

## Rally permitted and then clubbed by police

*Let breach of words be not the rule*

CRACKDOWN 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 coalitions 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*

THERE 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?



THERE has been talk about Bangladesh's participation in the peace and development process of Afghanistan ever since British Prime Minister Tony Blair came calling in early January.

The recent visit of US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca also carried an open message when she expressed the hope that Dhaka will have an active involvement in the Afghanistan's reconstruction process and as a leading peacekeeper participate in the peacekeeping, too.

Bangladesh's policy makers are now faced with two aspects of involvement in war ravaged Afghanistan. First there is the expressed desire by many western countries, particularly the United States and Great Britain that it would send its troops to act as peacekeepers. Second, to seize a window of opportunity in the Afghan reconstruction phase.

Bangladesh is still faced with a dilemma regarding sending of peacekeepers although it has openly committed that it will play an active role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Christina Rocca, in unequivocal terms stated at her press conference in Dhaka that, "Bangladesh's membership in the anti-terrorism coalition has helped to remind the world that it is a war against terror, not Islam. We look to Bangladesh for continued commitment and support."

Bangladesh 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.

Bureau for Asia and Pacific UN Development Programme (UNDP), during his recent Dhaka visit said that Bangladesh NGOs have already expressed an interest to work in Afghanistan. He had talks with Prof Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank and Fazle Hasan Abed of BRAC in this regard.

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.

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.

Despite it all, Bangladesh could perhaps participate in the Afghan reconstruction process if opportunity exists. But it must tread carefully.

M Anwarul Haq is the Diplomatic and Defence Correspondent of The Daily Star

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the US.

Policy planners in Dhaka decided to lend its voice and also stake its strategic facilities at the behest of Washington because it was perhaps the best option, or perhaps the only available option.

While submitting to the choice, Dhaka did not perhaps strike a bargain for receiving any sort of benefits, after the first phase of that war was over. Perhaps there was no scope for any bargain in a world then divided -- in President Bush's own words: "Either you are with us or against us."

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star on September 20, US ambassador Mary Ann Peters when asked if there will be compensation for Bangladesh for joining the coalition efforts and offering its facilities said in reply: "What particular kind of assistance will be sought or offered, or what particular help the US will give, I do not know. As you know the US has provided substantial development assistance to Bangladesh".

That was two days before the government decided to respond

has come in Dhaka's way.

No preferential market access means more closure of garments factories, shrinking empowerment of women, more people thrown out of jobs and more chances for escalating economic and social chaos, a situation the US publicly abhors Bangladesh to be faced with.

Christina Rocca when asked if it was unrealistic for Dhaka to expect Washington to make some economic concessions for supporting the coalition efforts in Afghanistan replied: "You joined the anti-terror coalition on your own accord. There were no terms or strings attached."

But despite the lack of any tangible benefits Dhaka still looks forward for engagement in Afghanistan as it wants to be an active partner in the process of stability in the South Asian scene. There is also a thinking in certain circles, rightly or wrongly, that in the long run a pro-US stand on Afghanistan could obtain some degree of American largesse.

The earlier thinking of sending peacekeepers to Kabul is now receiving diminishing consideration

would mean playing a combat role unlike the normal blue helmet operations that characterizes traditional UN peace keeping in which Bangladesh tops the list.

While normal peacekeeping is under Article VI of the UN charter, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), popularly known as the Afghan Stabilization Force has been created under Chapter VII of the charter and calls for enforcement action.

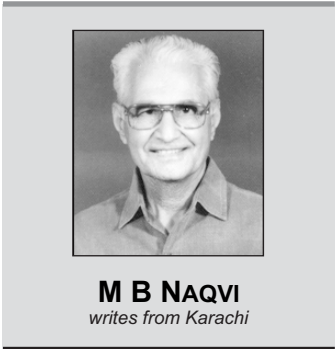
Bangladesh foreign secretary spelled out, Dhaka's future security role clearly when he said recently "We will not go for a combat role to Afghanistan."

A combatant's role would be risking too many lives and may generate animosity towards Bangladesh among various Afghan factions.

However, once the Trust Fund becomes formidable, Bangladesh troops could play an effective role in mine-sweeping, bridge building and medical operations. Perhaps that too would require a new UN resolution.

Dhaka short of reopening its

# Attack on church: Who did it?



A grenade attack was made on an international Protestant Church during Sunday service in the Diplomatic Enclave in Islamabad in which five persons died and 45 injured. It fits into a pattern. Not too long ago last year there was a similar attack on a church during the Sunday service in Bahawalpur in which a large number of persons were killed and many more wounded. In both the cases the attackers got away safely. If these be accepted as expressions of a virulent religious intolerance, as indeed it has to be, it is all too familiar. Far more incidents of targeted killings of minority Muslim sects are virtually an everyday affair. No matter what particulars in each incident, religious intolerance of an excessive kind is common to them all.

Also for Authority to condemn each such eruption in strongest terms and to order the security agencies to nab the culprits quickly is a regular feature; it happens almost every other day. What is also

common is that the killers walk away or drive away safely. The police have always drawn a blank. They are never found. Hundreds of such incidents have taken place in the last few years, claiming a horrendous number of casualties, mostly fatalities.

Also common is an expression of the suspicion of the ubiquitous 'Foreign Hand'. Every time an outrage of this nature takes place,

and Pakistan will continue to work shoulder to shoulder to win great they are waging against terrorism wherever it is found. The US President was also shocked and condemned the act while Pakistan's President was careful enough to say that the intention behind the crime was to harm Pakistan's domestic and international interests probably thinking of the image of the country abroad.

remnants of the old Afghan agency Khad. Even so, the two of them together will have to be -- to recruit those Pakistani Muslims who are otherwise quite happy in killing their fellow Pakistanis and others: Shias, Ahmedis, Christians and of course Americans, a la Daniel Pearl.

The choice of an international church close to American Embassy in the well-guarded Diplomatic Enclave suggests a repeat of Dan-

have known that many diplomats including Americans and other European people and many nations alongwith many Pakistanis attend the service of this church. The killers were registering, it is said, their protest against what the Americans have done in Afghanistan. Such people think they see the killers' nexus with the Taliban and Al Qaeda by way of being their supporters --- not unnecessarily organisationally.

Army can have dissidents in high places who would mastermind and allow such incidents. It seems too doubtful. What is more certain and obvious is the presence of a mind set that is--through and through with militant Islamic extremism.

The fact of the matter is that of all Jihadis, Taliban, Al Qaeda, sectarian terrorists and other killers of minorities belong to a single recognised generic school that has grown up in Pakistan over the years. That it takes various competing forms and organisations is also a fact, though the mind set remains much the same. These militants, the killers, are half educated boys from poor families who had gone to madrasas of the Deobandi sub-sect of Sunni Islam and are to be found in all Jihadist extremists organisations; they can, and do, switch organisations with ease because the set of the beliefs and outlook on life is the same.

It is this mind set that needs to be zeroed in on -- not by security forces so much as by other politically enlightened leaders of opinion and society. Security forces are meant to be entrusted with only the preventive side of crime, the duties of maintaining strict law and order and of catching the culprits with a view to trying them in courts of law, with due process. If they start acting as thought police, most things will get mixed up and nothing good will get done.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

## PLAIN WORDS

It is the mind set that needs to be zeroed in on -- not by security forces so much as by other politically enlightened leaders of opinion and society. Security forces are meant to be entrusted with only the preventive side of crime, the duties of maintaining strict law and order and of catching the culprits with a view to trying them in courts of law, with due process.

high officials do not fail to wonder whether India's intelligence agency RAW has not master-minded it.

In this case too, the President of Pakistan Gen. Pervez Musharraf has condemned the perpetrators of the horrible crime. He has ordered all security agencies to investigate and get to the bottom of the matter. He also ordered the arrest of the criminals forthwith. Since the incident happened in a church situated only so many meters away from the American Embassy and there were American diplomatic personnel among the dead and wounded, American Ambassador to Pakistan Wendy Chamberlin made a statesman-like statement saying that US

Who are these people who are out to harm the interests of Pakistan both in terms of domestic politics and internationally? Insofar the RAW's responsibility is concerned, it has to be seen as sort of reflection quite similar to that of the Indians who do not fail to see ISI behind every bush. Even if it was RAW which has masterminded it, it has to be assumed that it has somehow been able to recruit so many Pakistani Muslims who are so strongly imbued with the Islamic zeal that they resort to killing sprees of all manner of "others". How does RAW do that? It beats one. An explanation has often been given. RAW is supposed to be operating through the

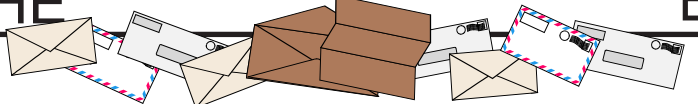
iel. The "others" are now allies of the current Pakistan ruler Gen. Musharraf, with whom they have scores to settle. Most observers think that, one way or another, Islamic extremists, belonging to the parties and groups that have been banned, are responsible for this gruesome incident, as of most other outbreaks of violence against minorities including sectarian violence. It has been widely noted that they have now been able to regroup and assert their presence. Sectarian and minority killings are their signature tune.

There are others who think that the choice of the place gives away the intention of the killers: they must

These people zero in on the intention to kill some Americans as the driving force behind the incident.

There are others who think that the main motive driving behind this crime, like so many others, is Pakistan's domestic politics. There are supposedly some erstwhile supporters of the rulers from within their own constituency who are registering their protest against the policy changes made by Gen. Musharraf under American pressure. There are many Americans who share this view. American media have freely reported on this aspect of deteriorating law and order situation here. It is hard to accept whether a tightly disciplined force like the Pakistan

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



### On Bannya's reply

Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya's reply doesn't hold water. If bad recording system is to blame, then many other words could also be distorted. We listen to many old songs and no body could argue that a particular word in these songs has become distorted or like that.

Yes, sometimes words can be destroyed. In that case, not the pronunciation but the whole word would be destroyed, which can be easily understood.

In fact, one can easily (the Bengali speaking people) understand whether a word is mispronounced or has become distorted. Bannya's wording was wrong, no doubt about that. She should come up and acknowledge her fault instead of trying to cover it up. To err is human-- even for an expert.

Kazi Asif Ahmed  
Washington DC, USA

ness and ignorance pervade all spheres of our lives.

In her reply Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya mentioned "Our laws do not provide any redress... I had to stop halfway trying to take legal step ...". And in another place she mentions "... have little care for correctness of word ... are full of either wrong words or spelling mistakes". Alas!

A Distressed Observer  
Chittagong

### NGO fragmentation

There is a political split inside the ADAB, the collective body of the NGOs, and the fragmentation has now spilled over in the field (March 18).

The huge NGO network in Bangladesh is one of the largest in the world, and these field units have rendered valuable social services in the rural areas for many years to make statistical difference in output, development-wise.

It would be a pity if this network is riddled with political strife, although it might be necessary to spot the black sheep in the flock. The political parties seem to be interfering everywhere and in every sector. At the same time, it is understood that

the government has to keep an eye over the activities of the thousands of NGOs so that there is no misuse of power and resources.

The politicians have eroded the positive contributions of the trade and labour unions and other service bodies; all for self and party gains. The political leaders at the top have to come out with clear policy statements not to encourage undue politicisation of the established institutions in the country, just for political jealousy and enmity.

A time might come soon when the people might reject these undemocratic gestures emanating from weak political culture. The donor agencies (which met in Paris recently) seem to be very clear about the negative image they have formed about governance in Bangladesh.

Mwz  
Dhaka

### Political self-survival tactics

The public condemnation is being exposed more and more against bad politics and third class leadership ("Seminar Under BUP", March 17). The momentum will pick up (like

an oncoming avalanche), as the citizens are already disillusioned after six months of poor governance by the newly elected regime (even with two-third majority).

Why Bangladesh cannot produce genuine leaders who are above sycophancy and potty ideologies? The Awami League's only asset is the Bangabandhu image it cannot think beyond it and without this Bangabandhu logo. The party is stunted cerebrally, and it knows what is wrong with it, but continues to exploit the voters with purified garbage suitable for nincompoops. These mighty Awami Leaguers are taking the nation on a ride, as its achievement during its tenure is nothing remarkable, except eroding established institutions and enforcing brand names.

Today we need the right type of catalyst for purging the weaknesses and major vices in the present debased political culture (the minor vices will sort itself out as per chaos theory). Both the major parties have a lot of empty space in the cerebrum, which have to be filled in with the right type of motivational stuff. If 48 per cent of the candidates at the polls are industrialists and business tycoons, what can we expect of the

big bank-loan defaulters? There should be more women in the JS, and the local government set up has to be fortified.

The voters do not vote to ensure the survival of questionable parties, but to enhance public service by volunteer politicians who like to help the helpless, not themselves.

Ajja  
Dhaka

### Arrest, remand and torture

It seems like that democracy in Bangladesh is a big illusion. More I like to see Bangladesh as a good example of the Emerging World's democracy, more I see, it is becoming a good example of Illiberal Democracy as illustrated by Fareed Zakaria.

If you happen to be on the wrong side of the party politics in Bangladesh, you can be put in jail at any time. If the party in power wants to make your life miserable, they can do it without any hesitation. Our police force- the boss of all corruption and mother of all crime syndicates - do serve thy master, more mercilessly than the master himself might have wanted.

In the name of remanding - which is basically a judge's order to keep the arrested individual under custody for a limited time - being used by the police as a license to torture in the name of interrogation. Torturing an arrested person is against any norms and forms of international human rights laws, and I guess Bangladesh is a signatory to this International Human Rights Charter. If I understand, Bangladesh Constitution protects individual rights, and it stands against any type of torturing its citizens. However, the law enforcing agencies are using some bureaucratic loopholes to express their barbaric behaviour, albeit with blessings of the party in power.

Currently, it is the Awami League who is in the receiving end of the torturing business, however, when they were in power, they also abused power and tortured arrested individuals fair and square.

I call upon all the decent people, civil societies, media, and intellectual to campaign to end torturing as a method of interrogation or for any other reason. Torturing can't be the substitute for the inefficiency of the law enforcing agencies in Bangladesh. I particularly urge the enlight-

ened members of the party in power to help remove this vicious and uncivil method. By removing the black laws, they would not only be serving the country, they would also be serving themselves-- I may come when they would be on the other side of the fence.

Dr. Nasir Ahmed  
Grambling State University,  
Louisiana, USA

### A good move by BTV

On March 20 there was an announcement on BTV for audition of English news. Thanks to the new Information Minister! We now look forward for an impartial and fair audition so that the real good ones are identified and the quality of BTV news goes up. Otherwise, why go into all that trouble? Please forget your personal relationship and hire good people for this important job. I would once again remind the authority that people all over the world are watching our English news.

I would also like to draw attention of the Information Minister to the standard of Bangla news reporting. The pronunciation, tone and delivery of almost all the reporters are a

disaster. We are proud of our mother tongue Bangla and we should be able to speak it correctly without any colloquial intonation. If at all somebody possesses one, why put him/her on air? Why some of the reporters do not come on screen? For what particular reason do they hesitate to show their faces? The viewers would not only love to hear the nice voice, clear intonation but also see the beautiful, young faces of the reporters.

Anjali Akbar  
Azimpur Road, Dhaka

### "Axis of evil?"

Mr. E S' letter (March 17) reflects his total hate for Islam. Mr. Mohammad Sohail pointed out only the question that as a pioneer of democracy and advocating all over human rights how can USA violate herself that? No one supports the terrorist and innocent killings.

In revenge of attack of September 11, does Mr. ES know how many innocent people USA has killed? No injustice is justified. May be in Bangladesh jail there are many innocent people but should USA need to follow this example?

AB  
Dhaka