

Massive Fraud

THIS is the most brazen-faced plunder of public money in the making that Bangla daily Prothom Alo exposed in a front-page report on Friday. No sooner had it been known that 700 acres of land would be acquired for Rajuk's new residential project - phase III at Uttara than dubious people fell for the spin-off benefits almost like vultures swooping down on residues of food. They are caught in a frenzied scramble for raising just about any structure to lay a claim to compensation money. They are aiming to eat the fruit and take it home as well. For their land to be acquired they will be entitled to compensation airtight; but they are not satisfied with that prospect alone. They are trying to show some 'structure' on the land to skim off yet more money in compensation payment. The *modus operandi* is exploitative from the beginning till the end. They bought land from the farmer at slightly above market price or through coercion if the latter refused to sell. Then they would mark up the price as the government did the valuation of the land so as to receive a hugely inflated amount of money in the deal. Add to this the compensation paid for the so-called structure, what you have is a fabulous sum plundered from the government exchequer.

The plots of land that are sought to be created from out of the acquired land would sell dear in the end to the allotees reflecting the premium of high compensation value paid to the original or coopted owners of the land.

All of this conjures up the ascendancy of corrupt elements in the economy, those parasites of the society, as it were, who are bleeding the national economy white by sucking its blood like the vermins do.

The fraud being enacted at Uttara does not have to be unearthed by investigation. It is so very manifest and visible that a corrective action can be taken almost instantly if the government so wills. The collusive elements behind the massive act of fraudulence are no extra-terrestrial things; rather they are a sprinkling of worldly faces at Rajuk, land settlement department, DC's office, union parishad, not to mention the local influential who gravitate to any project smelling money. All concerned agencies must now freeze the fraud on its tracks after the *expose*, or be labelled as abettors.

Apology of a Security Detail

A very high incidence of violence has been observed lately in our society. Resultantly, the inflow of cases before the courts with names of worst criminals and terrorists appearing in them has also increased. This in turn has exposed court officials, lawyers and others to some physical risk. Little wonder, the judges and lawyers of the Chittagong Court have put out a call for stepping up security precautions on the court premises. What now exists by way of a security posse is the deployment of only seven policemen there. There's no gainsaying the fact that the area should be regarded as 'sensitive' in view of the fact that 50,000 cases remain to be dealt with at the different courts in Chittagong with all sorts of attendant implications — pressures, provocations and sometimes putting out attendant threats by parties on the accused list, etc. Thirty thousand people of different kinds — not all of whose antecedents might not be innocuous - flock there everyday. The wide spectrum of work being handled there is worth taking into consideration. All the judges who work in the 51 courts there are placed under six separate courts of considerable importance: District and Sessions Judge Court, Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Divisional Special Judge Court, District Magistrate Court and Woman and Child Repression Court.

Allegations are there that armed terrorists also accompany political leaders when they appear before courts seeking bail or to attend the hearings of their cases. Normally the activities that go on in the labyrinthine Chittagong Court building would have called for tight security vigil and physical arrangements. But, with the spate in noisy and sometimes fatal incidents, within the court compounds these days — recall the killing of 'Murgi Milon' on the court premises of Dhaka — it is supremely imperative that some special kind of security surveillance is maintained at all the court building premises in the country. This area has been neglected so far inexplicably to say the least. Let's make amends for it.

Norms are Inviolable

IMMEDIATELY after being sworn in as the Prime Minister more than four years ago, Sheikh Hasina readily endeared herself to the people by declaring that traffic movement would not be impeded to make way for her motorcade. This bore an oblique reference to what her predecessor had occasionally done. Within a few months, the residents of the capital city realised, to their dismay, that the PM didn't quite mean what she had said. The picture of the PM's motorcade on the wrong side of the road to avoid traffic jams, front-paged in this daily not very long ago, was manifestly ironical.

But, it now seems, there were more surprises in store for us. There have been major changes in the schedules of regular rail service in the country's north. A special train has been commissioned to carry people to and from Dinajpur where the Prime Minister would speak at the freedom fighter-people rally. Besides, at least five regular services have been rescheduled to make sure that people can join and return from the rally without much inconvenience. Such a "wholesale revision of schedules, departure and destination" would definitely tell on the whole network in the West Zone of Bangladesh Railway.

The state minister for communications has reportedly paid for the special service, from which account no one really knows. The mode of payment is besides the point. We want to raise a few questions here. First, how could the state minister take such a step which is obviously an impingement on people's right? Second, would the opposition or, for that matter, any citizen of the country get such privilege on payment? Third, from whose pocket would the money for the special service flow? Finally, and most importantly, was the Prime Minister briefed about the state minister's plan?

We demand a public statement on the whole issue from the government immediately. We wonder when people at the helm would come to appreciate that there are certain norms and practices in a democratic set-up which should not be tampered with. Even the PM is not exempted in this regard.

THE Americans are going to elect their 43 President. Al Gore and George Bush are locked in what seems to be the most closely contested US presidential election since the Kennedy-Nixon contest in 1960. As the campaign enters its final week, opinion polls give the Republican candidate, George Bush, a small lead over his Democratic opponent. However, the contest that has already turned around once in the last month seems unpredictably close as the latest polls also show the Democratic candidate closing the gap with his Republican rival.

In the current close-run presidential race, the election will be decided not by the popular votes but by the Electoral College votes. The Electoral College is an indirect election system used in the US. Each state has a number of electoral votes equal to its total number of representatives in both houses of Congress. In addition, the District of Columbia has three votes giving a grand total of 538 electoral votes. In order to be elected President, a candidate must have an absolute majority or 270 votes. Electoral votes for each state are allocated on a winner-take-all basis. So the candidate who wins the popular vote in a state also wins all the electoral votes in that state.

What makes this race interesting is that current predictions show that states that are rated as solid, likely and leaning for Gore carry 205 electoral votes; while those rated solid, likely and leaning for Bush also carry 205 votes. Currently fourteen states are up for grabs, with neither Bush nor Gore claiming a decisive edge in state opinion polls. These states, some big and some small, represent the final pieces Bush and Gore has to work with to put together the 270 Electoral College votes required to win the presi-

Gore or Bush: Too Close to Call

For countries like Bangladesh, either a Bush or Gore administration can be a source of major headache. While Gore is more likely to succumb to pressures from the labour unions and create new hurdles for our garments export industry, Bush is likely to be less receptive to calls for additional foreign assistance for the developing countries, including Bangladesh.



Connecting the Dots

Dr. A. R. Choudhury

dency. If undecided voters in the swing states split about evenly, it is possible that one of them could win a razor-thin popular vote but still lose the presidency.

Thus Bush, for example, could rack up huge victory margins in some southern states but while that would increase his popular-vote margin, it wouldn't change his electoral college count. On the other hand, Gore could tip the electoral college to his favour by winning several battleground states by much smaller margins. Of course, it is worth noting that the last time a US president lost the popular vote but won the electoral college vote was in 1876.

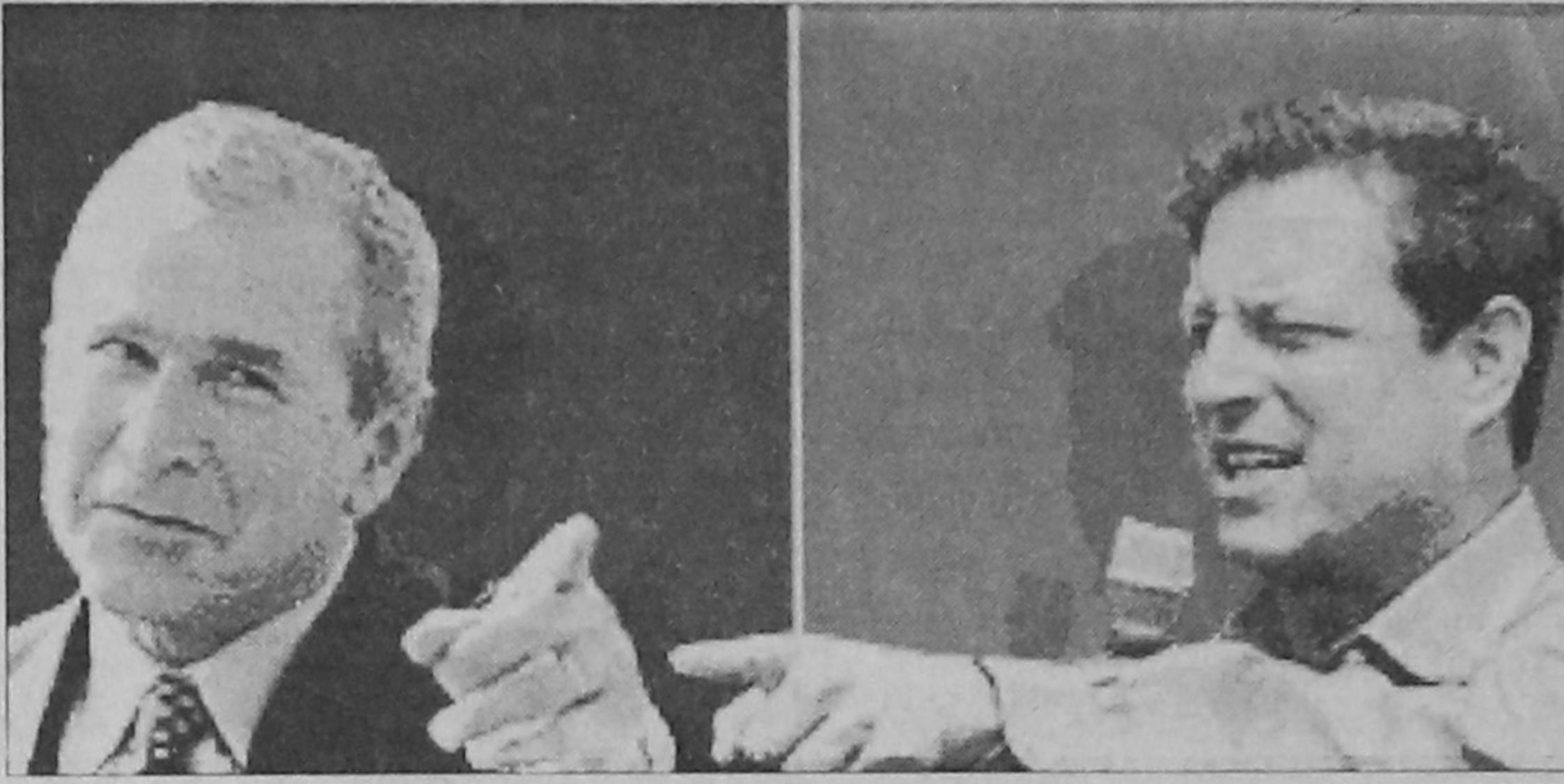
Behind the scenes, the campaigns are making last-minute effort to focus on tactical combat for the votes of critical groups who will decide the outcome. The candidates are trying to solidify their own party base, make inroads into rival party's core supporters and grab a majority of crucial undecided swing voters who will make the difference between victory and defeat.

There is a sharp contrast between the campaign style of the two candidates. Al Gore is basing his campaign on a sense of national contentment at a time when the US economy is

going through an era of unprecedented prosperity and growth. Whereas George Bush is trying to capitalise on a natural desire of the electorate for change. While Gore emphasises a broad satisfaction with the policies that have been associated with the Clinton administration during the last eight years, Bush raises a palpable sense that the moral values espoused by the Clinton administration

are not America's own.

On domestic policy issues, there is a sharp difference between the two candidates. They differ on tax policy, education, social security and health. While



tions with Europe and Middle East peacemaking. Even toward Cuba, the two candidates are similarly hard-line. Gore sees both Russia and China as "vital partners" and believes in a policy of engagement towards China. Bush, on the other hand, supports closer military ties with Taiwan and calls China "a competitor". He believes that US should reach out to Russia. Bush has vowed never to place US troops under United Nations command and supports paying the outstanding US debt to the United Nations only after it agrees to an administrative reorganisation and streamlining. Gore, on the other hand, supports unconditional and immediate repayment of the US debt to the United Nations.

When it comes to military and defence-related issues, there is a sharp contrast between the two candidates. The missile-defence issue is one of the hottest point of contention between them.

Bush has called for deploying a \$60 billion national defence shield even if doing so violates the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Gore also supports deploying a missile

shield, but only if doing so doesn't violate the 1972 ABM treaty. Since that agreement prohibits the deployment of such a shield, Gore is, in effect, an opponent of missile defence at least the kind of defence that Bush and others have supported. Unlike Bush, Gore favours ratification of a treaty that would ban the testing of new nuclear weapons.

Bush might be pickier than Gore in defining where to commit US troops. He has suggested that crises not directly related to US interests, like the Rwandan genocide, might not warrant US intervention. Gore, on the other hand, has expressed regret for initial US inaction in Bosnia and Rwanda. He has shown a greater willingness to deploy troops at times of international crisis.

For countries like Bangladesh, either a Bush or Gore administration can be a source of major headache. While Gore is more likely to succumb to pressures from the labour unions and create new hurdles for our garments export industry, Bush is likely to be less receptive to calls for additional foreign assistance for the developing countries, including Bangladesh.

As far as the outcome of the election is concerned, foreign policy issues are not going to play any pivotal role for the swing voters. It is where the candidates stand on the big domestic policy questions, is going to determine where the swing voters mark their ballots on election day. In a contest whose outcome remains too close to call, the inevitable temptation for both candidates is to play very safe in the next few days. Unless something drastic happens in the meantime, the election results are still up for grabs.

The Brave New Peninsula?

The South-backers, led by the US, have supported the reconciliation moves and so were the reactions from the allies of the North. But they have their own stakes and interests in the whole tangle since they have been involved here for a long period of time. The clash of interests is not unlikely and one cannot rule out the possibility of their allies influencing the two Koreas should they feel it necessary for their policies and interests.

THE sea-change that is taking place in the political climate in the Korean Peninsula, since the first ever summit between two Koreas in June last, continues in different form. One hopes that this may eventually remove one of the most dangerous international flashpoints, still afflicting global peace and stability.

The latest such landmark development surrounding the Peninsula is the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to North Korea. This is for the first time that an American official has met the leader of this Stalinist nation. Such a meeting appeared remote even a few months ago. But the developments in the region in the form of contacts between the two rival Koreas - South and North - made rather impossible things possible.

Albright discussed the sensitive issues that have kept two sides at poles apart over the last fifty years with the North Korean leader.

The United States was a party in the Korean war from 1950-53 and the North was in the opposite camp, along with China and other socialist countries. The war has not ended officially, except a peace formula was reached and as a sequel to the situation, tensions and war-like conditions prevailed between the two Koreas till the other day. American troops are also stationed in South Korea to help Seoul in the event of any war. Now they are discussing reconciliation issues to relax the tensions and possible reunification of the Peninsula. This began from the summit of Korean leaders in Pyongyang and the spirit was to lessen tensions and work towards the eventual recon-

sional hiccups. Albright's visit also falls in the same line because such a visit would not have been possible unless a qualitative change took place in the region. President Bill Clinton is likely to pay a visit to North Korea - regarded so far as a foe of the Washington. This is the positive fall out of the visit of Albright. If Clinton's visit takes place, even after November 7 presidential elections, it would certainly be of great significance.

Earlier, rival Koreas have moved a step forward towards their reconciliation. The historic summit heralding a new era of relationship, reversing the process of hostility and animosity, contributed to this development. Defence ministers of South and North Korea have agreed to ease military tensions in their meeting on September 25 - the first since the Peninsula was divided in 1945. No specific military measures, however, were announced to ease the tensions. But what is of significance is that South's Defence Minister Cho Sung-Tae and the North's Armed Forces Minister Vice Marshal Kim Il Chol held "sincere talks" in their important meeting in resort island of Cheju in South Korea.

Both sides acknowledged that the meeting went off very well and the spirit was to lessen tensions and work towards the eventual recon-

ciliation and reunification of two Koreas.

Indeed, this has been a remarkable development since the meeting of the defence ministers.

There has been a series of positive developments since the landmark summit of the two rival Koreas. On relaxation of the tensions and the concession to the development, the US has

formally eased sanctions against Pyongyang. There has been marked softening of the attitude in both Seoul and Pyongyang since the summit took place and both have scaled down their vicious campaigns against each other. People in the divided Peninsula are being swept by a fever of reconciliation which many of them believe will eventually lead to reunification of two Koreas.



Toasting for a trouble-free time?

To the Editor ...

Traffic anarchy

Sir, An article 'Traffic Anarchy in City-- Expansion of Road Network Needed' was published in the 'Bangladesh Observer' on 12 September. However, I believe that before expansion of road network what is needed to be taken care of first is educate and raise awareness among the city dwellers as well as the traffic police force.

Evidently, managing so many types of vehicles on the roads of a city like Dhaka is quite impossible. Therefore, it has become extremely necessary to educate the city dwellers about the existing traffic rules. And this responsibility completely lies with the concerned authorities of the government. They should immediately introduce and implement strict traffic rules (especially for Dhaka city) to avoid traffic anarchy.

We all have realised by now that motorised and non-motorised vehicles cannot ply side by side. And it seems that anyone can do anything on the city streets without being accountable to anyone. No matter whether it is a rickshaw or a three-wheeler-van or a car or a taxi it is all the same. No one

cares about others. Most of the time it looks like, the total city traffic, is run by itself and there is no one to guide. If this situation continues, we can never expect any permanent solution.

Unfortunately, Dhaka Municipal Corporation is also to be blamed for traffic jam in the main streets of Dhaka. Lately, the City Corporation have placed some funny looking large garbage bins lying open all over the important city streets. Not only these bins look ugly and dirty it also creates tremendous jam for there are no one to monitor how these bins are placed on the roads and what difficulties are being inflicted due to these bins.

We all understand that it would be very difficult for any government to remove rickshaws from the main streets of Dhaka immediately. But keeping in view the present chaotic traffic situation, we have to think seriously what can be done about it. In this regard I'd like to make the following suggestions.

1) Get rid of rickshaws from the main streets and allow them to ply only between bylanes.

2) Build permanent separate lanes for rickshaws on all city main roads.

3) U-turns and right turns should be banned for rickshaws on city main roads.

4) Left turns should be allowed at all points.

5) Rickshaws should never be

allowed to cross any city main road at any point.

6) Restrict rickshaw movement, area and zone wise in and around Dhaka city.

At the end, I would like to highlight that we have to implement a proper Traffic Management System to make it applicable for anyone and everyone starting from a rickshaw-puller to a Pajero owner. There is no other alternative. Unless we know that we will be punished if we violate any rule, we cannot expect a well behaved traffic in this city.

Azad Dhaka

authority had taken up this dog squad project at the first place

and wasted huge amount of public money of a poor country like ours.

We demand accountability and transparency from the authorities concerned regarding the wastage of public money on dog squad. Would the government care to clarify?

A Citizen
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PARC report needs importance

Sir, It was interesting to read the DS news item of Saturday 21st October, "Authoritarian Power of Public Servants Generates Corruption". Recently, in a inter-school parliamentary debate, my school Mastermind, debated a topic very similar to the article published in your daily.

Much of our debate was based on the Administration Reform Commission (PARC) report, as was your article. It is sad that even students of class IX notice such deficiencies and actually feel that the PARC report should be given due importance whereas the government seems to be quite

apathetic about it. It is, however, nice to see that our press address some of the problems raised in the report. Hopefully, the policy makers will take notice now.

Farheena Mashed Rahman
Dharmundi, Dhaka

Appreciating the beauty of art

Sir, I was highly fascinated to read the write-up "Translating the mind into colours" published in the DS Culture Page on October 22. As one of the invitees, I was present on the occasion of the 6th solo art exhibition of Nurun Nahar on 19th October, at Arial Centre, Dharmundi. And I must admit that the artist's creative endeavour towards Bangladeshi art and culture is worth appreciating. I strongly feel that her creations in art are unique and worth preserving.

I believe that someone should come forward to take up the task to preserve Nurun Nahar's Paintings. Who knows like BB Russell one day she may also uphold the uniqueness of Bangladeshi woman's role in creative paintings before the world.

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