

BNP MPs' wise counsel

Go slow on amendments and fast on reducing the cabinet

IT is an indication of the state of our democracy and of the decision making process within BNP that crucial constitutional amendments have been all but decided upon without any consultation within the party itself. Like the rest of the party leadership, the BNP parliamentary party- consisting of BNP MPs- was practically given a fait accompli on Wednesday and literally asked to endorse the amendment without much ado. It is to the credit of these meek and otherwise docile bunch that they found the courage to counsel the all mighty and increasingly aloof party chief of going slow on these vital issues. There is another very significant advice they gave their party chief- reduce the size of the cabinet by removing the corrupt ministers, of which there are quite a few as revealed by government agencies and parliamentary standing committees.

The Prime Minister has so far not bothered to tell the nation why she considers these amendments necessary. We expected that she will, at least, tell her own MPs. To the everyone's surprise and regret she did not. Amending a country's constitution is not a plaything and is not undertaken everyday. It is done after serious deliberation and extensive discussion. Nothing of the sort is known to have taken place, either within her party, nor within the wider political spectrum and definitely not within the society at large. So why these changes, and why now? These questions become more pertinent if we think that she made no serious attempt to make the existing parliament more efficient. Yes, the opposition is responsible for the boycott but who is responsible the frequent lack of quorum. The fact that as the leader of the house she cannot muster a quorum with two-thirds majority speaks volumes of either her inefficiency or lack of interest in the running of the House.

As for reducing the size of her cabinet, she ignores all the public outcry and counsel of her own party leaders and activists at her own peril. In spite of much effort to orchestrate the BNP-PP meeting much useful information and advice has been given to the party chief. She will be well advised to listen to them. But will she?

Playing foul with cancer treatment

A tip of the iceberg?

IT seems that in the health sector, mismanagement of hospitals is not the only problem. The health authorities appear to be blissfully unaware of some other highly disturbing developments. For example, the growth of unregistered private clinics is not an issue that can be dismissed lightly any more. What makes us sit up is that some of the clinics are allegedly offering treatment for diseases like cancer, that require specialisation of a very specific type. But here in Bangladesh even the mortally sick cancer patients are not spared. Can treatment of cancer be left to a signboard-only clinic.

One such outfit has been detected at Mohakhali in the city. The story of this clinic is not different from that of a large number of privately run medical installations which fall far short of meeting the requirements, even the legal ones. The Mohakhali clinic is not registered with the health directorate. And do we really need anything more to conclude that its business is not legal?

Those who are running unregistered clinics are not only violating the law, but are also guilty of short-changing people in the name of medicare. They have turned a noble profession into an ignominious calling. But what is really surprising is why the health authorities have not done anything against the owners of such clinics.

The unregistered clinics occasionally making news may be just the tip of an iceberg. The government must intervene massively by way of a searching survey to determine the exact number of such illegal medicare outfits so as to put them out of business.

Gaddafi's thirsty years



NURURDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

IN 1951 the United Nations declared the former Italian North African territory of Libya an independent nation. Having emerged from colonialism the state chose to be a constitutional monarchy. Bordering the Mediterranean it had no known resources, and almost ninety per cent of the country was barren desert. The new nation was almost completely dependent on aid from the United States, Great Britain and the United Nations. However, geologists considered it a likely place to look for oil, and there was a scramble among major oil companies for concessions. Millions of dollars had to be spent finding and detonating thousands of mines laid in the desert, across which some of the fiercest battles of World War II had raged. In 1959 Esso Standard of Libya, a subsidiary of Exxon discovered the first oil. Ten years later, in 1961, it began exporting forty thousand barrels a day. By 1969, exports had soared 75 times to 3 million barrels daily, making Libya the world's third largest oil exporting nation, even exceeding Saudi Arabia by 100,000 barrels a day.

Libya got an immediate grip on the European Oil market because of its geographical closeness. Also Libyan oil companies heavily discounted in competition with Middle East companies in order to break into the market. Libyan oil was sold at a premium price as Middle East costs went up owing to the long tanker haul around Africa. Furthermore, Europe was becoming pollution-conscious, and Libya's low sulfur oil was sought by all countries. By 1969 Libya was

supplying Germany with 45 per cent of its requirements, Italy 22 per cent, the United Kingdom 22 per cent and France 17 per cent. But Libya remained a poor society.

Then the unexpected happened. Ridding straight out of the pages of the holy book came a fiery, young zealot to change commercialism into a cause. On September 1, 1969, Libya's ailing eighty-year old King Idris was visiting some European countries. In Tripoli, the Libyan capital, a group of young army officers gave a party for the senior officers of the King's loyal national

nies and European consuming countries highly nervous.

Four months following the coup, oil Minister Ezzedin Mabruk summoned the twenty producing oil companies to a general meeting to announce that the government would start discussion with individual companies of demands for higher crude oil tax prices. Shortly after the meeting started, the oilmen were startled when Colonel Gaddafi walked into the room. He erased all doubt about the tough posture he would take in negotiations: 'people who have lived for

new US\$ 350 million LNG plant while a tanker was loading the initial cargo of 'frozen gas' to deliver to Italy. Someone from the oil company pointed out that the government was losing money by not selling gas. The quick answer was that the government isn't losing any money, because before the plant was built, the gas was flared in the fields and Libya didn't make any money on it then. Besides, oil ministry's Department of Economics said, 'We don't need money.' At this some one felt like Alice in wonderland when the White Queen tested her on mathe-

from its other fields, the government promptly slashed its total production. Occidental was forced to begin rationing its international customers.

A week later Libya nipped at the heels of the major oil companies such as Texaco and Socal. Europe was feeling a real pinch as Libyan supplies began to dry up. A month later Libya flushed another company out of the herd, jointly owned by Continental, Marathon, Shell and Amerada Hass, which was producing 31 per cent of Libya's oil. And just in case all the companies

before the Tehran Conference could start. However, something more serious was in the making. Libya's new demands were intended to 'hurt' the companies to force them to put pressure on the United States to change its pro-Israeli policy. For the first time, oil prices and policy were openly being used as a political weapon.

Colonel Gaddafi's goal appeared to be achieving what Colonel Naseer (of Egypt) failed to do -- unite 100 million Arabs and destroy Israel. He was determined to devote his oil money to that end. It was rumoured that Gaddafi put his money where his mouth was. He supplied hundreds of million of dollars of aid to Egypt and Syria. He financed, and still does, the Palestinian guerrillas. He bankrolled the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. He poured millions into Uganda, Mali, Chad and Niger to get them to break with Israel. Pakistan Army got military and financial support to subjugate Bangladeshis in 1971. Gaddafi even provided safe custody to the killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after August 1975.

The recent accord on the Libyan nuclear programme, though belated, is a sensible effort. It is not sure whether this new endeavour will help Gaddafi personally but this initiative would hopefully show encouraging results in the lives of the five million citizens. There is also reasons to be hopeful that Libya's oil wealth, until recently alleged to have been squandered on dubious extraneous cause, will now be available for building a better life for average Libyans.

The governments of the United States and Western European countries did not view the stand of Gaddafi as an economic matter concerning only oil companies. They took an active and public role to destroy Gaddafi and they seem to have succeeded after thirty-five years. They now look forward to buy Gaddafi a 'crutch' to allow him to walk in the desert of Libya.

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CHRONICLE

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police. At the end of the evening the army officers arrested them, proclaiming Libya a republic with twenty-eight-year old colonel Muammar Gaddafi as head of state and commander-in-chief. It was a deliberate long-planned coup by a nomad's son who believed himself to be a 'sword of Islam,' destined to unite 100 million Arabs. He was an extreme Arab nationalist, a revolutionary and puritanical reformer.

The unknown Gaddafi caught the outside world by surprise. His first moves were to close all night-clubs, bars and casinos and change all street signs from English to Arabic in Tripoli, which resembled a West Texas oil boomtown more than an Arab city. Soon he ousted the Americans and British from their air bases and expelled the 25,000 descendants of Italian colonialists still living in Libya. Gaddafi's new civilian cabinet members made vague, soothing statements that Libya would honour its oil concessions although there was no spectacular changes on petroleum production. Nevertheless, this made the oil compa-

ny five thousand years without petroleum are able to live without it even for scores of years in order to reach their legitimate right' he warned them sternly.

His guiding percept was: The Arabs need someone to make them weep, not someone to make them laugh. One of his first acts was to restore the practice of amputation for thieves. Simple theft meant the loss of the right hand. Armed robbery involved the additional loss of the left foot. In fact Gaddafi could do what he pleased as he had few political pressures. Libya's population was less than 2 million and 75 per cent of the people were either small farmers on the thin strip of fertile land along the Mediterranean or nomads in the vast desert. The American propaganda was that in such a situation no modern economic arguments concerning growth and development could carry any weight. Negotiations on oil tax prices had been dragging (because the foreign oil companies were virtually the boss of Libya). As a reminder to the oil companies Gaddafi shut down Esso Libya's

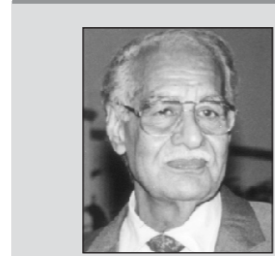
matics by asking what was the answer to the problem 'divide a loaf by a knife.'

The government was negotiating separately with each of the twenty companies operating then in Libya. The charismatic leader Colonel Gaddafi delivered a dramatic public speech exhorting the Libyan people to mobilise for the 'coming fight with the oil companies.' Immediately afterwards, he clamped a huge cutback on an Occidental Petroleum Company (the Magurcharra blowout culprit in Bangladesh) oil field, which was providing almost 21 per cent of Libya's total oil output. Occidental officials protested that cutting back production would cause a permanent loss of about 55 million barrels of recoverable oil -- for the wells would be flooded with water if they were not continually produced. Libyan authorities on the other hand contended that Occidental was critically overproducing its field (as Sangu gas field in off shore Bangladesh). When Occidental tried to make up its lost production by producing more

hadn't gotten the full message, the government nationalised the marketing operations of Esso, Shell and ENI with no indication when they would consider starting discussion in regard to compensation. In a five-month period the individual oil companies in Libya had tripled their tax price offers each time Gaddafi expressed dissatisfaction. It was really like being after a bigger game. That was Colonel Gaddafi in his top spirit.

The OPEC countries were jubilant at the price vistas Libya had opened for them. Venezuela, then the second largest oil exporting country, next to Iran, stunned the oil companies by raising the income tax rate to 60 per cent from a maximum of 52 per cent. This meant that adding other taxes the government would receive 80 per cent of the profits. The OPEC resolutions passed two month's later in Caracas left no doubt that the revitalised organisation (OPEC) now knew how much muscle power it had and was determined to use it. Libya was obviously upstaging its partners in OPEC

Is Khan a loose gun?



KULDEEP NAYYAR
writes from New Delhi

ABDUL Qadir Khan, the father of Pakistan's bomb, is no stranger to me. He said he was a fan of mine when he received me in the verandah of his house. But he turned against me when, after interviewing him, I disclosed that Islamabad had the bomb. Khan complained against me to the British Press Council because *The Observer* had used the interview which he denied. The complaint was rejected by the council with the remark that it had not been satisfied that the interview did not take place or that the quotations were untrue. This was more than two decades ago.

Khan is once again in the news. He has been accused of passing on the bomb technology to Libya. Earlier, he was suspected of bartering the technology to North Korea. Even Iran's name has come up. All the three countries have denied it and so has Pakistan. But denials raise more questions than answer them. When Khan is alleged to have stolen the technology from Holland, where he was working in a nuclear laboratory, he would have had no compunction in selling the know-how to any country willing to pay the "price." One expert has said that a long time ago began the great

nuclear adventure of marrying the pirated Dutch enrichment technology to the warhead designs that would later be imported from China. This happened.

However, Khan could not have done anything without the consent of Islamabad's rulers -- Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Zia-ul Haq, Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and Pervez Musharraf. In other words, they must have blessed Khan for what he was doing. After India's first nuclear test at Pokharan in 1974, Khan reportedly volunteered to

the charge vehemently.

"It has all the hallmarks of a Pakistani system," a senior official in Washington said. "These guys are now there as suppliers to the biggest proliferation problems we have," the official added, referring to the Pakistani aid to the nuclear programmes of Libya, North Korea and Iran. Only a few days ago were five Khan's close scientists arrested at Islamabad for their "involvement." Pakistan has been forced to put a ban on foreign travel of nuclear scientists. True, America's

Korea and Libya put a question mark against the assurance. Still Khan's single-mindedness cannot be doubted. Even when I met him, along with Mushahid Hussain, then *The Muslim* editor, what struck me about Khan was the conviction that his country should remain invincible. By then Islamabad had the bomb in the basement. He told me in no uncertain terms that Pakistan would use the bomb if India ever drove it to the wall as it did during the Bangladesh war.

Mushahid's face fell when Khan made the claim. Since Mushahid had arranged the interview, he could visualise the repercussions. Poor Mushahid lost his job and had to face the charge of treason which some religious parties levelled against him. General Zia saved the situation but Mushahid was literally hauled over the coals.

By pressuring *The Muslim* to oust Mushahid, the government tried to devalue the achievements of Pakistan's scientists. When Khan told me that they had "done it" in

that the interview had taken place which Khan did not want to admit. It was obvious that he had gone back on what he had said because of the pressure on him and the uproar the publication of the interview had caused. He said that he had never talked to me and that I had merely accompanied Mushahid when the latter delivered the invitation card of his wedding.

It is true that Khan did not allow me to take down notes. But he talked for an hour and gave the photocopies of some articles written on his early life. I recall his wife, a Dutch woman, wheeling in a trolley with cakes, biscuits, patties and sweets. Many people have told me at my face that Islamabad used me because it wanted to send India a message that Pakistan would retaliate if and when attacked. This could well be true. Those were the days when the brass tacks operation was on near Pakistan's borders and Islamabad was scared.

Yet Khan's brief was only to say that Pakistan was "now on the threshold" of being a nuclear power. He was not expected to blurt out that it had the bomb. That I was able to provoke him did the trick. Since then I have been preaching that the two countries should come to an understanding on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. For sure, they can destroy each other.

No one can take away from Khan his doggedness and outstanding ability. His pride to have built the bomb was commendable. But he needs to be controlled. An indisciplined scientist like a loose gun can pose a real danger to the world.

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BETWEEN THE LINES

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Pakistan's then Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, that he could match India's effort and even surpass it, provided he had the funds and the unstinted backing of his government. It is no secret that Libya's Mummer Gaddafi is said to have sent suitcases stuffed with dollars to Islamabad. In return, Bhutto who had initiated the project reportedly passed on to Libya the technology of uranium. After many years, Washington confirmed this. Libya too has admitted that the uranium enrichment technology was part of its clandestine effort to build a bomb. America says that Gaddafi has pointed its finger at Pakistan which has denied

pressure on Pakistan forced all this just as it made Islamabad some time ago to remove Khan from the Kahuta plant and the laboratory which bore his name. But he is still President Musharraf's adviser and Khan has not stopped functioning as a scientist. Khan's troubles are of his own making. He is too intense and too committed to what he considers is in his country's interest.

The Pakistan establishment has distanced itself from him. Musharraf has assured President Bush that Islamabad will not pass on its bomb-making expertise to others. But the disclosures in North

His nationalistic instinct, in fact, made him spill the beans. During the interview, there came a stage when I was not reaching anywhere. He would not answer my straight question: whether Pakistan had the bomb or not. But he nearly hit the roof when I said that according to Dr H Sethna, India's father of the bomb, Pakistan had neither men nor material to make the bomb. Sethna had not told me this but I made it up to provoke Khan. A person who was highly egoist could not contain himself. He banged the table and said at the top of his voice: "Tell them we have it, we have it." He would not brook any doubt about Pakistan's capability.

seven years as against India's 12, he was beaming with pride. Indeed, it was a tribute to him and his colleagues. And this was all that Mushahid wrote arguing that Pakistan should not be on the "defensive" or "peevish" on the issue and that the bomb was a matter of pride.

I could make out that Khan had got carried away during the interview and said more than what he was supposed to. Pakistan's top officials probably took him to task for going beyond his brief. Two Pakistani papers carried the interview on the same day as *The Observer* did. This only confirmed

OPINION

Whither law and order?

AH DEWAN

PORING over the DS of Jan 13 one could not but get the jitters and nerve-breakdown at the rock-bottom sliding of law and order, and the claim of its pretty improvement by no other than the Prime Minister of the coalition government is almost a mockery. The front page of the daily only on the same date covered three news reports of killings, besides the lead news of bomb blast that killed two men and injured thirty seven at the Shrine of Hazrat Shajalal at Sylhet (one of the injured also died on the following day of the blast). The back page carried the news that a sergeant's life was spared out of a bomb explosion. The inside national page published recovery at Patuakhali of abducted bodies of two brothers with another odious

report, 'wanted criminals move with police protection'. In the meantime in the capital a businessman, a police sergeant and a BCL leader were gunned down. And Khulna City was shocked by the death of a journalist by a bomb hurled at him plunging the whole country into bewilderment. A UP chairman too bombed to death in Khulna. By the time this piece gets printed we are sure to have more lives snuffed out. Bangladesh is now a killing ground and its air is thick with the wailing of bereaved families. Bangladesh has got a jumbo government it can barely afford and there is no dearth of showy posture and paraphernalia to contain the perpetrators. But where is that integrity and commitment to serve the nation without any discrimination, politicisation and nepotism?

Bare fact is that since takeover

by the BNP-led coalition government Bangladesh has the ill luck to behold in particular, elimination of political leaders and activists and abduction of businessmen and others to such an alarming proportion that never happened before, and that too under the administration of an elected government inevitably accountable to the people for the same. When the Home Minister could openly brag of having released nearly seventy thousand alleged offenders because of their affiliations, and invite such others who are still under police cases to get them freed, how could you expect law and order to improve? AL leader of Nature Mr. Momtaz, popular to friends and foes alike, fell victim to the axe of the alleged criminals, some of whom were relieved of police case perhaps on partisan consideration. Advocate Manjur

Alam of Khulna, a front line AL leader was also killed. And alas ! the alleged criminals under police case were seen joining the BNP procession in Khulna under police protection. In the recent past criminals also took lives of AL leader of Bagmara, Rajshahi and of Lalmonirhat. Many of the grass-roots level leaders and activists of AL fell prey to the criminals' bullets, and there is no end to that. AL's allegation that this government is bent on denuding the party of leaders and thus cripple it has come to be taken into public cognisance following the felling of AL leaders one after another.

Abduction in Chittagong Hill Tracts and elsewhere in the country is a daily occurrence. CHT is again being made a boiling pot. Business magnate Jamaluddin's abduction has reached a proportion of horror story. The man who

was finally caught to help lead to dog the persons involved in the abduction died mysteriously while case were seen joining the BNP procession in Khulna under police protection. In the recent past criminals also took lives of AL leader of Bagmara, Rajshahi and of Lalmonirhat. Many of the grass-roots level leaders and activists of AL fell prey to the criminals' bullets, and there is no end to that. AL's allegation that this government is bent on denuding the party of leaders and thus cripple it has come to be taken into public cognisance following the felling of AL leaders one after another.

When the minions of law and order and dispensers of justice are chosen/promoted on the basis of allegiance to the party in power, and not on merit or seniority, the dealing with law and order as well as dispensation of justice is less

likely to bring forth any improvement and fair play. On Jan 10 AL supporters from Chashara, Narayanganj who were coming to join the Rally at Paltan were attacked by JCD/JJD activists; many were injured. JCD/JJD also threatened Professor B. Chowdhury, their one time beloved leader, and declared him persona non grata in his district Munshiganj.

There are, of course, many other causes that are attributable to the deterioration of law and order and sometimes some of them are formidable. But too much leverage and leniency to the party workers and using of the police force as their umbrella and restricting them not to do their duty of their own are also contributing to further exacerbation of the situation. During its tenure AL did the same thing and so did it pay the price so heavily.

People and media still remind us of how journalist Tipu Sultan was beaten and maimed by AL cadres, how the convention of Kader Siddiqui was marred by the Dhaka University BCL activists, how shamelessly the then administration and AL supporters impeded and thwarted Khaleida Zia's entourage to South Bengal apart from myriad cases of murder and mayhem committed.

BNP had used the misdeeds of AL to woo the voters and succeeded and had also pledged to the countrymen to rid the country of miscreants, restore law and order, give safety and security to life and property. But with over two years of its governance with some enactment of laws and formation and launching of forces/battalions of catchy nomenclature it has failed to deliver the least. And sadly enough BNP does not seem to be

perturbed at the saddest state of law and order. It is quite complacent about having been able to politicise every organ of administration, educational and financial institutions and others and so it is unfrustrated about the unpredictable consequences it may suffer.

It has now come up with another issue of increasing the seats of law makers which a poor country like ours could ill afford for that will create further dent into the public exchequer. The crying need of the hour is how much devotion and sacrifice government could make with utmost urgency to deal with the miscreants with iron hand restore law and order in the society and contain corruption for which we have been ranked top among the nations. The sooner they get to this the better for them and the country as a whole.