

PMO, Peer and a Children's Park

WE want to ask three questions. First, can the political liaison officer at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) ask the Mayor to hand over any land belonging to the city to anybody? Has the Mayor any right to hand over land meant for parks to anybody, even if the PM orders it? (After all there must be strict procedure for dealing with public land). Finally, under what authority was the Mayor turning a children's park into a shopping complex in the first place?

Using an official pad, the political liaison officer of the highest executive office of the country, writes to the Mayor, with a copy to the DC, formally asking for the hand-over of a piece of land meant for a children's park, to a peer (religious leader). How dare he? Who has authorised him to write a letter to the Mayor? How does it come under the purview of his duties? The action was illegal and the perpetrator should be immediately charged under appropriate law for a serious offence, criminal if we are not mistaken. It is a clear example of misuse of power, authority and prestige of the PMO. Here again immediate appropriate action is necessary to protect the PMO from such staff. This political liaison officer has not only crossed the boundaries of his duty but is obviously indulging in land related deals amounting to theft of public property.

The incident clearly points out that PMO staff, at least some of them, are misusing their office and are involved in all sorts of activities that are undermining the PMO and giving rise to claims of corruption, nepotism and interference in the normal functioning of the government. *Tadbir*, or lobbying for deals, appointments, promotions and transfer of government servants and awarding tenders to particular parties are some of the accusations that are currently in circulation against a certain section of PMO staff. The Prime Minister must get to the bottom of this particular incident and investigate the role of all her staff and clear the name of her office, and also set standards for the future. This she should do as much for her own sake, as for the rest of us. The Mayor, it appears, is not going to hand over the land on the ground that there is a standing order of the Prime Minister that no construction can be made on land meant for parks. We commend him for his stand and urge him to stick to it. However, we cannot but ask that given the standing order of the PM how was he planning to turn the parkland into a shopping complex as is evident from his own plans of two years ago?

A scandal is going on all over the city concerning city parks, especially in the old town. Those that are not to be grabbed by the rich and the powerful, are being used for drug dealing, prostitution and related crimes. Practically none are usable by the children of the locality. Mr. Mayor, we urge you that you give the park back to the citizens, especially the children, and this you do with single-minded devotion. Prime Minister, please help the Mayor in this action. Let us remember you both for this farsighted act for the sake of our children.

Defaulters from Within

SUBSCRIBERS owe Bangladesh T&T Board a staggering sum of Taka 642 crore. There has not been any change in the situation after written orders were issued by Post and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim to realise the outstanding amounts from defaulters. The defaulters include government, semi-government and private organisations. And importantly, as far as individual defaulters are concerned, former and present members of the parliament (MPs) alone owe the Board an amount of Taka 6.86 crore. This is altogether an unacceptable scenario because the Board feared there was little possibility of realising an amount of Taka 102 crore in unpaid bills. True that we have not been able to devise a standard and reliable mode of bill-payment system. But that doesn't mean that telephone users, especially in the government and among the MPs would go on dodging bills.

We think it is an unforgivable act on the part of the parliamentarians not to be paying their arrear bills especially when they are given a monthly teleallowance of Taka 4,000. And they are in a much better position to have any errors in their bills corrected because of their clout. Now the question that arises in our mind is, they are using the facility in excess of their monthly telephone allowance, so that they are required to pay the differential from their own pockets. This is how they have run into a huge arrear. But as lawmakers they cannot be lawbreakers without paying a price for it. We expect the former and serving MPs to pay up this utility-services bills.

The existing method of paying telephone bills is flawed in that the payment is not readily registered with the revenue office of the T&T Board. Computers need to be used there. Preferably we would like to see one-stop service introduced in matters of bill payment. But this should not provide any excuse for the MPs and the government defaulters to dodge payment of the arrears.

Irresponsible Celebrations

SONALI Bank employees' union delayed its celebration of the Independence Day by at least three days but did not forget to disrupt the normal banking and other important activities at the bank's headquarters. All this happened on Wednesday. Present at the function was the home minister as chief guest. This is a disturbing sign as the biggest bank in the nationalised sector decides to flout the government drive to control trade union activities in the banking sector. It was an embarrassing situation at the bank as an officer confided to The Daily Star reporter. Loudspeakers were generally used inside the bank and audience were seated in front of the counters turning a blind eye to the clients' needs during banking hours. Many clients were reported to have left the bank unattended because of the chaotic situation.

It is rather strange that the bank authority should have permitted them to hold such a meeting during office hours. In fact, the report that was submitted to the Finance Ministry by the Bank Reforms Committee headed by noted economist Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud recommended curbing trade union activities in nationalised commercial banks. The government cannot play a dual role so far as trade union activities in nationalised commercial banks are concerned. It was after many an embarrassing happening in this sector that the government finally decided to constitute a Reforms Committee. But the spirit behind one of its important recommendations has been thrown to the four winds.

Clinton's Visit to South Asia : Goals and Attainments

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EDY caused great concern to the policy makers of the West, USA in particular. The concern arose not merely due to the negative development to their vigorous policy in favour of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons but also on account of their real or assumed fear of accidental, sudden or impulsive use of deadly weapons prompted more by emotion than reason. Another important factor rests with the continuing success of the US role as a peace broker in the Arab-Israeli conflict which allowed that country, in its role as international police, to pay greater attention to other trouble spots in the world. South Asia figured prominently in that scheme of thoughts.

The US President's visit to Bangladesh appeared to be almost an adjunct to his perception of significance for the region. But, it was not entirely so. The famed Gramen Bank of Professor Muhammad Yunus and the commendable role it played, along with Fazle Hasan Abed's BRAC and other NGOs, in poverty alleviation caused genuine attraction for the President. Furthermore, wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea's account of their visit to

Bangladesh during the BNP regime of Khaleda Zia became an added factor to the President's decision-making process. The 11-hour visit to Bangladesh could have been better and more gracious had the government not insisted on inclusion of some party motivated programmes in President's schedule. The self-imposed

homage to the martyrs, still remained a mystery to the most. This was viewed in stark contrast to the visits of the President to many obscure places, including his participation in the Holi festival with village folks in India, and an unperturbed visit to Pakistan, largely more infested with terrorists and Bin Laden group.

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However, during his visit to Bangladesh the President gained a first hand knowledge of the state of democracy, human rights and the socio-politico-economic scenario in the country. However, he emphasized that Bangladesh was a land with promises, but the people have to avail of the opportunities. Despite conclusion of some agreements and giving some assurances, the widely speculated agreements on exploration of gas were not signed.

The long visit to India and short visit to Pakistan were undertaken to diffuse tension, create confidence building measures and avenues for dialogue between the two contending parties and help restore peace in the trouble-torn region. The task would have been less arduous, but for India's unhappiness for the President to visit Pakistan and, perhaps, consequently to treat the military regime there in the same manner as the government of the largest democracy in the world. But Clinton's decision was, indeed, a sound one. Despite announcement of the pledge of holding some local elections by the military ruler on the eve of the Presidential visit, it did not tantamount to recognition of or support for Pakistan's military government. The principal purpose of the visit was to ascertain for himself the present position in Pakistan, the future plan of action of the existing regime and, above all, to help create conditions congenial for solution of its long standing dispute with India.

The US President's message to both Pakistan and India on the troubles emanating from the dispute on Kashmir was ba-

sically similar. He was categorical in his statement that resort to force would not bring about a solution and must be averted. He advocated the merit for establishing dialogue between the two sides and to create conditions congenial for this purpose. Being aware of the hypersensitivity of India against a third party mediation, the President refrained from making any suggestion even to play the role of a facilitator. But he assured both sides of the readiness of the US government to provide any measure that will make a positive impact on the issue.

As for nuclear weapons and missiles, the President not only urged the two sides to exercise restraint and take necessary action against proliferation, but implored them to consider reduction of their nuclear armament. He did discuss the issue of CTBT, but under the prevailing situation did not nurture any hope of signing it by either party. The signing of the CTBT by Bangladesh earlier produced much satisfaction for the President.

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invitation of the Prime Minister to the American Embassy and her presence during the distinguished visitor's call on the host President were not only in contravention of the normal protocol and usual practices but created embarrassment for all.

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the opposition to continue their boycott.

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