

## The PM's directive

*How dare they flout it?*

IF any reconfirmation of the prime minister's directive to arrest 'Bangla Bhai' was needed, in view of his being still at large, it came from none other than finance minister Saifur Rahman. He said he was present when the orders were issued by the PM. What are we to understand from all this? The orders of the head of the government, the highest authority of the state, are not being obeyed by one of its constituents: the police! That's something unheard of, even by the standards of the rather lenient governance culture in this country.

The law enforcement failure has been baffling in the case of the so-called Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) leader. First, nothing at all has been done to arrest the man. Second, he has been allowed to disappear from the public view. Third, the involvement of the police in helping him out of the law's reach has been palpable, if press reports, which have not been contested, are taken into account. There have been specific stories on how the law enforcers helped him disappear from the scene.

The fallout of the police debacle has been a rise in the incidence of JMJB terrorisation in the northwestern region. They have apparently been given the licence to kill or brutalise.

Now, how are we to interpret these developments? Are we to believe that there are forces within the government who could bypass the PM's orders with impunity? Who are these people and how can they disobey the PM's orders? These are questions which must be answered to get at the truth behind the non-implementation of the PM's directives.

The PM owes it to herself, to the office she holds, to the nation and the oath she took to uphold the constitution to go into the matter and have the responsibility fixed for non-compliance with her orders. Some heads must roll because we believe that her own credibility has been put at risk, not only at home but also abroad. Let us not send out anymore negative signals about the quality of governance in the country.

## Ahmadiyyas under siege in Chittagong

*Going from bad to worse*

THE International Khatme Nabuyat Movement took its anti-Ahmadiyya agitation to Chittagong on Friday, with hundreds of stick-wielding demonstrators besieging the city's Ahmadiyya mosque, and reiterating their demand for Ahmadiyyas to be declared non-Muslims by the government. Once again, the local authorities caved in to the mob pressure and agreed to hang a sign "warning" Muslims that the mosque was an Ahmadiyya place of worship and should not be mistaken for a Muslim mosque.

Let us repeat this point. The sign was hung up by the police. The police claim to have done so in order to maintain the peace. Thus, in the name of "maintaining the peace" the government has been a party to the continuing stigmatisation and marginalisation of the Ahmadiyyas.

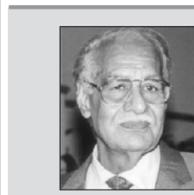
It is interesting that the government is forever bemoaning the image problem that Bangladesh suffers from, and castigates the media, the opposition, and even watchdog international organisations for contributing to this negative image which is so harmful for the country.

It does not seem to occur to the government that nothing anyone else can say or do could possibly harm our image as a country more than this kind of religious intolerance that it not only eschews but also condones. There is simply no place for this kind of obscurantist and reactionary religious repression in the Bangladesh we are professing to want to create. The world, even we have come too far to permit ourselves to revert to this kind of backwardness.

The government owes an explanation to all of us as to where it stands with respect to safeguarding the constitutional right to freedom of religion.

If in a nation of 130 million people we cannot afford to give space to one lakh Ahmadiyyas because of the sectarian orthodoxy of a handful, who do not care for civic peace and law and order, what kind of a signal are we putting across in terms of both governance and our credentials as a moderate Muslim country? Certainly nothing to be proud of.

# The Left is not right



**KULDIP NAYAR**  
*writes from New Delhi*

THE communists have committed yet another "historical" mistake by not joining the Manmohan Singh government. It took former West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu two years to admit it when he said he should have accepted the offer to head a third front coalition and become India's Prime Minister. This time the Left's realisation may be sooner because, as the days go by, the Congress-led coalition will get more entrenched and the communists' support less crucial. Their acceptance of the Lok Sabha Speaker's assignment reduces them to the position of Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam which was routed because of the limited performance by the Vajpayee government at the centre. The Left may suffer in the same manner. Somnath Chatterjee's writ will run in the precincts of Parliament, not with the cabinet where the power resides.

Strange, the communists till do not face the facts. An outside support is like committing a sin without enjoying it. Probably, the outcome of the election results has placed them in a position where they will be

damned both ways. The Left does not seem to realise that it is in a Catch-22 situation: it can neither throw the government out, nor withdraw its support. It can rant and rave but can do little. The BJP is waiting in the wings and the prospect of a midterm poll can loom large.

By joining the government, they would have firmed up the coalition. They could have influenced the Congress not to corner all the top

secretary general Harkishan Singh Surjeet took along Mulayam Singh's lieutenant, Amar Singh, to Sonia Gandhi's dinner without invitation. But it made no difference to the Congress.

The party wants to rebuild its base in UP where Mulayam Singh is at present supreme. He has 37 seats out of 80 in the state. Obviously, things would not have worked out. Mulayam Singh, who once claimed that no party would be

strongholds, during the Lok Sabha election. It will do so again when the two states go to the assembly polls two years hence. Had the communists been in the government, the two would have probably found some solution to the embarrassment of contesting in the states while sustaining unity at the centre. The secular forces have to evolve ways how to accommodate one another. If they fail this time, the communal elements may return

as the watchdog and conscience-keepers of the government. These are brave words and sound impressive. But they come to nothing. The Left can make noises. But the Congress can also plug its ears and go its own way.

What is the use of the politburo saying that the defeated candidates should not have been inducted in the government? The Left should have made it an issue. That these people have done a clean and

hang together or people will hang them separately.

There are reservations whether or not the government would last its full tenure. For the first time in India's political history, the Congress leads the coalition. The governments of Deve Gowda, Inder Kumar Gujral and Chandrasekhar fell because the Congress did not join the cabinet. It withdrew support from outside whenever it found convenient for political considerations. The communists, even if driven to exasperation, are in no position to do so. Even if forced to quit, their number of 62 does not pull down the government. The UPA may hobble but would not fall because it may be able to get the support of other parties.

At present the UPA has the strength of 330 in the Lok Sabha of 545-member house. The Congress and its allies make some 215, requiring only 57 to reach the magic figure of 272. The party can face a real problem if and when people like Laloo Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan - they are not happy over their portfolios plan to raise their standard of revolt. That the communists should have been inside the government to strengthen it may be clearer to them at that time than it is today.

The problem with the communists is they do not seem to understand that politics is an art, not science - the legacy of Karl Marx. Circumstances and situations in which the politicians have to act are always unique. An art presupposes material which does not vary. Political actions are performed irrationally. The communists may learn this lesson as the current Lok Sabha progresses.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## BETWEEN THE LINES

**The problem with the communists is they do not seem to understand that politics is an art, not science--the legacy of Karl Marx. Circumstances and situations in which the politicians have to act are always unique. An art presupposes material which does not vary. Political actions are performed irrationally. The communists may learn this lesson as the current Lok Sabha progresses.**

portfolios. They could have also told the allies not to display in public their unhappiness to the delight of critics. The presence of the Left in the cabinet would have been far more effective.

If the Left did not want to respond as a group, it could have at least permitted the CPI. As it so happens, the party was keen to join the government. Strategy-wise also, it would have been better because the communists would have known what was happening inside. The CPI ministers would, to some extent, have served as a check.

How far the communists can influence from outside is clear from the futile efforts they made to get the Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party into the government. CPI (M)

able to form the government in Delhi, has done well to go back to UP to look after his flock.

The Congress knows that the Left will huff and puff but has no alternative to support even when the Congress goes beyond the agenda of common minimum programme. That the Left may not sign it only lessens the importance of the document but at the same time it doesn't enhance the importance of the communists. The Congress will concede what does not come into conflict with its interests because the communists are an ally as well as an adversary.

The communists must understand that the Congress fought against them with all its force in West Bengal and Kerala, their

with a vengeance.

A better way out for the Left to register its presence would have been in the selection of ministers. A CPI (M) leader has said that if any incident of corruption is noticed and mis-governance identified, "we will oppose" it. How come they allowed the Congress to include in the cabinet a person against whom seven cases of corruption are pending in various courts? L.K. Advani was also charge-sheeted and he should have resigned from the cabinet. Laloo Prasad Yadav's matter is different; a day-o-day hearing is going on in the case.

One communist leader has said that they have not given the government a blank cheque. Another has stated that the Left parties will serve

competent job does not give the Congress the right to flout a popular verdict. The question is moral. Jawaharlal Nehru never violated the norms. He allowed a decent period to pass before reinstating the defeated people. Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee wanted Jaswant Singh and Pramod Mahajan in the cabinet badly. But he too waited for some time before bringing them through the back door of the Rajya Sabha.

The Left's defence is that it did not want to interfere in government formation. Little does it realise that its stock at stake is as much as that of the Congress. By saying that they are not part of the government, they cannot escape the responsibility. The Congress and the Left either

# Can academia fulfill national aspirations?

**DR. SYED SAAD ANDALEEB**

ACADEMICS, administrators, employers, policy makers, students, guardians and related others, involved directly or indirectly with the knowledge industry in Bangladesh, ought to note a perplexing and debilitating situation that has already taken root in the country's intellectual centers (i.e., universities, research organisations, think tanks, etc.). The situation is not only worrisome; it demands deep introspection and far-reaching measures. For decades, far too many universities and research institutions in the country, both public and private, have made little progress in promoting a research culture dedicated to knowledge generation to serve the needs of various "constituencies," especially the knowledge industry.

I stress the word constituency because these institutions are part of a larger society comprised of various groups with a variety of unfulfilled needs. It is these constituencies with which academia must interact constantly, solve their problems, and weave a knowledge base that is useful in ensuring a vibrant society. Especially, the universities must realise that they are not stand-alone entities, confined to some walls and idiosyncratic rigidities. Nor are they designed merely to "manufacture" graduates on a mass scale, often based upon context-less and, hence, ineffective education. To come alive as centres of excellence and to provide intellectual leadership, they must reach into and become one with the greater society, studying its every nuance and heartbeat to provoke, energize, guide, and build it. In the process, by assimilating the continuous stream of knowledge unearthed, universities can become the fundamental agents of social progress and reform. That means academia must engage fully with the society in which it is embedded to cast a critical eye on its deficiencies and to lend support

towards its accomplishments. Such engagement demands that knowledge generation or research becomes as important, if not more important, than knowledge dissemination or teaching.

Unfortunately, the knowledge generation function in the country's intellectual centres remains an enigma, its essence and importance seemingly lost to the academic world, while its counterpart - teaching - stands on the crutches of borrowed knowledge, generated in distant lands and under circum-

stances that often have little or no bearing with ours. The ability of such context-deficient borrowed knowledge to prepare future nation builders, "fit" for the local environment, is assuredly diminished if not, in many instances, useless. In essence, the problem is this: we have a huge need for knowledge consumption while there is a shortfall - more like a crisis - in the amount and quality of knowledge production in the country. That can mean only one thing: We are importing or borrowing knowledge from elsewhere. Can such borrowed knowledge sustain, guide, and revitalise our society? The answer is an emphatic no! Just look at the society we have built...of greed, violence, deprivation, mistrust, disrespect, arrogance, and many other associated ills.

My contention that we are in a knowledge-deficient society is easy to substantiate: A visit to academia will reveal more often than not how few are the academics involved with meaningful, long term research (applied or basic); the knowledge archives to which academia contributes in the form of books, journals, conference proceedings, etc. often do not reflect materials of international stature and would not stand the test of peer reviews; state-of-the-art practice is often absent in the limited scale of research where lack of quantitative model building approaches fail to provide deeper insight; and a visit to the libraries will indicate how few are the products of local scholars adorning the shelves. Unless academicians pursue the intricate but meaningful and useful art of knowledge generation that is rigorous, relevant, and visionary, we will remain a knowl-

edges-deprived society rooted in borrowed knowledge that is neither wholly relevant nor based on the particular circumstances of Bangladesh society. Furthermore, there is evidence that knowledge generation is not a priority item in academia and is revealed in the following: Where available, especially in the universities, the research budgets are deplorable; funds to support travel to conferences, even within the country, are nearly non-existent or disproportionately allocated as government officials seem to gobble up a lion's share of such travel (funded by the international agencies) often with no accrual of benefits; and the number of symposia, seminars, and conferences organised in the country, given the number of higher education institutions that have proliferated in recent years, is decidedly inadequate and often seem purposeless since they are organised more as random events instead of reflecting a sense of continuity and focus. Even the lack of in-house informal exchange of scholarly views is depressingly lacking as faculty find little time for intellectual discourse.

To add to it, much of academia follows the pattern of regular offices, confining intellectual activity to something like a 9-2 schedule. Such a time frame, if fully utilised, could lead to some productive output, despite the teaching loads. However, most intellectual centres seem "not" to want to take advantage of even such limited hours; their activities are in fact much less intense. One might observe that on most days, after mid-day, many of the intellectual centres are transformed into desolate zones with locked offices and bleak corridors. This, I believe, is

much of the research could at best be billed as "pseudo research."

What is imperative at this juncture for academia, if it wants to provide intellectual leadership to this nation, is to re-evaluate its role in society within the overall scheme of the knowledge needs of this country, formulate a clear vision, and bring knowledge generation to the forefront as an integral requirement of its faculties. Especially for the social sciences, local knowledge gener-

ation is a sine qua non for appropriate, meaningful, and context-based wisdom to take root.

Relying on foreign generated knowledge will not do in many areas as there's likely to be a misalignment of agendas and contexts. Unless the quality and quantity of research conducted in our higher education institutions is substantially increased, Bangladesh will be ever reliant on borrowed knowledge and foreign ideas that can lead the nation down paths it ought to carefully consider. For example, it is well-known how often the agenda of this nation is driven by external coalitions that often see the problems of this nation through their training and lenses. While the guidance they offer may be well-intentioned, reliance on external ideas must be properly debated by academia. Today that careful and questioning scrutiny is left to the hands of a tiny group of "intellectuals" instead of being shared more widely across academia as national policies continue to be driven by the "externals" based on their views and biases. The Poverty Reduction Strategy (commonly known as the IPRSP)

is a case in point about which much of academia is blissfully unaware although its design and projected effects have much to be debated. Unfortunately academia seems to have been side-stepped on the issue and a strategy of such national significance is being driven hard on the backs of a government administration that is neither trained to debate its pros and cons, nor fully committed to or cognisant about the process of developing such vital strategy as they appear to be founding sector by sector, without a clear understanding what to do and how to do it! I believe "wider academia" could make a big difference here by weighing in and charting out the poverty reduction strategy through a long term research agenda. Pursuing such long term veins of research and building an indigenous knowledge base is the better way to ensure our self-reliance and a course of development that is appropriate to our needs. Unless the role of knowledge generation and its continuous pursuit is imbued by academia, this nation will remain dependent on borrowed ideas and borrowed knowledge, mostly provided by those whose understanding of our context and culture can never equal that of a home-grown intelligentsia. Programmatic research must begin in right earnest in all of academia if a healthy and secure future is to be carved out with locally relevant knowledge. I might end by saying that my view of academia is not to cast all into one bag. There are pockets of good research that ought to be acknowledged; but as a whole, academia must generate much greater levels and quality of knowledge to build and sustain a vibrant social order.

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## 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.

### Reign of terror

We came to know Bangla Bhai, the ringleader of a vigilante group a few days back, though he has unleashed a reign of terror in Rajshahi for the last six years.

Reports say that his mission is to eradicate the outlaws from Rajshahi region. But we do not know who gave him such authority. We came to know that he along with his squad lynches the outlaws, which is inhuman, barbaric and a culpable crime.

The police keep silent and that disturbs all of us. What is the necessity of police, if Bangla Bhai works as a surrogate mechanism? A macabre picture published on the front page of DS on May 21 traumatised me. His mission to Talibanise our country must be torpedoed double quick.

The government should keep in mind that any delay in handling such a cancerous growth can be

very costly.  
**Molla Mohammad Shaheen**  
*Dept of English, DU*

### A voter's dilemma

Now I am 18 years old. If my name is included in the voters list, I should be able to cast my vote in the next general elections. But whom should I vote for? Now there are two large parties in Bangladesh. One is in power but it has abused human rights in the name of public safety. And the other is calling hartal in the name of safeguarding the 'human rights'.

So what can I do?  
**Md. Saiful Islam**  
*Chittagong*

### Transparency in governance

Judging by the critical analyses and editorials in the press, millions of

newspapers readers feel insecure at the apparent non-transparency in governance. The senior editors must be allowed some benefit of the doubt for alleged exposures and critical comments in public interest. The government goes gaga over press affairs, but ignores the feedback! To be insensitive on sensitive issues is a sort of hypocrisy (in any society).

It is not enough to deny and keep quiet, and pass on the buck to others.

Good intentions have to converted into practical actions and policies which could be seen and practised. Rhetoric is not good governance. Today insecurity and lawlessness have reached unimaginable proportion in Bangladesh. When the usefulness of a political party becomes questionable, then it is doomed, through public verdict (note what happened in India in the

general elections).

The photo of the dead body of an alleged lynched activist hanging from a tree (DS May 21) was shocking, when I realised it happened in our dear Sonar Bangla! The informal private cadre doing the job of policing the society has to be disbanded, regardless of its intentions. Why the official policy is not announced firmly? Be tough when needed, but not through the lower field cadres. It is so easy to misuse power and influence.

This is a coalition government, hence each party in power has some agenda, regardless of the fact whether a part of it could be launched at some time or the other. It is not a 100 percent BNP show. Hence the political policies and guidelines have to be explained clearly to the public from time to time, to avoid misunderstanding and propaganda by the opponents.

Vague generalities won't do.

The ministers are diverting from the hot topics of the day to inane development projects and concepts. The turgidity of the home ministry is disgusting. The politicians in power believe that the main objective is to criticise the opponents all the time, and then get busy in private occupations. The information content of public speeches is very low, leaving out the usual sermons and jargons. The BTB has nothing important to report, and fills the time slots with foreign clips and garbage speeches. I have been watching the similar video clips from Palestine for several generations. Some royalty is offered to relay Western propaganda?

Talk about the activities through the back doors, and unofficial contacts and contracts which are not talked about. Why the topic of godfathers is avoided? Tell us the

inside story with some examples of disciplinary action taken internally within the party. House cleaning is not publicised! First wazoo, then namaz!

**Md Abad**  
*Dhaka*

### Freedom fighters' wards

We are wards of freedom fighters. We applied for the 24th BCS, got our admit cards and appeared at the preliminary test and came out successful. We sat for the written examinations and did well. But we were dismayed at not finding our registrations in the result sheet. When we contacted the PSC, we were informed that our applications had been cancelled as we failed to fix the freedom fighter ward certificates with the applications. The fact is that the "Ministry of Liberation War Affairs" took a very long time to

issue the certificates after sorting out the genuine freedom fighters. As we did not get it in time, we filed the applications inscribing "Yes in the form hoping that we would show it during "viva voce".

To our great surprise, we had to pay the price for the procedural fault. Every one is aware of the fact that the preliminary test was held twice amid the wanton rumour of question paper leakage. We appeared in eight subjects in written tests. But we were "massacred mercilessly" at the eleventh hour. If we were to be denied the freedom fighter quota, then why weren't we refused before the preliminary test? Besides, the ward certificate was wanted in the viva voce in almost all the BCS examinations. This is the exceptional case.

The freedom fighters are the valiant and worthy sons of the soil. They made the supreme sacrifice for the

independence of the country. Would the PSC consider our case?

**Sabuz**  
*Demra Bazar, Dhaka*

### Attack on HC

I was deeply shocked by the attack on the newly appointed British High Commissioner, Mr Anwar Choudhury. He was wounded in the blast that took place at the holy shrine in Sylhet.

This incident smears the traditional hospitality of the Bengalees. Mr Anwar Choudhury is not only the British High Commissioner but also a high ranking official who is the first Bengalee ever appointed a British High Commissioner.

But what happened in Sylhet is truly shameful for the nation.  
**Niharendra Nath Choudhury**  
*Lecturer in Economics*  
*Palashbari College*