

## Rally permitted and then clubbed by police

*Let breach of words be not the rule*

**C**RACKDOWN by the police on Awami League workers who were trying to hold a rally in the Gulistan area close to their party office is dismal news. It's so not just because a rally was disrupted by the police which has become pretty much a standard culture in our country. It's also primarily because this rally had official permission to be held. Despite having that they were clubbed and teargassed away. If permitted rallies are not allowed to be held, then what kind of special official sanction would be needed to hold a rally must also be announced. Clearly what exists now isn't enough.

Furthermore, we are surprised to know that accredited journalists were harassed when they were trying to gain entry into the Sangsad Bhaban on the day. Even though 'special passes' issued by the parliament sectt. were shown by them at the gate, the security staff would not let them in. The fact that the matter was somewhat sorted out later on at the intercession of the Director of Public Relations of the parliament sectt. hardly absolves the initial attitude shown to the media men.

It's understood that the government was uneasy about the possible trouble that was threatened by the AL when the repeal bill pertaining to display of the portrait of Bangabandhu was being processed for passage that day. But no matter what the threat, the point of granting permission and then refusing to let the official order be implemented casts a shadow on the government rather than the opposition.

This incident unfortunately signals an established practice and the scene is an all too familiar a reminder that we have learnt to rule by the stick and not by the word. The history of every excess accumulates to create an environment where breaking the law could be the rule.

Media reports that the Mayor of Dhaka who was supposed to address the meeting showed the police his permission document but the police said that "higher authorities" had forbidden the meeting to be held. And herein perhaps lies the crisis where 'higher authorities' can overrule official orders and the law enforcement authorities are run by such constructs.

If only we could accept that such violations are not the stuff of which democratic governance is made things would start to move in a healthy direction. We counsel the rule of law for all. We are confident that wise thoughts will ultimately prevail.

## Cleanliness drive

*Community participation holds the key*

**T**HERE was enthusiasm in the air, as Prime Minister Khaleda Zia shovelled a heap of garbage off a Karwan Bazar road to mark the inauguration of a week-long, countrywide cleanliness drive. She made a clarion call to an attentive audience: "Turn it (cleanliness drive) into a social movement." It was all quite encouraging for a major bazar area that really needs to be seriously oriented to maintaining a clean environment. There is something more that we need to bear in mind; whenever the head of a government launches a programme of public interest, there is usually a receptive audience, lots of excitement and resolve. But the positive impression created at the start begins to taper off down the road. Take for example, the annual plantation week. Ministers, high government officials, political leaders all get busy planting trees at one function or the other. But the seriousness does not prove sufficiently percolatory in the end.

Nevertheless, we hope that the cleanliness drive the prime minister has launched would truly be turned into a social movement, because we can no longer afford to be indifferent to the health hazards indiscriminate dumping of waste poses. Environmental degradation has become a major challenge for the country. Environmentally, we are headed for a disaster. Our air is polluted, so are our natural water resources. We have allowed mindless deforestation and dereliction of natural water bodies. Absence of waste management has turned almost every nook and corner of the urban areas into a virtual garbage dump.

The cleanliness drive could be the starting point of making things right, of turning the tide around, of improving our largely anti-environment attitude into a positive mould. To ensure all this, however, the relevant agencies of the government must take the drive to the grassroots. In that scheme of things, community participation will play a pivotal role. The city corporation needs to play the leadership role there. Most importantly, they must ensure that the cleanliness drive continues throughout the year instead of being restricted to a ceremonial week.

## Do we have a role in Afghanistan?



M ANWARUL HAQ

**B**ANGLADESH did extend its unstinted support to the US led coalition when the ground was being prepared to fight terrorism targeting the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. It extended unconditional use of its airspace, sea ports and other key infrastructural facilities after very quick but extensive consultations with a conclave of foreign policy experts and with all major parties on September 18, only seven days after the terror attacks in

fully to the US request. Expectation of any special economic dividend from the US still continue to elude Bangladesh. As an anti-terror coalition ally, nothing has been done by Washington for Dhaka to receive duty-free and quota-free access for its RMG sector whose 40 per cent share at stake in the US market has already plummeted considerably. Nothing in the form of debt relief and nothing in any other known economic sphere

from Dhaka. The recent eruption of pockets of conflicts in Afghanistan calls for a cautious approach. Besides, joining the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan requires more than anything considerable sums as financial contributions in the Trust Fund. Engagement of our soldiers in Afghanistan means huge financial support for moving men, providing logistics and obtaining very expensive military hardware. Besides, it

Kabul mission will soon open a direct diplomatic link with Afghanistan through its resident mission in neighbouring Uzbekistan.

The intent of Bangladesh has always been to be a close ally of the Afghan people. The Afghans have been very sympathetic and helpful to thousands of Bengali civilians and military personnel escaping the persecution of the Pakistani regime during the country's war of liberation in 1971 and beyond.

BRAC is interested to provide basic education to girls in Afghanistan while the Grameen Bank would like to get involved in micro-credit programmes and IT development efforts.

There is also scope for entrepreneurs to participate in the construction process through supply of manpower. Bangladesh's involvement in the agricultural and rural development of Afghanistan is also a likely possibility. For traders there is a huge market for tea and jute.

Bangladesh would do well to take note of what was stated in a UNDP report. It said, "There was not yet a national government (in Afghanistan) that enjoyed the trust of all Afghans and there was no existing Afghan capacity, except what was in organisations such as the

UNDP report. That was mentioned in a UNDP briefing report prepared some time back. But what was also mentioned in the same report still holds true: "That the more Afghan involvement in programmes, the better, because of deep resentment of foreign interference."

Afghanistan's deep distrust of foreigners is legendary. That Afghan hospitality, too, has its limits was perhaps manifested when the tide turned so quickly against Saudi-born Osama Bin Laden after the US attack.

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