therefore like to ask the concerned BTB officials how long would they take to fix up this problem. If they can not fix it up — then why did they unnecessarily fiddle with something, which they do not know how to operate.

I think it is high time to privatise the country's telephone system.

Shamsul Arefeen
Uttara.

Institutional responsibilities

Sir, Dhaka city's urban and slum problems are accentuated by fragmented institutionalised responsibilities, as pointed out by the World Bank chief, addressing the Dhaka Workshop on Feb 18 (DS Feb 23).

The BMRE and input and output integration of these public institutions have been going on in an ad hoc basis in a haphazard way for decades. Now the seriousness of the shortcoming is apparent, as the huge city of 10 million cannot be governed properly. The problems should have been nipped in the bud; but unstable gover-

nance is at the root cause of this malaise. In the civil service, the clerk-and-file approach has to be replaced by executive-oriented work centres (more horizontal mobility than vertical ladder approach).

Management has to be one step ahead of the rate of progress of anticipated problems. Slums are live organism, and static and dry approaches to solutions will not provide satisfactory result. Now it is apprehended that in Bangladesh 50 per cent of the population would be shifting to the urban areas by 2020. Another global finding is that shifting of the slum people create more problems than it solves; and ad hoc and non-integrated solutions lose the shine after a while.

The public planners have a big job in hand. Luckily, several thousand NGOs are working in the country, but most of these are concentrating on rural projects; ignoring the dynamics of urban migration and the problems of the slum population in the major cities. While there are long-term plans and projects for reducing the rate of urban migration, the rehabilitation schemes on the slums itself are receiving a step-motherly approach.

The first step is to defrag the institutional responsibilities. Rajuk and the DCC are weak spots. The Ministry concerned has to be more technically and professionally oriented.

The government has to devote more time to urban planning, before the situation goes completely out of control.

The danger signal is already there: some experts are apprehending that the capital might have to be shifted to a third site. The question is how to go about this exercise amidst persistent political instability and confrontation.

A Husnain
Dhaka.