

Death at BSMMUH

Hospital negligence surpassed by JCD vandalism

YES, the patient's friends were aggrieved, but what they did in reaction was to bring the whole hospital to a standstill for no fault of the hundreds of its patients. They were held ransom to an arrogant display of power at its vilest worst, the ruling party syndrome literally erupting with a blinding blaze.

We demur at the horrendous backlash to the death of Rashidul Islam, an assistant secretary of the now-suspended central committee of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) on Tuesday.

There are two sides to the episode: negligence of the hospital authorities and the rowdy student behaviour. Let's treat this in a reverse order taking up the second aspect first for the simple reason that the ugly reaction could not bring the dead back to life, far less do any honour to his memory and that other patients suffered while public property was damaged.

During the AL rule, almost a similar rumpus was created following the death of a student at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Again and again, we see the same ruling party syndrome -- thanks to the arrogance of its student or youth wing. So, it's now for the incumbent leaders of BNP to address this persistent tyranny with all the power at their command, so that the hydra-headed Frankenstein growing within its fold cannot ransack its credibility right, left and centre.

As for the systemic drawbacks in hospitals these are so inbuilt that they are bound to recur anyway. Rashidul Islam was hospitalised with critical ailment comprising brain tumour that needed immediate operation plus a high blood pressure condition verging on cardiac arrest which actually happened. Yet, when he was taken down the stairs for tests not even a nurse was detailed to accompany him. The authorities should have kept glued to him, constantly monitoring a patient in his near-terminal conditions.

As a patient admitted to a ward and then to a cabin at the behest of Amanullah Aman, himself the state minister for health, he was expected to receive the closest of medical attention conceivable. But the fact that even he was denied it, only goes to show how patently flawed the system is. The guardian of the deceased pointed to doctors being drawn to the on-going BMA electioneering so much so that they could hardly pay any attention to a patient.

A thorough investigation is called for with safeguards built into the composition of the probe body as well as its terms of reference.

Slums, railway tracks and public safety

At the end it all boils down to governance

YESTERDAY this newspaper published a photograph of a section of Dhaka-Narayangan railway track showing overflowing human habitation set up on the two sides of the track with a huge vegetable market with numerous shops and hundreds of buyers shopping in them. The slippers that hold up the tracks have all disappeared under the mud that accumulated through daily use. The railway tracks are barely visible above the debris that gather when hundreds of people huddle in slums and waste from vegetable shops are thrown all over the place.

The picture dramatically points out the many challenges that we face in Bangladesh. First of course is the population pressure that the whole country, and especially Dhaka, suffers from. The dire poverty is obvious from the picture and our failure to provide even the barest of housing facilities stares us on the face. The picture also reveals how an important infrastructure is falling apart. Our railway system was once the centre-piece of our transport network along with our river transport. Tragically the former has been allowed to disintegrate and the railways that we have are a mere shadow of what it was in the past.

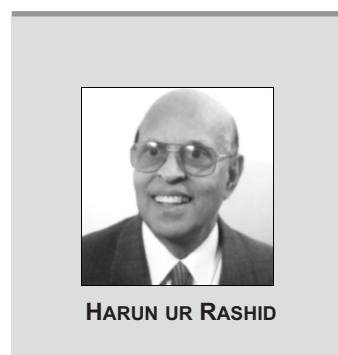
But it is not to mourn our failures that we write today but more to point out the danger that the people who are living on the side of tracks face. They are running the danger of meeting with a fatal accident every time a train passes, which occurs numerous times a day. We must take urgent action to provide some safe place for them to live in. We know that several attempts were made to clear these lands but they were filled up just as soon as they were cleared. This happens because criminal gangs control them and prevent the railway from getting possession of its property.

The ultimate failure is that of governance. We are unable to protect and promote one of our most important means of transport because we are unable to control the criminals who occupy the railway land. Our police are either in league with these criminals or are unable or unwilling to confront them.

We eagerly wait for the day when our people will not need to live on the margin of constant danger and we will not need to publish such picture to draw our government's attention.

Johannesburg Earth Summit

How 'sustainable' is 'development'?



HARUN UR RASHID

THE Johannesburg summit on sustainable development, otherwise known as Earth Summit II, officially ended on 3rd September after a 10-day exhausting mammoth meeting. The Summit was the largest conference ever held under the UN auspices with more than 100 world leaders and about 65,000 delegates participating from 191 nations.

The last two days of the summit were meant for the world leaders. Among the government leaders French President Jacques Chirac, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and Japan's Prime Minister Koizumi attended the summit. President Bush was conspicuous by his absence and many environmentalists saw it as an indication of US disdain for the world environment and world opinion. President Bush sent the Secretary of State Colin Powell in his place to Johannesburg.

Two other parallel conferences were held with the summit. One was by the non-governmental environmental organisations and the other by business and corporate groups. They held their discussions independently of the summit and some of their decisions had impact on official deliberations of delegates. The road to Johannesburg sum-

mit began in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992 with the first Earth Summit. Johannesburg Earth Summit-II was a follow up of the Rio Earth Summit-I. In Rio 180 countries agreed to a broad framework for eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development (known as Agenda 21: 21 stands for 21st century). Since then there are few physical benefits to be seen.

The phrase "sustainable development" became widely known in

world's population. It is noted that only 20 per cent of the world's population, concentrated in rich countries, are using 83 per cent of the world's resources. The US is the biggest polluter in the world (36%) followed by Europe (24%). The developing countries, on the other hand, also contribute to pollution by a deadly combination of poverty, rapid population growth and unmanaged industrialisation. According to the World Bank,

is a highly toxic model.

Prior to the summit, the UN came out with grim statistics to remind the delegates from rich countries that about 1.2 billion people live on less than US\$1.85 a day, 800 million people do not get enough food to lead normal lives, 1.1 billion lack access to clean water and 2.2 million children under five die each year due to contaminated water and 2.4 billion have no proper sanitation, mainly in Africa and Asia. It is

The UN's top scientific panel said that carbon dioxide level were now 370 parts per million, 30 per cent higher than in 1750 and could reach between 500 and 1000 parts per million by 2100. Some fear the impact could be catastrophic if the worst predictions -- a rise of 5.8C centigrade by 2100 -- come true. Many parts of low-lying countries including Bangladesh are likely to be submerged under the sea.

In the light of these uncomf-

the agreed items were measures with regard to sanitation, clean water, restoration of fish stocks, ban on certain chemicals and protection of biodiversity. The delegates of developing countries pointed out the success of the summit to the agreement that one billion poor people would have access to clean water and sanitation by 2015.

At the Summit China's declaration that it would ratify the 1997 Kyoto Protocol was greeted with applause. Canada, Russia and Poland announced that they would also ratify the Protocol by the end of the year. Many considered that China's announcement was one of the most important event of the summit because the Protocol stipulated binding targets and compliance rules for reducing global warming greenhouse gas emissions. The US was urged to join the Kyoto Protocol.

Although some positive commitments were made at the summit, the non-governmental environmental organisations, such as the Greenpeace, the Friends of the Earth, Oxfam International and World Wildlife Fund, were disappointed with the Action Plan as they considered too much compromise had left a limp document full of fine sentiments but nothing was binding.

The Secretary General of the Summit Nitin Desai said that the Action Plan covered everything needed to make sustainable development happen. However, the test of success of the summit would be whether governments, society and the private sector (multinational corporations) would act to achieve measurable results.

Barrister Harun Ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva

BOTTOM LINE

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1987 when a Report on environment titled "Our Common Future" was submitted by the Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (at present she is holding the position of the Director General, World Health Organisation). Sustainable development means natural resources may be used in such a way as to meet today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. In other words, it implies that tree cutting does not exceed tree planting or carbon dioxide emissions do not exceed the capacity of nature to absorb the gas.

Human activities have contributed to degradation of environment since industrial revolution. The industrialised countries are the major polluters because they consume much more than the rest of the

between 1975 and 1988 toxic releases went up by 500% in Indonesia, 800 per cent in the Philippines and 1200 per cent in Thailand. The three-wheeled vehicles (known as scooters or baby taxi) equipped with two-stroke engines pollute urban atmosphere in Asian countries.

Furthermore pollution is not an important issue in developing countries when ordinary people confront mass poverty. All Asian leaders are single minded in their pursuit to uplift the quality of life of people by providing access to clear water, sanitation and primary health services, often ignoring environmental hazards. Many Asian countries are slowly beginning to realise that the Western industrial strategy, with its heavy use of raw materials and fossil fuel,

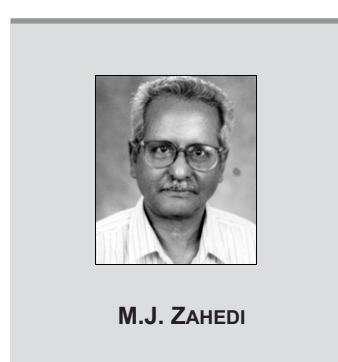
reported that each time delegates walked into their hotel rooms, they were reminded with a sticker "you are one in a million" to enjoy comforts and sanitation.

It is estimated that 40 per cent of forests may vanish in 10 to 20 years. More than 11,000 species face a high risk of extinction in the near future, mainly as a result of habitat loss. The world population is expected to reach 9 billion to 10 billion by 2060 and energy consumption could triple. This will have impact on climate change. Many experts suspect a warmer atmosphere has already begun to change climate and the recent occurrences of unprecedented floods in Europe and drought in the US and Africa demonstrated clearly that climate change was no longer a sceptical forecast but a bitter reality.

able statistics, the summit discussed a wide ranging issues such as, water, sanitation, health, women's reproductive rights, energy, agriculture, foreign aid, trade, global warming, renewable energy and bio diversity. The delegates had a difficult task to convert good ideas to firm commitments. During deliberations, delegates had to face conflicting national interests and seemingly intractable differences. For example, the US and oil exporting countries clashed with European Union to set renewable energy targets of 15 per cent by 2015.

Finally, compromise had to be made on issues by delegates and the summit settled on a heavily amended 71-page Action Plan for eradication of poverty and protecting the world's environment. Among

Prescription for controlled democracy



M.J. ZAHEDI

POLITICAL activities have been restored in Pakistan from Sunday, September 1. The decision has been welcomed by all, among whom, naturally, are the political parties themselves. The country's media also has applauded the decision.

The government's decision will give the political parties 39 days for campaigning before the October 10 general elections. The time, to many, is not very much. But it is perhaps enough, especially to those who have done their basic homework such as preparing their manifestoes which to many, as can be seen from the TV or heard on the radio programmes, is the most primary activity during a forthcoming election.

Most people however see the government decision as made grudgingly. But once it had agreed and decided to hold elections to the parliament and the provincial assemblies, there was no way it could avoid giving parties or individual candidates time and opportunity for campaigning. But it has not been too liberal in this matter. The conditions that will regulate political activities show the government's conviction that the whole process

should be carefully managed (not the actual polling of course).

On one crucial aspect the government and the Election Commission seem to differ is the matter of taking out processions and hold rallies. The regulations made by the government show that it is keen to see that these are done only after certain formalities have been fulfilled which would preserve public order. It has not permitted rallies and processions on roads, streets, and railway stations etc. Many people

is always there. The editorial points out that the Election Commission has specified several measures to minimize unnecessary trouble. The measures suggested by the Commission should have been accepted. Political rallies serve to ensure popular participation besides mobilizing the electorate. They also have a role to play in the political education of the people. Even if there is some disruption in day-to-day life, it should be endured for a month or so. 'We are hardly a

and indifferent to turn out at all to vote.

A question is being asked by many whether when the Supreme Court gave this verdict, it had the intention of giving the President the limited authority to amend the constitution. The court's verdict has resulted in a controversy among the jurists. Many of them contend that judiciary's role is interpreting the law, it cannot usurp the functions of the parliament, i.e. make the law or write the constitution, although

least he would be following Gen. Ziaul Huq who combined in his person the presidency and the office of the army chief. Thus he has kept to the truism that power flows from the barrel of the gun rather than the will of the people.

It is true that in democracies, parliamentary or presidential, the President is the supreme commander of the nation's armed forces but not the service chief of any of these. Even Ayub Khan was content with the honorific of Field Marshal as

systems were finally dismantled, Ayub's by a martial law (promulgated by Yahya Khan) and Zia's by a parliament. Both Yahya Khan and Nawaz Sharif invalidated the laws of their mentors. Musharraf has of course shown that he is not impervious to what happened before and has said he would not allow anybody to do away with the amendments he has made in the constitution. His legal framework order tries to ensure that the validity of any provision made, or orders passed, under clauses 1 and 2 of the LFO shall not be questioned in any court of law on any ground whatsoever. But, politicians say, it is not democracy, it is autocracy, if the parliament cannot endorse or reject changes made in the constitution and the courts cannot pronounce on their validity. In a parliamentary democracy, the elected parliament is sovereign and the executive is accountable to it. It is the parliament that elects and ousts governments by a majority vote, President is only a titular head and acts according to the advice and consent of the prime minister and his cabinet. The National Security Council, as envisaged in Article 125A of the LFO, will be a supra cabinet that will not be answerable to the parliament. On the contrary, it may bypass the cabinet and even call for dissolution of the parliament.

It is feared that rather than ensuring checks and balances in the exercise of power at the apex level, the amendments would be an appendage to the President. At best, the LFO is a prescription for controlled democracy; at worse, a recipe for dictatorship.

M.J. Zahedi is an eminent columnist in Pakistan and formerly the Editor of the Khaleez Times.

LETTER FROM KARACHI

In a parliamentary democracy, the elected parliament is sovereign and the executive is accountable to it. It is the parliament that elects and ousts governments by a majority vote, President is only a titular head and acts according to the advice and consent of the prime minister and his cabinet. The National Security Council, as envisaged in Article 125A of the LFO, will be a supra cabinet that will not be answerable to the parliament. On the contrary, it may bypass the cabinet and even call for dissolution of the parliament.

see this as extraordinary. Daily Dawn said in an editorial that the government would now have an even harder time 'trying to justify that the Election Commission is an independent body'.

'Dawn' has said that if the Commission's considered views can be dismissed on such organizational matters as the mode and method of campaigning, 'many will wonder what will happen when the Commission has to decide on more contentious electoral issues'. It will be under pressure, the editorial said, to reach verdicts that are acceptable to the rulers. The editorial also asks what the government is afraid of if it has banned rallies and processions. Does it think that these will disrupt the daily life of the people? The possibility of so happening of course

very disciplined or efficient nation anyway, and a few days lost to elections can make little difference to our low productivity', the editorial argued. It further said if the time taken up by traffic stoppages caused by VIP movements on our roads is taken up, it will surely be more than what we could lose in 39 days, and lose for a better cause. Elections are not held everyday, especially in Pakistan. When they come along, political parties have a right to campaign freely and reach as much of the electorate as possible.

The paper said that the government would be well advised to have enough confidence in itself to face the hurly-burly of an election campaign and refrain from making the whole exercise insipid to an extent where the people may feel too bored

some also believe that judges not only interpret the law, they also make the law in the process of putting a construction on it.

In a way, some think, Gen. Zia did better than Gen. Musharraf. The former got all his amendments, including the infamous eighth amendment, validated by an elected -- albeit a hostage -- parliament. But Gen Musharraf would not allow the future parliament to approve or reject the amendments made by him in the constitution, nor would he permit the parliament to elect him as President according to the constitution. He has already announced that he would continue as President and Chief of the Army Staff for the next five years. To make sure, a provision to this effect has been incorporated in the constitution. In this respect at

he relinquished the office of the commander-in-chief and endowed Gen. Musa with it. But Ayub's national assembly was elected by a restricted electoral college of eighty thousand Basic Democracies. Ayub Khan, like all despots, treated the national assembly as a rubber stamp. The citizens' rights were not justiciable, so the courts could not strike down the basic laws that were repugnant to the basic norms and values of civil society. At least Ayub's saving grace was good governance than his Bonapartist successors.

The Ayub regime was impervious to public criticism. So was Zia's. Ayub questioned the wisdom of an elective system of government, Zia termed election as un-Islamic; the latter thought it did not suit the genius of the Muslims. Both their

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

The Earth Summit

The Earth Summit at Johannesburg is coming to an end. Everybody is urging for the same thing, the water of the world.

Nowadays, wall posters are seen all over New York City, including at the subway stations, saying 'Save the water. Do not drip New York dry'. May I request BELA through your column, to raise our conscience, by uttering the same slogan, so that we do not drip Dhaka dry, in particular and the country in general?

Mazhar Haq
Gulshan, Dhaka

ETV and Muktakhabar

Muktakhabar, a program run by the young journalists of ETV was a major platform for voicing the children and their demands. But with ETV closing down Muktakhabar as well comes to an end.

We have a biased media like BTV, which is incapable of arranging such programs, as it is busy praising the Government. So we the youngsters of the country turned to ETV's Muktakhabar. Now where are supposed to look for alternatives?

Reaz Mohiuddin
Dhaka

TI Report and some questions

According to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2002, of the Transparency International Bangladesh topped the list of 102 countries. It is very unfortunate that once again Bangladesh has been ranked as the most corrupt nation in the world.

Bangladesh is a least developing country suffering from over-population, malnutrition and poverty. About 47% of the country's population are living below the poverty level. There is a very limited scope for the people of Bangladesh to be corrupt. Only a portion of government employees has a scope for corruption. So it is absurd to declare Bangladesh as the most corrupt country amongst 102 countries.

We, general public would like to ask the following questions to the TI.

1. What are the criteria/rating systems for marking CPI?
2. On what basis a country is declared most corrupt?
3. What are the authentic evi-

dences for the report?

In short, transparency of the Transparency International should be made public.

M.H. Bari
Khulina

Our politicians are found to talk about putting curbs on corruption and improving law and order situation in the country. The ruling party pledged so to the people, when it launched its election campaign last year. This pledge was the most appropriate way to win people's heart since at the end of the past government's tenure, the law and order situation deteriorated alarmingly and the nation earned a bad name as the TI index listed Bangladesh as the most corrupt nation among 91 countries in the world. This year among 102 countries Bangladesh is top-listed in corruption again. Thanks to the politicians for helping us achieve such a rare position!

Thus this position is pushing the country to plunge into the abyss of deep corruption and lawlessness and the government is oblivious of all about it. The involvement of the

ruling party politicians in recent wheat scam and the attitude of the government towards them prove the degree of honour of their own election pledges. Actions are being taken against the minnows involved in the scam but no action against those party leaders who master-minded it. The present government can publish white paper on corruption of the leaders of the opposition but it cannot make public the wheat scam probe report. If this double standard continues, the impression of TI to our country may remain unchanged and it may leave this derogatory position for Bangladesh as long as the strategies of the country are not changed.

Islam
Tangail

Fruitless hartal

Thank you for the timely editorial (2nd September) where you have justifiably criticised the opposition for calling an unnecessary down to dusk hartal (September 1) which brought nothing but immense financial loss to our poor people and country.

I'd like to remind the Opposition Leader (the then Prime Minister)

about giving her words not call hartal even if she's out of power. It's unfortunate that she has broken her promise.

At the same time, I condemn the ruling party's hard-line attitude regarding the opposition resorting to street programs. No one has the right to play with our country and its future. We have had enough and we demand an end to our misery!

Mohammed Sohail Hara
Dhaka

Spray the patients! Why not?

Mr Farhan (September 3) please try to give a solution rather than passing a comment.

There comes a time when you have to decide between 'better of the two evils'.

Would you rather have dengue than absorb a few ppm of pesticide? A huge population in Europe was literally dusted with DDT after the World War II to save them from epidemic.

General Musharraf chose Americans to Laden - as better of the two evils. We now have BNP to AL - as better of the two evils. It is better to send your wards to English

medium schools than Bengali medium. It is better to have clear plastic bags rather than polybags. And of course rickshaw jams are better than the two-stroke auto-rickshaw.

FM
Chittagong

Hypocrisy and politics

Our opposition leader Sheikh Hasina took the pain to travel to Sathira to visit a rape victim Mahfuza Khatun at the Sadar Hospital.

While she was the PM, one of her BCL cadres, at Jahangirnagar University, raped his fellow female students and celebrated his century of rape. During that time there was a strong public protest but the then PM kept mum although she had the authority to punish the culprit.

She is sort of powerless now, but it looks like she is active to stand beside the rape victims. I wonder why these leaders remain silent against these heinous crimes when they are in power and why do they become so vocal when they're out of power! How long these leaders will

bluff us, common people! This question is to the incumbent Prime Minister, too.

Ms. Shameem Akhter
Oregon, USA

"Biman's wrong decision"

Pakistan International Airlines is indeed buying eight Boeing 777s ... along with the six used Boeing 747-300s from Cathay Pacific. The present administration may have cancelled the earlier order of 777s signed during Nawaz Sharif's tenure. But this is an entirely new order, declared only last week.

Very few "famous" airlines operate the DC-10-30 anymore. An updated version of this aircraft with a digital cockpit and improved avionics (renamed as MD-11) came out about the same time as Boeing's 777. However, it did not have much improvement in terms of efficiency and capacity.

We definitely need to revamp our fleet and Boeing 777-200 and Airbus A340-300 are the closest alternatives. If finances are the main concern, we could go for used or leased ones. Boeing 747-300 is a

much bigger plane and may not be suitable for most of Biman's routes. Boeing 777 provides the additional passenger and cargo space (over DC-10) Biman can use. Also instead of having two engines, it is known for its unmatched safety record and being the best for ETOPS (Extended Twin-Engine Operations). Sooner or later, we will have to replace these DC-10s. We have to have better and reliable aircraft in order to "compete" with other airlines operating in the same routes. So why not start as quickly as possible? As an example, Sri Lankan Airlines (former Air Lanka) has turned itself around recently with better management and a newer fleet (and by being a partner of Emirates).
Shafiqat
USA

Announcement:
Due to huge flow of letters it has become impossible for us to accommodate the longer ones. The valued readers are therefore earnestly requested not to send letters exceeding three hundred words.
-- Editor