

A good step, but just Anti-graft body must be a tangible reality now

TOGETHER with prominent members of civil society, this paper had raised a question about the government's retaining power, under an existing law, to withdraw graft cases, even at the trial stages, which would militate against the principle of independence of the proposed anti-corruption commission. Thus, we are definitely heartened to learn that the government has decided to amend the relevant criminal law (under which graft cases will be prosecuted) so as to divest the government of its power to withdraw such cases. This will help allay concerns about state officials and functionaries being provided with any immunity by the government to corruption proceedings. So, it is a step forward.

While it is good to see the government trying to clear the deck for the formation and functioning of the anti-graft body, one would have hoped that the impetus were not all donor-driven but had sprung from within the government itself.

Indeed, if the government truly wishes for the anti-corruption commission to operate independently and effectively then it must take the lead in the process. This means, among other things, delegating financial authority to the commission to ensure its full autonomy and ability to function.

More importantly still, the government must show that it considers fighting corruption a top priority and that the work of the commission is important for governance, national image, economy and investment. The bill to constitute the commission was passed in February, but the search committee to select a six-member panel for the President of the Republic to choose three amongst them to form the anti-graft body came into being only on May 9 proximate to the BDF meet. Ten days have passed by and yet there is no clue when its first meeting will be held. Could we have a specific time-frame for the much-awaited mutation from the rhetoric to the tangible taking place?

'Bangla Bhai' still at large Why, what's happening?

TWO activists of the self-styled vigilante group, Jagrata Muslim Janata, led by the so-called Bangla Bhai are reported to have been murdered by the members of the Purbo Banglar Communist Party, the rival organisation which the JMJ seeks to wipe out.

With further spilling of blood, it has become clear that law and order in the northern districts is facing a real challenge. The law enforcers were cooperating with Bangla Bhai whose men had attacked PBCP outlaws. But the strategy had no legal basis, and it was soon realized that supporting a militant organisation, with a hidden agenda, would backfire. Finally, the cabinet committee on law and order issued a directive that Bangla Bhai be arrested.

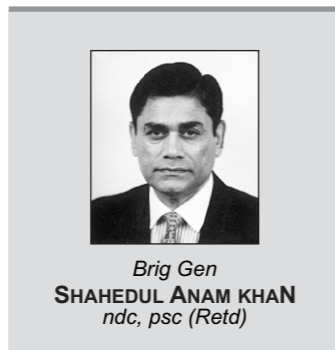
But things appear to be far from clear now as reports say that there is considerable difference of opinion among the ruling alliance leaders about the issue. Only that can explain why Bangla Bhai has not yet been arrested. We again urge the government to disband the group which is trying to run a parallel law enforcing system.

The objections to the presence of such a group are quite obvious. First, it is promoting militancy and par-taking in governmental authority, which is indeed a dangerous proposition. Second, the group has its own agenda which looks to be as pernicious as any form of ideological extremism. Third, it is violating the law in the name of fighting outlaws. The JMJ activists have already killed and maimed many people besides terrorising localities. Only the law enforcers have the authority to deal with the outlaws.

We would like to know, once more, what is happening and why the group is still not outlawed -- the only befitting status for a fanatic vigilante group like it.

The government should not be oblivious of the fact that the situation is going from bad to worse. It must act before more atrocities are committed by the JMJ men. We want them to be put out of operation and brought to justice without ado if the government likes to come clear on it.

Rob Peter to pay Paul?



**Brig Gen
SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN
ndc, psc (Retd)**

RECENTLY, some very eminent persons, leading -- economists, ex-secretaries and finance ministers, and chairmen of private banks -- called on the finance minister with suggestions regarding the forthcoming budget. One of the suggestions was to 'cut defence spending and invest the same to strengthen the law enforcing agencies to improve law and order'. It was their considered opinion that the additional fund for the police should be defrayed by chopping the defence budget. We do not know whether the size of the cut was suggested to the finance minister also.

No doubt the suggestion is motivated by a pious desire to see that both growth and development supplement each other and that, while unproductive expenditures are curtailed, dis-

tributive justice percolates through grassroots level to make growth more meaningful.

The suggestion has lot of merit and the underlying motivations are well meaning and just. This ought to be considered dispassionately, without making political capital out of the defence-development dichotomy. It is an unfortunate reflection of our psyche, which is motivated by our heart rather than our head

the defence sector, a speculation that is perhaps tenuous because, while the input in defence is tangible, there is no conventional pricing mechanism to ascertain the value of the defence output.

Be that as it may, the suggestion to cut defence outlay contains some implied assumptions. Apart from the fact that the police force needs to be beefed up, implied in the suggestion is that the defence outlay is in excess of

means is reduced, and that they are motivated enough to uphold the law and not circumvent it. This will need money, of course. But should it be the defence sector that ought to part with its share?

It is not the purpose of this article to delve into various facets of defence development dilemma or go into the findings of various studies of defence economics. Suffice it to say that security and

a determinant of military efficiency, it will be even more so. It is also true that a taka saved from an unproductive expenditure is a taka for the soft, social sectors. However arguments that defence is an unproductive sector is far from convincing.

Budgeting a nation's defence outlay is an intricate process because defence capability cannot be determined unilaterally. Capability is a relational

the military to fulfil its designated role, and whether at the end of the day the nation is getting value for its money. The reasons that the military is the butt of all criticism are its size and cost, including opportunity cost, relative to its threat and capability. All these issues must be examined critically and dispassionately. The fact that defence is more or less a non-substitutable product with other commodities/services of the economy the natural question to ask is, what should be the minimum threshold expenditure on defence?

Defense and indeed the security of a country are too important to be left to the novices and the uninformed. Many of the comments regarding defense budget stem from asymmetry of information and lack of comprehension of the matter. Perhaps it is time that there was a debate on the whole issue a debate that should involve the current civilian as well as military leadership, economists and retired military officers.

However, to divest Defense to provide for additional fund for the police is like robbing Peter to pay Paul. One is not certain if the benefit to Paul would not be to the detriment of Peter.

The author is Editor, Defence and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star

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when we undertake discourses on national issues. Thus, those that suggest reduction in defense expenditure cannot do so without having ill motives ascribed to their pronouncements. Rationality, rather than emotion, should guide our approach to any issue, most of all the issue of national defence.

It has also been our experience that defence is always made the target when it comes to the question of tightening our belts. The reason for suggesting 'salami slices' of the defence outlay is primarily because of the perception of 'unproductivity' of

the requirements of the defence which merits reduction. Also implied is the assumption that while maintaining the expected level of competency in mission fulfilment, the defence sector can withstand the cut.

One could not agree more with the suggestions that the police force needs improvement. If their efficiency has to be improved they will have to be given the necessary resources, both infrastructural as well as technical. Their pecuniary conditions will have to be improved so that the compulsion of supplementing their income through other

by implication defence is a vital and very relevant part of any nation. The upkeep of a military force, dedicated to ensuring the security of a nation, is a vital component of any national agenda and budget. This conception holds true in the case of Bangladesh also. A standing military force, of whatever size, is an indispensable adjunct of a state, although its shape, size and composition may be open to debate.

It is also true that it is getting more and more expensive to maintain a military, and as technology gains more relevance as

phenomenon, related to threat, estimation of which constitutes the major input in defence spending. Budgeting deterrence, which is precisely the purpose of defence, raises the question of how much defence is enough defence? While there is a propensity of overstating requirements by defence planners, it is only natural for skeptical taxpayers to question the prudence of certain expenditures.

There has never been an open and informed debate in Bangladesh as to whether the size and the budget is justifiable and adequate in enabling

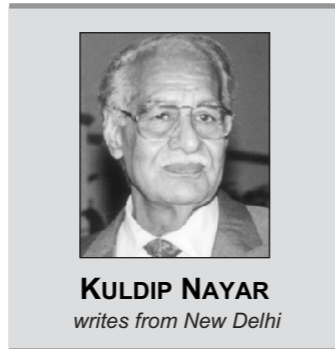
of force during the emergency. But it is the same party that has turned out to be anti-democratic and authoritarian. If the BJP can take the credit for playing a part in retrieving democracy in 1977, Sonia Gandhi can single-handedly claim to have restored secularism. The BJP has done its worst to saffronise education, culture and information. But pluralistic forces have emerged victorious with determination to clean up these fields.

What does the future hold for the country? The Left looks like creating problems. They have said: "The government would be watched as the policy direction of the new government is going to be determined with the formulation of a common minimum programme." Does it mean that the Left will be a supervisory body to judge whether the common minimum programme (CMP) has been implemented or not. This will only reduce the importance of the cabinet. It would be better if the Left were to join the government. It is an open secret that the CPI wanted to do so but was dissuaded by the CPI (M).

The Left must have watched the emotional scene in the central hall of Parliament when Sonia Gandhi refused to accept office and the Congress members her 'no'. Still, a consensus emerged. The Left must deal with the new government in the same spirit. Economic reforms should not hurt the common man as some of the steps taken by the NDA did. At the same time, the country cannot go back to the mantras which had stalled the progress. There will have to be give and take as much in economic sphere as in political.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

It was Sonia's show



**KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi**

IN the Mahabharata, an Indian epic, Bishma Pitamaha, a revered elderly warrior, remained quiet when Droupathi, a lady of virtues, was sought to be disrobed in public. People even today compare him to a person who lacks courage to speak out. Atal Behari Vajpayee reminded me of Bishma Pitamaha when democracy was disrobed by his BJP. Not a single word did Vajpayee utter to condemn or criticise those of his party men who raised passions and threatened to disrupt normal public life if Sonia Gandhi had been sworn-in as the Prime Minister.

Even when Sushma Swaraj said that she would resign from the Rajya Sabha and tonsure her head, Vajpayee did not tell her to behave. As Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma had accepted Sonia Gandhi as the leader of the opposition and talked to her on affairs connected with the two houses. Neither Sushma nor her party ever demanded that the Congress should nominate somebody else to deal with them since Sonia Gandhi was ruled out on the basis of her foreign origin.

Vajpayee also maintained his silence when Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Uma Bharti submitted her resignation. And of course,

there was no question of pulling up Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi who said: "Sonia is a jersey cow. Even shopkeepers are not ready to employ her (Sonia Gandhi) as a clerk. Rahul Gandhi is a hybrid calf. I will not even employ him as my driver."

I cannot imagine even in my wildest dream that Vajpayee was supporting them. But I can well imagine his silence in the face of an ugly and abusive campaign which

In 1999, the Supreme Court dismissed a petition, challenging Sonia Gandhi's election from Amethi on the ground that she was not a citizen of India. The Court said: "It must be held that Sonia Gandhi by virtue of certificate granted to her under 5 (i) © of the Citizenship Act, which has not been cancelled, withdrawn or annulled till date is a citizen of India."

There is no law to bar a person of foreign origin from holding public

Janata Dal. In addition, Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party and Mayawati's Bahujan Samajwadi Party had given their letters of support to the President in favour of the Congress. Except the Samajwadi Party and the BSP, all other parties met and elected Sonia Gandhi as their leader.

The BJP goes on saying that they accept the verdict "in humility" but does everything to sabotage it. Humility has to be in deeds, not in

was something else beyond power: conviction and commitment. Sonia Gandhi was right when she said that she did not want to divide the country. A person who was not considered Indian had to tell the BJP and other members of the Sangh parivar, which do not stop talking about "nationalism", that she would rather step down than copy their ways. They have, indeed, done everything to polarise the society on communal lines.

BETWEEN THE LINES

By spurning the highest honour in the biggest democracy in the world, she, an Italian by birth, has told India-born politicians that there was something else beyond power: conviction and commitment. Sonia Gandhi was right when she said that she did not want to divide the country. A person who was not considered Indian had to tell the BJP and other members of the Sangh parivar, which do not stop talking about "nationalism", that she would rather step down than copy their ways. They have, indeed, done everything to polarise the society on communal lines. They should learn the lesson from what she has done to save the country from chaos which the fundamentalists and fanatics were determined to create.

the RSS orchestrated against Sonia Gandhi. He has always faltered when the occasion has arisen. He may well go down in history as a person who had healthy instincts but lacked the courage to put them to use.

What the BJP has done to stall the democratic process will haunt the party for years to come. It has written its own epitaph by not letting a leader with the support of some 320 in the 545-member Lok Sabha to become the Prime Minister. After losing at the polls, nobody thought that the BJP would resort to tactics of street urchins. It is not merely hitting below the belt; it was hitting at the very constitution and the legal system.

office in India. An unofficial bill brought to the Rajya Sabha a couple of years ago was not supported even by the BJP, much less other allies. The party did not make it an issue during elections. Wherever it did -- Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu -- the BJP and its allies were rejected lock, stock and barrel. Why is the BJP so churlish in not accepting the defeat at the hands of Sonia Gandhi when it had itself converted the polls into a clash of personality between Vajpayee and her?

True, the Congress won only 143 seats. But it had the support of the Left, the DMK, Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party and Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya

words. Even after the defeat, the party leaders have not given up the posture of arrogance which has been their undoing. In any case, their game is up for many, many years to come.

On the other hand, Sonia Gandhi has risen to the stature which Vajpayee did not attain in all the six years' rule. It is easy for the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to give Vajpayee the credit in a prepared statement. But it is a pity that the NDA did not have the grace to congratulate the parties which had won. It is customary.

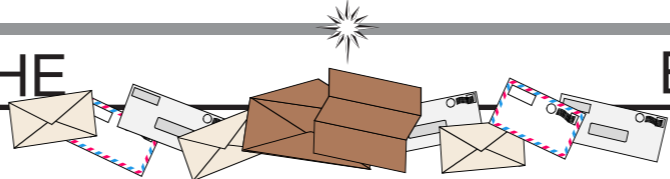
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They should learn the lesson from what she has done to save the country from chaos which the fundamentalists and fanatics were determined to create.

In fact, she has done something more: saving the nation from the perennial suspicion which the Sangh parivar would have raised on every decision she would have taken as Prime Minister. They would have argued that she had done or not done such and such thing because of her foreign origin. She too would have bended backwards to prove her nationalistic credentials.

Sonia Gandhi put the BJP in the dock. Here was a party that fought for democracy and against the cult

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Violation of human rights

We are the people of the democratic state of Bangladesh. But in every sphere, human rights are being downtrodden by the government. The recent blanket arrests were one such example of gross violation of human rights. Our constitution assures that, "Every citizen shall have the right to move freely throughout Bangladesh." But by violating this supreme law the police arrested people, without any justifiable cause or charges, from bus stops, river terminals and even from footpaths. According to the comments of the victims, they were arrested for only coming to Dhaka. They were asked to show their identity cards but most of them didn't have any. It was an abuse of Section 54 of the CrPC and section 86 of the DMP Act. The Supreme Court had directed the government to amend the Section 54 of the CrPC and issued the ruling that law enforcers apply it with caution. But still now no move for amending it has been made by the government. The most appalling things took

place in the police stations. There was no food, water and space for the victims. How could we expect such kind of behaviour from a democratic government?

We, the people of Bangladesh, do not like *hartal*, siege and deadline for ousting a democratically elected government, and we do not expect inhuman activities on the part of the government either.

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Can you hear us?

The communications minister promised to dissolve the unbearable traffic jam, the black soot and unserviceable motor vehicles and so forth. Eventually, he pulled off baby taxis using his iron fist from Dhaka city as his first step to save the oppressed citizens from the inescapable state of air pollution. But, as we see now, the progress rate is impeded. As usual, we the commuters had to yield to the 'bondage' of suffering in the streets. We are again compelled to travel by all those ramshackle buses

choking in smokes, boiling in the hellish heat caused by traffic jam for an immeasurable time. Yet we are proud to have the 'magnificent' road dividers in the middle of the streets and 'hillcock shaped' unplanned speed breakers. The traffic authorities are doing nothing about the old and worn-out buses.

Here we raise the question, how long will this maltreatment continue? Is it beyond the capacity of our authorities to fulfil the demand of the commuters? Can't they hear our cry? If they hear why don't they answer?

**Md. Shafiquee
Tangal**

IELTS coaching

To pursue higher education or for immigration to another country, 'IELTS' is required as it assesses one's ability of adopting in an English speaking country. For that reason, IELTS coaching centres have been mushrooming across the country, especially in Dhaka, but there is still doubt among the people as to how many of these IELTS institutions are good or well

informed about IELTS strategies. In newspapers we can see a lot of advertisements for IELTS and all such tests. It is also known to almost everyone that only a few people are aware of actual IELTS contents. The coaching centres in Dhaka try to draw the attention of the learners and claim that they have teachers and professors of renowned educational institutions. But the bottom line is that the entrepreneur himself or herself does not know how to apply the rules and regulations at the examinations. IELTS has four sections: listening, reading, writing and speaking.

If we conduct a survey, we may find that the teachers employed by the centres do not know much about the subjects. So how can they help the students? People say that only the British Council has efficient teachers for every section of IELTS. My suggestion for the interested learners of IELTS is: Give a thought before getting admitted into any centre as its sole objective is to earn money. **Kabir**

On e-mail

Situation in Iraq

Iraq has become a land of the dead. Everyday, coalition forces and Iraqi freedom fighters are being killed in clashes with each other. On the other hand, US and British soldiers are killing innocent Iraqi civilians including school going children that has broken all records of cruelty. The US and Britain jointly attacked Iraq, violating all rules and regulations of the UNO in order to capture Iraqi oilfields. They are torturing the Iraqi prisoners and later killing them and raping the helpless women. They have been drawing Iraqi oil (24 lakh barrel per day) and selling it for meeting the expenditure of the war. This is a heinous crime. But it is astonishing that the whole world is watching this US barbarism in Iraq as a silent viewer and no country or international organisations like the UNO, OIC and Arab League are taking any initiative to stop the wrong doings of the US. Heavy fighting is continuing between coalition forces and

milliamen of Maketada al Sadr in the holy city of Nazaf, Karbala, Kufa, Baghdad, Basra etc. The US claimed that Iraqi president Saddam Hossain had weapons of mass destruction but they have not found those till now. In this situation, all countries and international organisations should take immediate action to stop the genocide. **Md. Shafiqul Islam (Sagar)
North Jatrabari, Dhaka**

Orientation courses on QC

Our leather is cheap (for export), but the QC is short (poor quality of shoes, DS report May 10). Our cottage industry is big and heterogeneous, and lacks training on Quality Control basics; plus lack of regulatory coordination. Booklets are not easily available for new entrepreneurs.

BITAC, BCSIR, FBCCI, NGOs and related agencies can open and operate a national network of QC centres, attached to the technical vocational centres, for creating

awareness. These certificates would have market value, for the incumbents and the products.

The agricultural sector has created some roots so that the farmers are aware where to go to seek technical advice (see BTV programme, but the other trades are not covered). Our motor vehicle mechanical repair workshops are neglected in the informal sector, with hardly any regulatory presence, although some of the skilled mechanics are good without formal training.

Our huge human resources can produce thousands of skilled and semiskilled work force for employment at home and abroad (our seamen have earned some international recognition as a source of recruitment). We can export motor vehicle drivers if properly organised and trained. At present the driving skills of the majority of drivers is poor, due to lack of self-improvement courses (one week is enough for the basics).

We need a technical human resources independent agency to plan and operate enhancement

schemes to compete in the market, first in the domestic market, then abroad (the training of personnel for restaurants and hotel and tourism industries have been taken up recently). The body for over-all coordination of the policies in the various sectors is missing, (hello, Manpower Division?)

Our greatest asset is human resources (male and female), but we are paranoid about control of population (due to pressure from the donors located in the developed countries where the population growth rate is alarmingly low) The millions of masses will control themselves once they are made aware of their potentialities. We cannot say produce quality-controlled babies, but can ensure quality employment opportunities to those born. That is the central idea of all development goals. **Alif Zabr
Dhaka**