

# The Daily Star

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## EC in Doldrums - Now?

NOTHING seems to be moving in the Election Commission these days. On available indications, working relations between the Chief Election Commissioner and the three commissioners of the EC have soured into a dysfunctional state of affairs for the statutory body. The crippling differences of opinions between the CEC and the members of EC are centred around certain appointments made or initiated by the former, allegedly in contravention of recruitment rules aside from those being driven by nepotism.

Last August the CEC took on board a database consultant reportedly at a monthly salary of Tk 10 lakh with the standard procedure made a short shrift of. Thereafter a functionary of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) of which Abu Sayed, the incumbent CEC had been the chairman earlier on, was given an appointment at the election commission office 'brushing aside rules'. A process was also set afoot to pluck out another two SEC employees which too met with resistance from the EC members apparently owing to 'tainted' antecedents of the persons from their days at the SEC.

Amidst such a conflicting situation at the Election Commission, routine meetings between the CEC and the commissioners have been held in abeyance for over a month now with huge gaps developing in terms of making policy and operational decisions at the EC's peak season. The final voters' list has to be published, to say nothing of disposing of the case relating to BNP MP Akhtaruzzaman's status against the backdrop of his expulsion from BNP for having gone against party whip. While these urgent tasks face the EC, the overriding thing to note is that this is an election year with a whole range of agenda of its own pressing for immediate attention. The EC being also entrusted with the task of holding local elections it has its hands full almost the year round.

**With the crisis of confidence at the top and demoralisation across the length and breadth of the organisation, the EC looks ill-put to exercise its writ as a constitutional body.**

We should never lose sight of the fact that the image with which the EC had been formed was not quite of the ideal type in that some key appointments to the body were made without recourse to a bipartisan consensus even as a matter of convention. This left room for earning credibility through an impeccable conduct down the road, but this unfortunately went abegging. Since the virtual standstill at the EC bodes ill for the conduct of the next general election the matter needs to be gone into on a top priority basis. Who wants to see an apology of an Election Commission at this juncture?

## Friday Mailbox

### Stain on the JS

Sir, It seems that Home Minister Mohammad Nasim cannot keep off controversy's way. In an attempt to portray BNP as the eternal fountain of all evil, the Awami League stalwart has taken a swipe at its founder late President Ziaur Rahman. The home minister branded the general-turned-politician as the pioneer of state terrorism in the country. Zia came to power through terrorism and dragged the country's young generation to the depth of terrorism and drug addiction, Nasim said.

Apparently, dissident BNP lawmaker Major (ret'd) Akhtaruzzaman induced Nasim's diatribe with the comment that the home minister had made money and caused delay in the trial of the Bangabandhu Murder case by speaking against and intimidating the judiciary. Besides, Akhtar accused Nasim of capitalising on his telecommunication portfolio and making a fortune out of it. The retired major was verbally punched back with Nasim calling him a person devoid of ideals and principles, who was sacked from the army on charges of corruption.

The rivals in the latest mud-slinging competition at the Jatiya Sangsad have two things in common - both have no taste and both care very little for the sanctity of the parliament. We have long given up the hope that our lawmakers would discuss issues related to popular needs and interest at the highest forum of people's representatives. But we have not voted them to power to undermine the sanctity of the JS as and when they wish.

The damage however is done. We are bracing for yet another round of war of words between the ruling and opposition leaders. Thankfully, the BNP lawmakers are still on a boycott of the parliament. Or else, the parliament would have witnessed a spate of sickening epithets hurled at Bangabandhu and Zia. One wonders when our politicians would learn not to drag these two leaders into their dirty talks whenever and wherever possible.

Miraz Dhaka

### Reschedule the date, please

Sir, The BBA admission test under IBA (DU) and the admission test of unit A(ko) of Shahjalal University are announced to be held on the same date (i.e. 1 December, 2000). As a result, a lot of students who have applied and already submitted forms for both BBA (IBA) and unit A (SU) admission tests, are now in a dilemma to decide which test they are going to sit for.

Both IBA and Shahjalal University are regarded as one of the leading educational institutions of our country. So it will be really appreciated if the concerned authorities of these two institutions change the date of admission tests (at least one of the two) to get the applicants free from anxiety and offer them a better chance to choose their career.

Therefore, without much delay a decision should be taken in this regard. Hope the authorities concerned consider this matter.

Md J U Fahim Chittagong

### Price hike in Ramadan

Sir, One the eve of the forthcoming Ramadan, the prices of all essential goods and commodities

have already started shooting up.

This is a common phenomenon in our country as some traders and shopkeepers want to earn profit of a whole year in a single month of Ramadan. It appears that these unscrupulous traders and shopkeepers do not have moral character or business ethics. They neither care for the sanctity and righteousness of the holy month of Ramadan nor they have any reverence or admiration for the religious persons.

We also find the Ministry of Commerce guilty of its alleged inefficiency as they fail to take any timely step or preventive measure to ensure steady and smooth supply of essential goods and commodities to market.

Would the shopkeepers and traders as well the ministry concerned help contain the price hike and alleviate the sufferings of the people?

O H Kabir Wari, Dhaka

### Open air workshops

Sir, We wonder if the newly named Kamruzzaman Sarak from old Nawabpur Railway crossing/B B Avenue to Jai Kali Mandir/Rankin Street, Wari has been selected as open air motor workshops and garages and the road island on the sarak has been demolished intentionally at many places for the purpose?

Kamruzzaman Sarak and road island repaired, recaptured and built a few months ago at the huge amount of public money lay in a horrible condition.

This busy public road linking old part of Dhaka with new Dhaka has become a scourge for the city dwellers due to following reasons:

1. Buses make 'U'-turn one after another at three points on the road a) Jai Kali Mandir corner b) Biryani House near new under construction municipal market c) old Nawabpur railway crossing/ B B Avenue meet.
2. Hundred of buses remain parked on both the sides of the road in haphazard manner for hours and days together.
3. All types of vulcanising, welding, body manufacturing, body painting, engine overhauling and repair works of buses are done on the road.

These chaotic, messy and disorderly situation paralysed and cripple the vehicular traffic and movement of the pedestrians and the sufferings of the people is immense.

We are surprised that the authorities concerned on the one hand are bulldozing and demolishing slums one after another evicting hundreds of poor distressed people from their dwellings and on the other hand they are doing nothing to keep the public roads, streets clean and free from all sorts of obstacles, hazards, hindrances and lawlessness for convenient, smooth and well adapted movement of members of the public.

Would the DCC and DMP kindly wake up, take necessary action and save the people from this endless irritation?

A Citizen Dhaka

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

# LDC Forever?

The LDCs, like the other developing countries, are very critical of the bad deal that they had and are still having under the present world economic order. While there is some justification for this, they cannot wriggle out of their responsibility to make the best of a bad bargain... If no substantial help is forthcoming they have no alternative but to bootstrap their way out of economic stagnation and poverty. It should be considered a stigma to remain LDC indefinitely.

the least developed countries at the national level, as well as for measures for international support. The SNPA also contained provisions for specific follow-up actions at the country, regional and global levels. UNCTAD's Intergovernmental Group on LDCs met at a high level in 1985 to carry out the mid-term Global Review of the SNPA and agreed on a set of conclusions and recommendations to speed up the implementation of the SNPA. Subsequently, the problems of the LDCs constituted one of the four substantive items on the agenda for the seventh session of UNCTAD which took place in 1987. As a contribution to the global monitoring exercise, the UNCTAD secretariat prepares annual reports on the LDCs. The responsibility for regional monitoring and consultation has devolved on the regional UN bodies. The First SNPA for the Eighties was followed by the Second for the Nineties. The Conference next year in Brussels is expected to formulate the Third SNPA. All of these speak of seriousness of purpose and determination to achieve the objectives set. But mostly these meetings, recommendations, resolutions and programme of actions have been exercises on paper with very little tangible happening on the ground. For this dismal record both the international institutions, the developed countries and the LDCs are responsible in varying degrees. The former failed to translate many of the pious wishes into actions while the latter, the LDCs, fell short of the efforts that were to be made at the national level.

Globally, the most important benefit derived by the LDCs from multilateral and bilateral sources have included concessional terms. They are particularly eligible for the soft loan from IDA of the World Bank and ADF of Asian Development Bank. Reduction of interest rate and rescheduling of loans have been allowed to the LDCs.

from time by the European Union and the Paris Club, the Association of developed country lenders. Preferential treatment has been accorded to the LDCs in trade through quota and GSP by the European Union and the USA. All these appear as really substantial assistance worthy of SNPA. But both the incidence and coverage of credit, interest reduction and loan repayment rescheduling have been very thin on the ground. The LDCs have not really benefited as much from these 'concessions' as it appears to be. Even during the implementation of the First SNPA in the 1980s the LDCs faced growing protectionist pressures, insufficient expansion of concessional resource flows,

mean a rather different set of parameters and constraints. LDCs had to 'adjust' instead of pursuing their own development policies. They had to erect countervailing forces to limit the economic and social damage caused by adjustment. Whereas in the past their main objective would have been to proceed in linear fashion towards the elimination of poverty through economic growth and development, now there is great concern to prevent the poor getting poorer or the nation as a whole suffering from the adjustment process. It would have been natural to expect the LDCs having managed balance-of-payments deficit (to be capital importers in the early stages of

domestic price inflation, achieving balance-of-payments stability (by lowering demand for imports) and increasing exports. The stabilisation programme was expected to work in the short-term providing a basis for long-term growth. In practice, in many LDCs the austerity undermined growth and discouraged domestic and foreign investment.

The failure by the multilateral and bilateral institutions in implementing the SNPA come out in bold relief both by the acts of omission and commission. Much less has been done by them than was required under the two SNPAs. On the other hand, much harm has been done to the cause of sustained development of the LDCs through the universal application of the regimen of economic reforms making no exception for them. Now the LDCs are caught in the maelstrom of globalisation which may keep them floundering helplessly unless corrective measures are undertaken in time. The Conference in Brussels next year cannot be business as usual if the international development community really means business. Nor can the developed countries attending the Conference start yawning at the mention of LDCs because their feeling of aid-fatigue is premature in the backdrop of so little having been done.

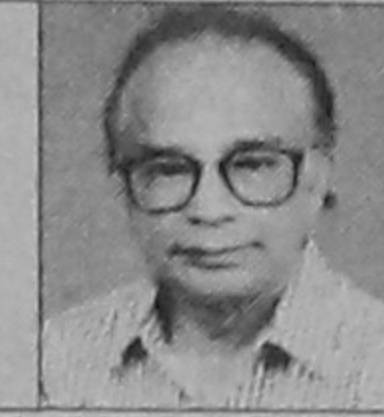
As for the LDCs, the list of failures and negligence, even complacency is not very short. Very little effort has been made to raise the abysmally low savings-GDP and investment-GDP ratios through appropriate incentives. The development of human capital remains neglected with the literacy rate below 20 per cent (some of the cut-off point for graduation out of LDC category). The growth rate has averaged around 4-5 per cent across the whole spectrum of LDCs with a few even registering negative growth rate. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP observed in an interview during the preparatory meeting

in Dhaka that Bangladesh with below US\$500 per capita income and plus four per cent annual growth will need double digit economic growth to cross the benchmark of LDC status of per capita US\$900 annual income. He further commented that with the present growth rate it would take 25 years for Bangladesh to graduate from the LDC category. It cannot be denied that even with limited resources at disposal, investment in unproductive sectors (defence) is being made by most of the LDCs. Moreover, the various pressure groups representing the elite in the countries succeed in having policy decisions that serve their short-term interest (e.g. consumption of luxury goods) rather than the long-term goal of overall growth. The savings-investment and the foreign-exchange gaps could be somewhat bridged if the LDCs created the environment conducive to foreign investment. But elementary preconditions for such investment like rule of law, infrastructures development, disciplined labour, efficient and honest government agencies etc are either conspicuous by their absence or are very inadequate. To make the investment climate even more bleak the governments in most of the LDCs are continuing to borrow heavily from the banks with quite a few printing money to cover the deficits. This is a symptom of a faltering macro-economic policy environment and a recipe for crowding out domestic investment.

The LDCs, like the other developing countries, are very critical of the bad deal that they had and are still having under the present world economic order. While there is some justification for this, they cannot wriggle out of their responsibility to make the best of a bad bargain. Moreover, globalisation fuelled by the new economy in the developed and emerging economies will make their stride forward even more difficult in future. If no substantial help is forthcoming they have no alternative but to bootstrap their way out of economic stagnation and poverty. It should be considered a stigma to remain LDC indefinitely. This holds true even when the charade of SNPA is being played out.

## IN MY VIEW

Hasnat Abdul Hye



high real rate of interest and the virtual collapse of commercial bank lending to the developing countries. The foreign exchange receipts of LDCs thus drastically shrunk. Concomitantly, their mounting external debt and debt-service requirements, despite rescheduling, resulted in considerable increase in capital outflows. It is no wonder that the economic performance of the LDCs throughout the 1980s fell short of expectation. The picture of the cloud did not have much of a silver lining in the nineties when the Second SNPA was supposedly underway. To make life more complicated and miserable the LDCs were made to take up programmes for economic liberalisation and structural adjustments with greater urgency during this period.

Adjustment under economic liberalisation prescribed by the Bretton Wood sisters as well as by bilateral authorities came to

development). But under the prescribed adjustment programme they have been more or less forced to adopt adjustment packages comprising finance plus a set of required policy reforms affecting their external economic relationships, largely to reduce or to eliminate both their current account and their overall balance of payment deficits. This occurred when their aid flows stagnated, availability of compensatory finance became more constrained and their access to commercial credit almost vanished owing both to the prevailing high real rates of interest and to the reluctance of creditors to lend.

If the adjustment programme brought on stage a nightmarish scenario, the agenda for structural reform and stabilisation was no better. Stabilisation policies operating on demand management through fiscal and monetary restraint aimed at lowering

# In the Rigors of Violent Mortis

Right now our hearts are advancing from nature to violence and we cannot tell why we kill, why we mourn and why we suffer. That makes all of us victims of each other... Our only hope is that our hearts will soon pass from violence to morality when we shall not kill without a good reason or find a good reason not to kill.

racial purity impregnated a war upon the world, which cost the lives of millions. The horrors of the communist regimes are still fresh in our memories.

Terror is often essential to temper ideology. Spartacus's rebellion was powered by his dream to win 'equal rights' for the slaves. It was his dearest dream to die in absolute equality in a single combat with Crassus who symbolised every Roman master of that time. Before the last battle,

transformed into science. On the contrary, the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre argued that 'dirty hands' are necessary in politics and that a man with so-called bourgeois inhibitions about bloodshed cannot usefully serve a revolutionary cause. Sartre's attachment to the ideal of revolution tended to increase as he grew older, and in some of his later writings he suggested that violence might even be a good thing in itself.

their rivals over turf control or profit sharing? Could any idea living even on the margin of a genuine philosophy justify slaughters, which make politics look no more than an absurd wedge between gangsterism and gallantry?

Hence, what is true for the Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is true for ideology and terror - the measuring of either of these two related quantities produces uncertainty in measurement of the other. That means, if we try to measure the terror unleashed on the Russian society by Stalin, we cannot tell how far the communist ideology actually worked to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. Again, if we try to ascertain the success of the Cultural Revolution in China, we need to overlook its reign of terror.

Where do we draw the line between ideology and terror when senseless violence is unleashed in the name of politics? If it is okay for a political activist to die for his belief, it must be okay for him to kill for that belief as well. But what belief propels one to take the life of his fellow comrade or opponent in order to secure his own interest? And can the concern of an individual or a group of individuals for parochial interests be essence of benevolent politics? The student leader, whose murder had prompted the car wrecking on the road, is said to have been a victim of factional politics. The motorists, whose vehicles were wrecked, were

victims of an even greater peril. It was nihilism, the terrible vacuum created in the bosom of ideology by the bastion of terror.

Thus nihilism is when terror dictates the terms of ideology, when both the innocent and the guilty are confounded in the same blind fury. Those who assassinated an aspiring student leader and those who protested his premature death, they all convulsed in the convoluted agony of an inordinate distress. But how does one explain the fate of the motorists who came under attack in all innocence, who knew nothing about sowing of the crime yet reaped its tragedy?

They represented the final analysis of distended depravity, when morality went desperate over its own bankruptcy. Between those who killed and those who mourned, the motorists were the victims of insanity. In 1793 Saint-Just said, 'The human heart advances from nature to violence, from violence to morality.' The Russian revolutionary Kalyayev refused to attack on Grand Duke Sergei because he didn't want to kill the children who were riding in the same carriage with him. In the transition of his heart from violence to morality, Kalyayev taught us that an idealistic man would know where to draw the line between terror and ideology.

Right now our hearts are advancing from nature to violence and we cannot tell why we kill, why we mourn and why we suffer. That makes all of us victims of each other, and, as Breton said, violence is the only adequate mode of expression of this absurd condition. Our only hope is that our hearts will soon pass from violence to morality when we shall not kill without a good reason or find a good reason not to kill.

## CROSSTALK

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan



Spartacus crucified a Roman citizen to show his men the fate, which was in store for them if they lost. When Spartacus died in the hands of slaves like himself, Crassus crucified six thousand slaves on the road from Capua to Rome. In his revenge, Crassus proved right his own ideology that masters calculate, at an usurious price, the price of their own blood.

Even though the ultimate aim of every ideology is to diminish human sufferings, terror erupts when excessive evil means are used to attain good ends. The British philosopher Karl Popper criticised ideology because it rests on a logical mistake; namely the notion that history can be

Sartre was then able to draw a distinction between philosophy and ideology in which he reserved the term philosophy for those major systems of thought, such as the Rationalism of Descartes or the Idealism of Hegel, which dominate men's minds at a certain moment in history. He defined an ideology as a minor system of ideas, living on the margin of the genuine philosophy and exploiting the domain of the greater system.

Do we put the assassinations and their consequent violence under a genuine philosophy or its margin? Could any genuine philosophy inspire murder of young activists in the hands of

## OPINION

# Moral Encroachments

A Mawaz

MANY of the local political policies pursued by the leaders of the political parties may be classified as moral encroachments, impinging on the established values of life which have survived the tides of time and place. This is due to the lust for power, and indulging in nepotism to please the followers and political and supportive workers, for continued support of the party for obvious misuse of power and influence for indefinite periods. If some politicians are corrupt then how much the private sector is responsible for it?

The results are visible physically, in the encroachment of public lands and water bodies by powerful vested groups. Two such cases were boldly reported by *The Daily Star* (Nov 19): the demolition of part of some costly structures of modern building/s in DRA/College Street; and the ugly fairy tale of imported soya oil mixed with water to dilute for

strengthen?) the loan default cases.

The third component is the spill over of the various PARC reports and recommendations. The political regimes simply cannot tame the entrenched civil service, as no core or tangible public administrative reforms could be carried out by any regime during the last two decades (leaving out the decade of the 1970s as the settling down period after the revolution).

In another report on the same days (Nov 19) issue of the newspaper, a Minister debunked the WB for offering more advice than funds; quietly ignoring the siphoning effect of foreign aid funds due to rampant institutionalised corruption in this country of bottomless basket. Let us face our national weaknesses openly and boldly, without feeling shy

self-analysis can never be demeaning.

The problem is that the political masters wish to have it both ways: the corrupted helping hands (both in the public and private sectors) fill the private coffers. The question then arises why have respect for politics in Dhaka, when the weak-kneed political leaders cannot deliver, and in the lukewarm efforts displayed to the naive public, the mess created is worse confounded?

Elections and change of regimes and parties are no solutions, unless and until there is a mass movement to root out corrupt practices; which the politicians are not qualified to lead. Now the shopkeepers and business houses have started mobilising whistle battalions in the localities to pounce upon the

innumerable gangs of toll collectors and terrorists and mastaans (mostly in their twenties). It is an established fact that the latter cannot exist without the knowledge of the law enforcing agencies.

Why the unofficial political godfathers are not being officially recognised and their names publicly disclosed? At another (top) level, the Mayor of Chittagong is openly opposing a huge government approved project of setting up a large container terminal near the port under a joint foreign investment scheme. Had the opposition opposed this move, the ruling regime would have brought the skies down. The two ports are under-performing, and remedial solutions are available, but not enforced by the inefficient authorities. Attention of the Cabinet is drawn to this type of hypocritical policy stands,

in case after case, eroding public confidence. Vote for whom during the next elections?

When parties or agencies (political or otherwise) offer themselves for public service, they should abide by a Code of Conduct, (even if unwritten), and forget about personal and private stakes in the public domain. In our public service, the moral and ethical boundaries are there only on paper, but not in practice. Who can tame the bureaucrats? (None but themselves). So let them draft a PARC recommendations for public debate. It would be an interesting debate; because they cannot go back on the public verdict on their own DFA.

We have two big problem areas, the politics (run by the holy politicians) and the administration or the civil service, otherwise known as the bureaucracy. Both these species are everlasting; hence there is little hope!