

Democratic norm flouted  
Those responsible must be brought to book

WE are distraught with what happened in Barisal on Friday as all right thinking people would be. The noisy disturbances and the highhanded behaviour of local ruling party cadres centring around Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the JS and former Speaker Abdul Hamid's organisational programme, were disquieting, to say the least.

Although a huge contingent of police ringed the Barisal Circuit House where the Deputy Leader of the Opposition was put up in, the latter's personal assistant Farid and some BCL and Jubo League leaders and workers were allegedly manhandled by ruling party cadres. There have been also reports of BCL convenor Milan Bhuiyan's residence being attacked on Thursday night and threats put out to houses of some local opposition leaders. It is learnt that even journalists such as Daily Purbokone's Dhaka Bureau Chief and Dhaka Reporters' Unity leader Kuddus Afrad were manhandled. The warped activism was openly obstructive as even journalists' identity were allegedly asked at the point of entry to the Circuit House.

There was customary denial of any such highhandedness and attack by ruling party sources. And, the police said there were no fetters put on the movement of the former Speaker. But obviously there is a public and media perception of what happened. Our point is, why such a law and order situation was created bringing the township to a virtual state of chaos? What was the provocation? The matter should be fully gone into and the responsibility fixed for 'excesses' committed, so that these things don't happen again.

Why must some overzealous activists be allowed to tarnish the government's image when this is all so very eminently avoidable? It is in the maintenance of the fundamental norms of democracy that the common interest of the AL and BNP lies. We urge the BNP central leadership to rein in overzealous party cadres in deference to democratic norms and the ruling party's natural responsibility to enforce high standards of political behaviour at all levels.

Regulating rickshaw movement

Consultation with owner and worker associations welcome

THE authorities have set January 1 as the date for imposition of some new restrictions on the movement of rickshaw and rickshaw-vans through the city streets. If the objective behind the phase-out of lead-sweeping two-stroke three wheelers was anti-pollution that of disciplining the pedal rickshaws is easing the city's traffic congestion. That Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda is seriously working at it -- namely, reducing air pollution and traffic jams augurs well. The persistence with which the steps have or are being taken to mitigate the problems has gone down well with most people. However, the void created by the regulatory or phase-out measures will have to be progressively filled in by alternative modes of transport with a rehabilitation scheme taken in tandem.

Also, it is only proper that the communications ministry is consulting the stake-holders and trying to take them onboard before imposing restrictions on them. For instance, the ministry has held a meeting with rickshaw and rickshaw-van owners' and workers' associations to reach an agreement on longer term strategies for disciplining the movement of the manually operated three wheelers. A consensus is expected to be reached and formalised between both sides in ten days' time.

Already rickshaws have been disallowed on some major arterial thoroughfares or allowed only in stipulated hours. Now, more of this squeeze is likely to be applied. Consequently, subsidiary roads will experience a swell of rickshaws which could create its own dispersed variety of traffic jams. The answer basically therefore lies in putting a cap on the number of rickshaws that will be compatible with the viability of entire traffic system. That is, the unauthorised rickshaws which now outnumber the properly licensed ones a few times over with novice pullers on the pedals will have to go off the streets.

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

Ward Commissioners

The letter "Ward commissioners" (October 3) is rather unkind. A dead person, even if he were a criminal in his lifetime, has gone beyond our reproach and he is in the hand of the Almighty Allah. Comments from official after every murder condemning the victim as a terrorist with so many arrest warrants are tasteless reaction from incompetent beings. But the letter-writer is correct in saying that there is nothing to be frustrated about. The situation is of our own making. Various utterances of the responsible people have encouraged the criminals and have given them a sense of immunity. MAH, Dhaka

escort? Please recall Dhaka's scarce police resource so that they may provide services to more worthy citizens. I feel sorry for the real victims like Simi's family who are still being terrorised by the sewage of our society, owing much to the apathy of our Home Minister and the BNP government. AA California, USA

Mismanaged Mirpur Zoo

Mr Man in Uniform, I don't know how many zoos in the world that you know of, but, for your information, killings of human by animals and occasional escape of animals happened to every major zoos in the world, including the ones in the rich western nations. In most cases, it happens because the person in charge was not following standard procedure for feeding and handling of the animal. The other day as I was watching

The Mirpur zoo case is just another such example. The employee, Ismail Hossain Hawladar, lost his life, unfortunately, but foolishly. He did not follow the standard zoo procedure for feeding the bears. I will tell you what you will never see in any other zoo in the world. The employees shutting down the only national zoo because one of their fellow workers died in a foolhardy accident. This is unheard of elsewhere. Also worth mentioning, the zoo authority did not apply itself in preparing for such an incident. A fatal error. Billal, On e-mail

Bangladesh cricket

This is in reference to your Friday full-page letters "Bangladesh Cricket" (October 4). I have read almost all the letters and the gist of most of these letters are that in order to improve the standard new players must be recruited. I fully agree with their suggestion.

The first one-day international against South Africa, I began to lose heart as South African opener Herschelle Gibbs scored a fantastic 153. But once he was out my hopes began to arise and I was not as disappointed as I thought I would be in that game, because I saw Bangladesh has improved a lot with their bowling as well as fielding. It is time for us to wait and see what they do in the upcoming matches and hope for the best. Sanjana, Dhaka

Bangladesh cricket team has suffered yet another defeat. They are just one short of their own world all time worst streak. Will they be able to end this losing streak? Bangladesh have beaten Pakistan at their very best form during the last world cup. Can they repeat that against the Protease? Only time will tell. Good luck to Bangladesh. Imrose, Dhaka

Our team's performance is deteriorating day by day especially in the batting section. First they need to improve their footwork. Almost all the players are terrible in footwork except for Tushar Imran. Secondly, we should desperately seek for new and young players and train them properly in every department by a competent coach. The time is running out fast and it is high time we did something to make ourselves proud. AFan, Dhaka

What we need is infrastructural change. There should be a fair option for the newcomers. And also research works are much needed to improve our cricket. Rinto, Dhaka

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The principle of "Regime change" by the US Administration is not only undemocratic, it is totally against international law. It will also be a very dangerous precedent for the entire world. Indeed the "Regime Change" appears to be a gathering danger for the regimes of the rest of the world as nobody knows when its turn will come...

At least 10 per cent of the total world's population ... have been suffering from mild mental illness while one per cent from serious mental diseases.' (UNICEF report). No wonder why there happens to be so many problems around the world terrorism, racism, occupation, bombings to kill innocent civilians, state sponsored assassinations, craze for weapons of mass destruction and war.

President Saddam Hussein is a "grave and gathering danger" as stated by President Bush. The allegation is that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction chemical, biological and n-weapons. President Bush's concern appears to be based on facts, as, reportedly, it is his own country which supplied the strains of all these germs to Iraq in 1980s when the United States supported Iraq in its war against Iran. The exports were reportedly approved by the Department of Commerce of the USA. The disclosure put the United States in the uncomfortable position of possibly having provided the key ingredients of the weapons America is considering waging a war to destroy, said Democrat Senator Robert Byrd. Indeed, he entered the documents into Congressional Record this month. It seems from the same report that Iraq later admitted to the United Nations that it had made weapons out of all three.'

(The Daily Star October 2, 02.) But it appears from various other reports that the weapons, Inspectors destroyed to Israel and possibly to other locations where American troops are stationed. The result will be the total devastation of not only of Israel but also of the entire area. Of course, America and Britain will not suffer as Saddam certainly does not have any missile that could reach American or British soil.

Therefore, it will be disastrous to disturb this "grave and gathering danger" at this stage. In any case, practically the entire world including a large American population including considerable number of Senators and other Congressmen have been pleading with Bush Administration not to go to war on mere speculation that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction. Mention may be made of Al-Gore, Tom Daschle, Edward Kennedy, Robert Byrd, three Congressmen who visited Iraq recently and several others including former Advisors of senior Bush. But latest report show that President Bush has managed to get assurances from some Senators and Congressmen through his personal consultation at the White House where some important

UNSC. He already went to the UN and he should not deviate from that path. Indeed, during the last couple of days Hans Blix and his associates under the authority of the UN sorted out the details with the Iraqi regime and latest statement of Blix shows that he will have unrestricted access and full authority to visit all suspected sites in Iraq. Iraq has also authorised the weapons team to visit all sensitive Ministries including the Defence ministry without any prior approval of the Iraqi government. Thus the access is unrestricted.

Only exceptions are Presidential sites where there are some restrictions like accompaniment by some diplomats and prior notification to the Iraqi government, which were already approved by the UNSC. In his last briefing to the UNSC Hans Blix said some "loose ends" are to be sorted out. He also used the word "minor" while he was talking to the press. Therefore, the better course would be to allow the inspectors to go to Iraq and start their work. In the meantime, the UNSC may work out a resolution on the issue of Presidential sites, that could be

They all are against war, at least not to have a resolution that could automatically authorise war. French President Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder in a joint press briefing to the press clearly expressed their views against war to disarm Saddam. Russia was indeed against any new resolution at this stage and was of the view that the present resolutions are enough to start the work in Iraq. However, one has to see what Russia does after Hans Blix's latest briefing. China was always of the view that all problems should be sorted out diplomatically and not through war.

If Saddam has those weapons, these will certainly be detected by the weapons inspectors and could be immediately destroyed by them. Again, to go by the argument of Bush Administration, in case Saddam succeeds in hiding some, he may not really have the courage to use them when he will see that he can be overthrown any time as the war could be authorised by the UN and indeed the whole world is against him in terms of his use of

near future. Although it is difficult to predict the results, most analysts think that the Swedes will finally vote in favour of adopting the common European currency, because on the whole, it would be good for the Swedish economy. On the issue of joining the NATO, the victory of the social democrats indicates that the independent-minded Swedes prefer fending for themselves rather than joining an American-controlled organisation, particularly now that the threat from the Soviet bloc countries has disappeared.

operations. These were popular measures which raised the ratings of the social democrats, but not enough to assure victory. Further help came from an unexpected quarter. The American president came back to Washington from his summer holidays with a determination to invade Iraq. The German public, long suspicious of the real American intentions reacted negatively to this unprovoked warmongering. The social democrats, who after all, are in coalition with the Green Party (ideologically more to the left of social democrats and are pacifists) sensed the mood of the public and came out decisively against the American position.

After trailing behind the conservatives for months in the opinion polls, the leftist coalition's victory in the election can be considered as a huge success story. This is true that the social democrats have lost a couple of percentage points in comparison with the results of 1998 election, but this loss has been more than adequately compensated by the surprising advance of the Green Party. Actually, it can be said without any exaggeration that Joschka

votes and the Green Party won 4.5 per cent. Why did the Swedish people not follow the trend? After all, both in Norway and Denmark, the conservatives rule the roost. There were four issues at stake - the continuation of the existing benefits of a welfare state, immigration, the euro and the NATO. The conservative platform proposed a cut in social security benefits and a corresponding cut in taxation and further restrictions on immigration. The results of the elections indicate that the Swedish people prefer their model of welfare state to tax cuts. Given the current demographic structure of the Swedish population, the voters have also demonstrated their realisation of the fact that in order to maintain economic growth, immigration was absolutely necessary for Sweden. Although some of the leftist elements of Swedish politics are against Sweden's joining the euro bloc, most of the social democrats and in particular the present incumbent prime minister and leader of the social democrats are firmly in favour of the euro. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect a referendum on this issue in the

to be able to turn a party of protest into a credible alternative to govern a country, i.e. a party in power. The Greens, the inheritors of the ideological revolution of '68, the party of the legendary figure of Petra Kelly, although now in power, still are ecology conscious idealists and human rights activists and believers in social justice and sustainable development in poor countries. True, immense tasks lie ahead, particularly in the economic area. The government will have to face up to the reality of the situation, which to put it mildly is difficult. With high unemployment (over four million), low economic growth, poor consumer spending, the European Central Bank's insistence on maintaining relatively high interest rates (over which the German government cannot exercise any direct control), budget deficit (2.9% of the GDP) reaching almost the maximum allowed by the EU, the German economy is in a straitjacket.

The government will have to reach an agreement with France to reduce its share of subsidies to French farmers under the current highly protectionist common agri-

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NOTICE

The coming 10th of October will mark the 1st anniversary of the present BNP led alliance government. On this occasion we invite our readers to write us letters in 200 words-- giving their assessment of the government's performance preferably mentioning the biggest success and the worst failure. The readers may also wish to refer to the BNP's election manifesto, PM's pledges, role of parliament, MPs, party activities including that of student and youth wing.

--Editor.

Reducing pollution?

The government being optimistic in making the country pollution free has banned the autorickshaws leaving only 5,000 to ply for the time being. Before taking such decision

the government should have sorted out an alternative for autorickshaws. In absence of adequate transport the people are suffering immensely especially those without cars. And those autorickshaws that are still plying are charging higher fare increasing the plight of the commuters.

The government has also decided to offer unemployment benefits to the autorickshaw drivers, which is a complete wastage of money. Instead, the government could have helped the autorickshaw owners to convert the engines into four-stroke which could have reduced the level of unemployment and the citizens may not have faced transport crisis. Farrah Hamed, Dhaka

Gitanjali in English Translations...

It was a great joy to read Fakrul Alam's "Gitanjali in English Translations: The Latest Reincarnations" (September 28). The essay while goes deep in a comparative analy-

sis between the English and Bangla versions of the songs, informs at the same time so overwhelmingly of the recent translation works on them. The writer especially does an excellent job when he picks up several translated excerpts including that of Thakur's and he himself says very little on the comparative strength of them allowing the readers to justify for themselves. However, while the writer refers to the Edwardian era and the time of tumultuous World War I behind Gitanjali's quick popularity and transient impact on the Western society respectively, he appears to be rather contradictory. More importantly, his emphasis only on the period when the English version of Gitanjali appeared and won the Western society may imply that the popularity of the songs was simply circumstantial and that they have nothing to do with their intrinsic beauty. I am sure the writer did not at all mean that but had a little space been dedicated to the appreciation of the bewildering power these mystic songs such an apprehension

best be a sleeping danger. No problem, let him sleep. He has been sleeping for over 12 years as he was not involved in any terrorist activities nor attacked any other neighbour including Israel. If his neighbours are not panicked any more, then why should Bush Administration, be?

As President Bush has been talking so much and so often about Saddam, he, probably in an unguarded moment or out of sentiment, made it a personal issue. He said, "...The guy wanted to kill my dad... It's entirely an American issue." If it is entirely an American issue, then what Tony Blair who looks after Britain has anything to do with it? Why did he go so far to prove that Saddam is dangerous and he must be stopped immediately, otherwise we will lose "the collective will" and in the process lose "the authority of the United Nations." What authority the United Nations has on Israel? Israel showed thumb to the UN every time a resolution was passed by it on Israel. Israel violated more than 70 UN resolutions as various reports show. Did

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cultural policy of the EU, which in my opinion, is both immoral and uneconomical, in the long run. Instead of tax cuts, it is quite possible that new taxes, (which will further dampen private spending) will have to be levied to finance the social security system and to improve the state education system, which according to a recent OECD report is in a disastrous condition. In order to save the welfare state from disappearing for lack of funds, it will be necessary to trim the social benefits and eliminate the abuses. In order to avoid further economic stagnation and consequent social unrest (in which the immigrant community will inevitably be targeted), it will have to take further unpopular measures like structural changes and labour market reform. The coalition will need the trade unions' co-operation to do all this. But now the questions are - Will the trade unions maintain their support to maintain a leftist coalition in power, understand that under the current economic conditions reform is absolutely necessary for growth? Will Chancellor Schroeder have the courage to break the EU directives on budget deficit (or negotiate a more flexible application of the directives) and embark on a Keynesian programme of public spending to stimulate demand and reduce unemployment?

These are issues, which must be addressed urgently by the social democrats and the Green Party. If not, no amount of leftist solidarity or Schroeder Fischer charisma will be able to save the German left from sure defeat in the next general elections, which will set back the clock for the European ecology conscious humanitarian agenda for many years, because the rest of Europe is watching the German experiment very closely.

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