

HM's philosophy and Nero's fiddling

Myriads of hatreds are due to the Home Minister who has ignited Naushin's parents filial sentiment by his philosophical piffle. The whole nation is crippled owing to the alarming deterioration of law and order and the security of life has become insecure. The kid-glove method adopted by the law-enforcing agencies is languid because the frantic effort of our Home Minister is already invested in the arena of philosophy.

Nero, the brutish Roman emperor was engaged in fiddling when Rome was burning. Our fatalistic Home Minister is alike Nero. When the whole Bangladesh is witnessing its worst law and order situation the Home Minister is babbling philosophy. Rome was burnt to ashes, Bangladesh is nearer to Aceladama, if the law-enforcers are becoming philoso-pher other than fiddlers.

Hierophant
Dhaka

I just can't imagine what prompted Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury to utter those words in connection with the tragic death of Nowshin. Will the Home Minister sit back and watch people being murdered and resort to philosophy?

After the Meghna Launch disaster in which nearly 400 people died, the Home Minister remarked, "there is no guarantee that a good launch would not sink.... even the Titanic sank."

Probably, it is time for the Home Minister to resign and start writing books on philosophy.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Tax the NGOs

The Finance Minister is quite correct that the tax net needs to be widened. However, rather than cripple the country's already struggling private sector with new taxes, what about taxing the NGO sector?

The NGOs have long since moved away from providing purely public services like health care, education and microcredit. They are now running Internet Service Providers and commercial banks, and renting out space in their multi-storied buildings. They employ large numbers of expatriate workers for annual salaries, which are roughly equal to the yearly profit of an average garments factory; one even hears of consultants' salaries in the \$100,000 to \$200,000 range. And yet to my knowledge, most of these individuals are completely tax exempt.

The Finance Minister should bear in mind that taxing local industry has a big risk. With our liberal trade rules and low import duties, it can simply result in substitution of local industry by cheaper foreign products. The NGO sector, however, does not face the constraint of market competition and is thus a lower-risk tax subject. In particular, taxing foreign nationals employed by NGOs should result in substitution of these expensive employees with local staff, reducing the amount of aid which actually leaks out of Bangladesh in the name of expatriate salaries.

Zeeshan Hasan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Rabi Nyogi

I must congratulate you for your editorial on Rabi Nyogi. Dedicated people like him deserve respect from the society. I almost started believing that we stopped respecting dedication and stopped respecting people who fought all throughout their life to defend what they believed in. Your editorial has brought optimism in me.

Waheed Nabi
Sheffield, England

Nasim Khan, the leader of the stranded Biharis

About a quarter million stranded Pakistanis (commonly known as Biharis) have living in innumerable squalid camps throughout Bangladesh since the liberation of the country amidst all deprivation and frustration.

The miserable and pitiable lives they have been leading is known to all. They have been struggling for the last several decades under the leadership of Alhaj M Nasim Khan Chief Patron, SPGRCC and Leader of stranded Pakistanis. He is one of the remaining comrades of Pakistan Movement who had most actively participated in all-political movements of the sub-continent.

He is now over 80 and has been suffering from various diseases for the last several years. The right portion of his body has totally been paralysed and remains confined to bed. We the Stranded Pakistan most humbly appeal to Pakistan Government through Pakistan High Commissioner in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Government and Islamic donor agencies to come forward and help save the life of octogenarian leader of stranded Pakistanis.

S M Aslam Pervaz
Convenor, Citizen Committee of Stranded Pakistanis
in Bangladesh, Bansbari, Saidpur

Terrorism continues

in the Middle East

Writing about the Sept 11 terrorists, Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for *The New York Times*, wrote: "Poverty is frequently mentioned as a root cause ... But we all know that the Sept. 11 hijackers came from privilege backgrounds. Look at ETA in Spain, Red Brigades in Italy, Aum Shinrikyo in Japan, the IRA in Ireland or Timothy McVeigh. They suggest middle-class alienation rather than Third World deprivation."

To understand this alienation, we must ask the question: What the hijackers want? It is obvious that the Saudi and Egyptian terrorists who attacked the WTC felt humiliated by the U.S. domination of the Middle East. They saw this as an obstacle to their aspiration to impose an atavistic Islamic order free from pernicious Western influences like pluralism, female education, cinema, television and free press. The attack on the WTC is only the first salvo in a long war to force the United States withdraw from the region. They will not stop as long as America maintains its military and political presence in the Middle East.

But we know that any American withdrawal from the region would be quickly followed by a new invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Husssein who has his own plan for domination. The second Iraqi conquest of Kuwait would raise the fears of Iran, which had been a victim of Iraqi aggression before and would be tempted to strike at Iraq. Others may also join. In a short time, most Middle Eastern states may be at each other's throats, endangering the global oil supplies. Most European and non-oil producing Third World countries would face an economic catastrophe, which would affect all.

The United States cannot afford to leave the region just because some people feel humiliated by the presence of a super power, which remains the biggest obstacle to their

Murky millionaire Mahbub

A very good investigative reporting (Murky way to millions, May 15) on what 'system loss' really is.

I am sure your investigative reporters can also reveal such murky millionaire meter readers in the power and telephone sectors also.

You have mentioned several times in the report - 'political blessing' 'top political leader' 'close to policymaker' - can we not know who this millionaire maker is and his lifestyle. Definitely he must be getting share of this corrupt practise, or else why should he make the reported phone call to the airport? Why can't the BAC touch him? How many more Mahbubs does he patronise?

Unless you start naming such politicians who are root evil of our country, nothing much will be achieved.

I would also ask you to publish the names of the industries and the their owners who has been profiting from Mahbub's meter tampering. These parties are also responsible for making him what he is today. Also, such so-called industrialists must be defrauding the public exchequer in matters of VAT and IT also.

FM
Chittagong

Not only in Titas but T&T, WASA, PDB, DESA and utility organisation we will find countless Mahbubur Rahman who became millionaire without any struggle or investment.

But when the entire system of our society is corrupt and ruined

bit active these people stay off the streets for a few weeks. But not for long and they are always back worse than before.

Just like the ghettos of America, they have a network of young boys who act as watch outs and informers. If the police is in the area they know before anyone else and if there is a particularly juicy target up for grabs then they are the first to find out.

As the report mentions, one of their main targets is the garments waste fabric business. One way to regularise this would be to give a contract, based on the area, for the waste disposal business. This way at least factory owners would be spared from terrorism.

Another main means of extortion is their fundraising for cricket clubs and social functions to commemo-

rated out to be worse than ever. Could anyone please tell us whom should we turn to now?

Rana
Sardah College

"Migs and helicopters"

We can think about Bangladeshi defence spending in two ways. In one we can regard India as a truly renegade neighbour that can pounce on us at any given moment. Adopting this view, we have no choice but to make sure our military is strong enough to counter the inevitable onslaught. Given India's military strength that would mean we have to virtually dedicate our entire budget behind militarising the nation. Anything less would imply grave national insecurity.

The second approach is to regard India-Bangladesh border conflict as a minor threat to our security and not a harbinger of massive conflict. In that case, it would suffice to have an efficiently equipped border patrol. The armed forces would also be required for patrolling our skies and waters, coping with natural calamities and assisting in infrastructure development. I do not think that for these purposes it is necessary for military spending to be as significant as it currently is.

Given our history of sporadic skirmishes on various issues, we have no reason to expect an altruistic neighbour in India. But should our scepticism extend to gross suspicion and beget a climate of virulent national insecurity? I am inclined to think not.

If there is any real threat to our national sovereignty it exists on the cultural and economic front. In the absence of a sound political, economic and cultural structure, it is that much easier for larger forces to exert their hegemonic influence on us. Unless we can define our own economic and cultural identity, it will not be long before we are just a pawn moulded in the image of stronger international associates. The "invasion" is more likely to happen in the form of media influence, economic and resource dependency. In fact it can be argued that the take-over is well underway.

Therefore if we truly are concerned with our national sovereignty it is wiser to focus on socio-economic empowerment such as improving educational facilities, healthcare provision, financial structures and entrepreneurial opportunities. The cultural lexicon has to be strengthened so that Bangladesh does become a mini-Bollywood or a small Hollywood.

We are much more likely to achieve a strong and independent Bangladesh with word processors than with AK-47s.

IZ
USA

Unworthy mandate in 2001 election

People of Bangladesh revived their hope for a democracy in 1991. Unfortunately, the democratic rulers of the 5th Parliament nursed terrorism, violence, corruption, and dirty politics in the same manner the military rulers did.

People elected Awami League in 1996 election. But nothing changed. In the 2001 election, helpless than ever, people opted for BNP's 4-party alliance.

Unfortunately, the situation has

turned out to be worse than ever. Could anyone please tell us whom should we turn to now?

Rana
Sardah College

The rivers of discontent

The recent launch tragedy on Meghna is a symbol of a national symptom of negligence of regulatory functions and indifferent routine maintenance by government agencies, and absence of a healthy code of conduct by the operators in different areas of public activities. In a riverine region dominated by a huge and complex internal waterways transport network, it is unbelievable to read in the papers that the government has only five inspectors to inspect several thousand vessels. The callousness and inefficiency is indirectly due to inadequate recurring budgets in the relevant departments of the regulatory and monitoring agencies.

The issue has to be probed at the central planning stage, when the projects (including the BMRE aspects) are approved by the NEC and other processing bodies. The government as facilitator has to provide the minimum level of administrative infrastructure to ensure proper safety and efficiency levels in the public services.

Nothing much can be expected

Drugs in music



from the political representatives, due to the poor prevailing political culture, but the civil service has to be tuned up from time to time by the elected regimes. This exercise is being constantly neglected.

The political focus is always on new development projects, and not on routine efficiency. This attitude must be changed.

A Mawaz
Dhaka

What should we do?

Ours is a poor country. Our fiscal policy is mostly dependent on foreign aids. A few days ago an aid amounting to about 264 crore taka was cancelled due to alleged corruption against one incumbent minister. The government promised to probe into the matter.

Now the question is whether we should debunk the alleged appropriation and regain the foreign aids or publish white papers of the past govt. as a political vendetta.



Md shamimuzzaman
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

BDR bailout for Dhaka

This refers to the lead news published in your esteemed daily of 14 May.

I must admit that I was not too excited about the measures now being contemplated by the ruling party. The state of our law and order situation is not a matter, which can be dealt with by periodic extraordinary hit and run measures. We shall have to deal with its root causes.

It has been reported time and again in the national media that most of terrorist and major criminal gangs are under the patronisation of influential political quarters in collaboration with active support of corrupt members of various law-enforcing agencies. Given the background what miracle will take place bringing in the BDR! If the police who are certainly aware of the activities and whereabouts nearly of all the major criminal networking group are unable to nab them how is BDR is expected to do the job. Consider the fact that BDR who has very little and no knowledge of the criminals referred to has to depend entirely on the very agencies that have reportedly failed to deal with the situation.

What is the guarantee that the concerned law-enforcing civil agencies will now extend their co-

vous" implications of corruption in the development funds handed over to the five generals.

I am certainly willing to accept and hope that it is true and there was no corruption.

But do please explain the rationale by which serving generals are given development money from Upazila Parishad Development Assistance Fund? If memory serves me right, the former army chief also ran a failed election campaign and this same paper reported in great detail about his promotion the day before his retirement. Wasn't then the development money given to him as a sweetener for his prospective constituents? Correct me if I am wrong, but wasn't there a great deal of criticism of AL making him the army chief in the first place?

I would also beg to differ on the comment that "to drag the names of the army top brass amounts to breaking institutional norms". If the names of army brass allegedly implicated in corruption, according to the White Paper, is inviolate, then why not the names of our erstwhile PM and her cohorts? Even if the names of the serving generals were withheld, which I agree may be justified, why should the name of the former army chief also be withheld?

Even the syntax of this article is skewed, for instance, "Where the revelatory appetite went berserk..." What sort of a comment is that? Is

I have been appalled to note how some 'band artists' in the country are practicing music. I went to a concert of 'Nagar Baul' recently, and I must say that I am not impressed about the way some artists, including Nagar Baul itself, practised music.

The artists got drugged before they performed on stage. 'Fans' believe that it is necessary, and it is so necessary that the fans themselves took drugs of different types sitting in front of the stage. Since fans made up a substantial part of the audience, the atmosphere became disgustingly unhealthy.

Such an open drug culture needs immediate attention from the concerned authority and should be abolished before it destroys lives of the young people in the society.

A concerned citizen
Dhaka

operation to BDR? We have seen BDR getting into action on earlier occasions also in recovery of illegal arms, the results are but too well known.

The root cause for most of the major crimes in city based locations particularly in the capital are results of utter police inaction, not efficiency, coupled with patronisation by some acutely corrupt, power hungry sharks of both the major political parties.

Therefore the key to the success in curbing the ever deteriorating state of law and order lies in the hands of our political hierarchy and the Police themselves more than anyone else.

Shamsher Chowdhury
Dhaka

Synonyms in BUET

Could you please explain to me what "Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology" means? I ask this question because 'technol-ogy' and 'engineering' are synonyms and they do not need to come together in such a short phrase as BUET.

In Bangla the repetition is avoided (*Bangladesh Prokoushal Biswabiddalaya*).

A former student of English Department
Dhaka University

Please be careful

There was an error in *The Daily Star* May 14 issue. In the dateline of the front page the Bangla dater was wrongly printed as Jaistya 1, 1409. But it was the Baisakh 31, 1409.

Please be careful with your every alphabet because I totally and fully believe in *The Daily Star*.

Nazmul Haque
On e-mail

White paper fall out

I am glad to see that the Daily Star has leapt to the defence of "pre-sumptive, maligning and mischie-

this paper trying to say that revelations of allegations of corruption cannot be made if those people being accused are considered, by implication, beyond the scope of public discourse?

I absolutely and completely agree that the army should not be politicised and that both BNP and AL are culpable in this. But I'd imagine handing out MP nominations to freshly retired officers should also then be discouraged?

Astreix
Dhaka

Matir Moina

The censors had no right to ban Matir Moina. Accepting censorship in any way of form is handing over a part of our freedom of choice to the government. Do you really want the government to tell you what you can or cannot watch? Remember these are the same people who support millionaire meter readers, whose colleague is the philosopher Home Minister and who manage to launch massive drives that just harass innocent people and nab toy politicians.

This reminds me of a few other famous cases of film censorship. In 1974 the BBFC (British Board of Film Certification) gave Exorcist an X rating; apparently it gave people heart attacks. Stanley Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange" was also banned in Britain because of the copycat violence it seemed to be engendering.

Another famous case was the controversy over "The Last Temptation of Christ" in Italy for blasphemy. But in this case, although I don't think so, the Church had a valid argument in regards to blasphemy.

But "Matir Moina" is neither blasphemy nor violent or scary. Banning this film was just another example of the government stifling creativity and exposing its petty bureaucratic red tape.

MA
Dhaka



Do we have an image?

Image of Bangladesh

It was a circus when our PM arrived at JFK Airport in New York. Couple of hundred expatriate BNP leaders and supporters went to the airport to receive Begum Khaleda Zia, but got agitated *deshi* style due to our ever opportunity loving bureaucrats and diplomats who stole the grand prize (PM) from them. It led to a very unpleasant and vulgar outburst not that uncommon thanks to our New Yorker *Deshi* Political workers (?), who are keeping the eternal flame of uncivilised *deshi* politics in its original form in New York.

These are the bad apples that tarnish our national image at public places like airports and in front of UN headquarters. For an example, UN headquarters is the number one choice by Awami League supporters to protest against the current BNP government. What is the logic behind making your own country a laughing stock before the world community?

Internationally, Bangladesh is facing a lot of flak due to public relation disasters one after one. It started with Awami League's match fixing to attain "Taliban Test Status" for Bangladesh during

bureaucrats, thugs turn leaders, loan defaulters, traitors using Islam, portrait worshippers, and pathological liars who are defaulting on people's trust every single time.

Nafees
USA, Texas