

Pope's funeral

Honouring his memory

POPE John Paul II was laid to rest in St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican on Friday after a funeral service attended by over two million mourners including dignitaries from more than 80 countries. It is notable that the dignitaries included many leaders from non-Christian countries, and their honouring the passing of the Pope underlined how he had been a political and moral leader as much as a religious one.

The Vatican is considered a state, but that wasn't the reason the heads of state felt that they had to be there to see the Pope laid to rest. Nor were the world leaders there solely because the Pope had been the spiritual leader of the world's billion-plus Roman Catholics. They were there to honour a towering figure of moral authority who had a great influence over world affairs.

Within the Catholic church the debate has begun as to Pope John Paul II's legacy. There are differences of opinion with respect to his conservatism and traditionalism and his centralization of authority. But this is a question best left to Catholics -- of whom we have many in Bangladesh -- to sort out individually and as a community.

For the rest of the world, the Pope will be remembered chiefly for his strong and uncompromising stands, first against communism and then in no less measure against the soullessness of capitalistic materialism. More than anything else, the Pope was a man of peace. His opposition to the Iraq war will not be forgotten.

What he has shown in death is that he can be a unifying force. President Bush and Prime Minister Blair were of course on hand to pay their respects -- but also leaders such as Robert Mugabe and Bashir Assad and Mohammad Khatami as well.

The lesson to be learned is that if the world can unite to mourn the death of this great man of peace, then we should be able to unite as humans to resolve our problems peacefully and with wisdom, and not on the battlefield. If the world leaders take away in their hearts this principle espoused by the Pope, then they truly will have honoured his memory.

ACC's need for an unencumbered start

Wrangling at the top must stop

THE advisory committee on screening of the Bac staffers for absorption into the Anti-Corruption Commission has come up with some recommendations. It has suggested that the commission may approach the government for appointing officials on deputation and ad-hoc basis in the interim to give itself a start without any further loss of time. The committee wants the former Bac staff sent back to their parent offices. The other important recommendation is that the ACC frame its own organogram, rules for appointment and define the jurisdiction of the staff before they are appointed. So, it seems, there is an element of adhocracy in the first recommendation, while the second deals with the long term plan for its functioning.

A fresh start by the ACC is what we are looking forward to, but the downside to it is that it may cause further delay in the commission becoming serviceable.

As it is, considerable delay has occurred in floating the organisation which is latched on to fight corruption. The government is into the fourth year of its tenure, and has already lost four months over the staff absorption issue and taking up of the cases left by the now-defunct Bac since the inception of the ACC. The government had decided to include the Bac staff through a screening procedure that apparently defied any formulation. Then came another spate of confusion triggered by bickering at the top with the chairman and the two members of the commission airing conflicting opinions on some rudimentary issues. Differences between the government and the commission also surfaced interminably. As long as the bickering at the top level continues, the rest of the organisation can't be expected to remain unaffected.

The reservations about media coverage of the goings-on are hard to explain. The media reported what had happened. So, why blame it for your own failings? It is patently contradictory that an organisation created to establish transparency and accountability, should turn its back to media coverage of facts and figures. The media is only performing its duty by pointing to a delayed start due to an administrative mess-up that couldn't be hidden from public view. Frankly, insofar as combating corruption goes, the commission will only benefit by allowing the media to serve the people's right to know -- even about itself.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

WE in Bangladesh are used to the periodic spectacle of the clarion call issued by the high and mighty to establish the rule of law. The cynics say that the intensity of such calls is inversely proportional to the expanding deterioration on the ground. In other words, the more passionate the exhortations to obey the law, the greater the flouting of the rules or regulations. Authorities, however, warn in sombre and solemn tone that the law will take its own course, and remind us that none is above the law. Erudite speakers educate us about the compulsions and benefits of going by the constitutional directions and provisions.

However, under the present circumstances, many of us might not be aware of the discomforts or the minor disasters that may visit us should we decide to lead a totally or even a partially lawful life. Bengali, according to some, is a language of over-statement, and as such, speakers may naturally be oblivious of the dangers of obedience to the law while expounding on the necessity of establishing the rule of law.

Historical perspective

That the natives lie even on their death-bed is a stigma attributed to the Indians by the British colonial rulers. While this write-up does not intend to examine the veracity of such a pronouncement, it is perhaps largely true that most Bengalis do not correctly register their date of birth. In this context, only those having direct experience can tell us about the dangerous discomfort or uneasiness or even a comical situation that may develop if one speaks the truth or obeys the law. To record the date of birth by decreasing the actual date by several years at the time of admission in school has proved to be a beneficial practice in our society. Very few feel ashamed or embarrassed by such alteration. Barring some honourable exceptions, the leaders of our society do not have their dates of birth correctly recorded.

Many of them are sincerely carrying out their assigned functions for long years without extra remuneration.

Imagine what imbalance might arise if many of them can be motivated to correctly pronounce their dates of birth by touching the holy book or under a solemn affirmation before a magistrate. One can only think about the doubtful validity of scores of official papers, many of them legal, with grave consequences, which were signed by persons who at the time of such signing did not have the *locus standi* age-wise. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to even figure out the money drawn irregularly from the treasury. It might be imprudent to ascertain the number of civil and

proposition under such circumstances. Obedience to the law might invite disaster in such a reality.

Work experience has shown that most passenger-carrying buses of outlying stations do not possess mechanical fitness papers. Setting the records right might mean the stoppage of all buses from plying in small cities and towns. In such an eventuality the misery of people will be unbearable and disorder may follow. Under such circumstances, even the patriotic military government will not emphasize the observance of such a law beyond one week. The government elected by

Interestingly, the traffic police will not be very keen to set things right because disobedience benefits them too. The matter that merits special attention in this regard is the active support and sustenance provided to the stability and continuity of such irregularities and indiscipline by political quarters. One has only to take a close look at the transport sector to appreciate the arrogance and the unbridled malevolence of an unaccounted money flowing on a daily basis. Disciplining the transport sector might give a rude jolt to the foundations of our politics. Whether the public interest

we want services from the public sector. The major earnings of the state come from customs duties and sales tax, but there also the share of the state remains below the due. The evil process of over and under-invoicing is difficult to counter. The vested quarter is very strong and stable here. One may remember that in the 80s there were efforts to entrust the duty and tax collection job to a private company as was done in Indonesia. It is very difficult to establish an environment of greater law obedience because illegal practices have unofficially

account of its becoming a tradition due to its prevalence for a very long time. Now sticking to the rules and regulations as per the book in these places even on a smaller scale might place the public in a quandary, because they might think that if speed money assures prompt service then why venture into the uncertain experiment of the application of the golden rule. The cynics say that even the furniture of such historical buildings expects extra payment, and employees here think that receipt of speed money is their birth-right as much as adoption of unfair means in the examination is looked upon as a fundamental right by many students.

Tyranny of justice and deliverance

It might appear that under the present circumstances, obedience to the law might turn the suffering public into victims of the tyranny of justice. The expectations of the public are many, but our capacity to deliver is extremely limited. We will have to put up with lot of ambivalence in such a situation. The language of our constitution is lofty and inspiring, but the discourse of our politicians does not match up. However, we cannot lose heart.

We may condone the lapses of illegality and disobedience of the past by taking cover in the doctrine of necessity under irretrievable circumstances in the greater interest of the society. But we should earnestly hope that good words and noble deeds will be restored. The realization may dawn on us one day that disobedience of law cannot be a strategy and a way of life, and that an orderly society is the foundation of democracy. The nation will perhaps awaken to the reality that in the ultimate analysis, intangibles like sincerity and honesty will help us in eking out a durable existence. In the meantime, let all of us earnestly pray to the Almighty for good men and women to lead us.

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criminal cases that may have to be registered for incorrect statements or reports or irregularities. Those who are desirous of embarking on a revolutionary course or are believers in doctrinaire politics may resort to epoch-making ventures. Many of us would like to wait and watch.

Transport and movement

For a large majority, specially those of the low-income group, the rickshaw is still the dominant mode of transport for daily movement. In Dhaka, if we are expecting the rickshaw-puller to ply lawfully then he will lose half a day's wage, because if he does not ply in a haphazard and rash manner he will definitely lose a sizable wage. This is the reality of a metropolis where mechanical and human-powered transports are uncomfortably rubbing shoulders. Under such circumstances, how humane and enforceable would it be to expect the rickshaw-puller to go by the law? The plying areas for rickshaws are shrinking. By one account, there are more than one hundred and fifty thousand unauthorized rickshaws, and the livelihood of at least one million people depend on the income from such unauthorized rickshaws. To put an end to such illegal practices would be a complex

popular vote is usually very kind and will never be heartless by being too respectful of the law. Therefore, one may discover that the comfort of the citizenry is not necessarily dependent upon observance of law. On the contrary, observance may produce the opposite result on occasions.

The goods-carrying trucks on long distance routes may draw special attention in the discussion under review. Many question whether the tradition of greasing the palm of traffic policemen at several intersections and paying toll to other pressure groups is not the result of illegal conduct and activities. The discerning observers say that the unlawful transaction in the transport sector is the inevitable result of peaceful coexistence of two corrupt groups in their mutual interest. When the situation goes beyond previously arranged agreements, some clashes occur.

For facility of understanding, the ground reality is that our driving licenses are largely fake, mechanical fitness is not subject to rigorous scrutiny, and there is no bar to carrying goods exceeding the authorized tonnage by several times. Efforts to put a stop to such irregularities will encounter serious opposition from truck owners and labourers because this will adversely affect their livelihood.

would warrant such a bold new experiment is a matter worth pondering over.

Income and wealth

Barring a few honourable exceptions, Bangladesh does not enjoy the reputation of proper payment of taxes and submission of statement of wealth. By one account, nearly four million individuals and groups are supposed to be within that tax net the actual paying rate may be hovering around one million. This figure is an important pointer to the understanding of the vastness of the phenomenon of disobedience, particularly when one is thinking of identifying the obstacles in the way of creating positive economic culture. In this sector the peaceful coexistence of two corrupt groups does not attract public attention. The creation of an environment of obedience may inconvenience the mental and physical well-being of many. Interestingly, the tax returns of our highly-placed professionals are ludicrously low, and quite naturally our tax department does not evoke even one percent of the fear and respect that the IRS does in the US. In reality, we are happy to enhance the individual's unearned income while neglecting to raise the earnings of the state, though all of

acquired the honour of right. Promoting obedience at higher levels is definitely desirable but achieving that might disturb our societal balance.

Regulatory bodies

The pathetic absence of observance of rules and regulations in subordinate courts and investigative bodies is too well-known to be repeated. For prevention and investigation of crime, the servants of the republic are supposed to serve without extra payment except their salary and allowances, but breach of this conditionality is more frequent than its observance. The disobedient conduct of law-enforcers have become so normal a sight that many do not expect proper discharge of their functions any longer. The unholy nexus of politicians and law enforcement personnel in the commission of crime does not trigger serious protest by the taxpayers. Under such circumstances, the government is ceasing to be the true guardian of the people.

Transparency International has repeatedly reported that in our subordinate courts, services cannot be made available without "speed" money, and that such practices are not considered undesirable on

Homeless Iraq War veterans

RON CHEPESIUK

ADJUSTING to civilian life after serving in the military has always been a daunting challenge for America's soldiers. But as the Iraq War continues with no end in sight, an increasing number of returning American soldiers are finding it tough merely to put a roof over their heads.

According to advocates for the homeless, about 100 Iraq War vets are currently homeless, but they expect that number to increase dramatically, if

American soldiers have to stay in Iraq for several years, as Bush administration officials have suggested. "Americans think the VA (the US Veterans Administration) is wonderful, but that's a lot of rubbish," said Linda Boone, Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless Veterans (NCHV) in Washington, DC. "The VA doesn't have enough resources to take care of our veterans, and Congress doesn't want to pay for them." The NCHV has 350 member organizations in 46 states, providing shelter, food, and other services to homeless vets.

Maria Fostarinis, Executive Director of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty in Washington, DC, agreed that the VA doesn't have the resources to do its job well, and added, "Budgets are not acts of God. They are political choices. The VA needs to be out there making the case for veterans."

As the Iraq War vets become homeless, they join the 299, 321 veterans the VA estimates are

homeless in America on any given night. Nearly 47 percent of them are Vietnam War vets, while the rest have served in World War II, the Korean War, Granada, Panama, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq. No organization, including the VA, keeps statistics on homeless vets, but the agency does have profile of the homeless vet population. The

outrageous that anyone who has put their life on the line for their country should have to live on the street."

In one of its reports, the VA boasted that since it began responding to the special needs of the homeless vets, its "homeless treatment and assistance network has developed into the largest

some event will trigger a problem. The public should be really concerned about that because the VA doesn't have the facilities or resources to treat the current number of homeless vets with mental health issues, let alone any new ones. The VA has cut back its inpatient residential care programs." Statistics from the VA show that

budgetary affairs, Boone said. Meanwhile, the Pentagon appears to be in state of denial. While admitting to some problems in treating soldiers returning from Iraq, Pentagon officials have told the press that the situation has been fixed. Homeless vet advocates remain unimpressed. "The military has done a terrible job easing vets

back into American life once their tour of duty ends," Stoops said.

As the 10th Congress gears up, the NCHV has adopted a comprehensive legislative agenda that focuses on homeless prevention strategies and on adequate funding levels for community-based veteran service providers. The NCHV and its allies are lobbying Congress to provide an increase for the Homeless Veterans Revitalization Program (HVRP) and the Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP), the only federal programs specifically dedicated to providing employment training and placement services to American veterans. The NCHV warns that, without an increase in government funding, a number of programs receiving government grants will decrease and there will be no new grants for new programs.

Meanwhile, advocates for homeless vets would like to see Americans who have strongly supported US troops in Iraq and Afghanistan step forward and get involved with the issue. "You see all those cars with yellow ribbons saying, 'Support Our Troops,'" Boone said. "What you don't see are signs saying 'Support Our Veterans.' But when those men and women take off their uniforms, that's when they need support the most."

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INSIDE AMERICA

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vast majority are male (about 98 percent), single, and poor or disadvantaged. Nearly 50 percent suffer from mental illness and/or substance abuse problems; more than 67 percent served their country for three years; and about 33 percent were stationed in a war zone.

"Veterans, who make up about 9 percent of the US population, comprise a sizeable percentage of America's homeless population ... about 23 percent," Boone revealed.

Michael Stoops, Director of Community Organizing for the National Coalition for the Homeless in Washington, DC, stressed that homeless vets are not "losers," as some people might think. "About 59 percent of them had honourable discharges," Stoops said. "It's

provider of homeless services (in America), serving more than 100,000 vets annually." But, in reality, that means only 20 percent of the vets in need are being served and that 400,000 vets have no supportive services to help them find housing, medical care, nutritional food, job training, placement assistance and substance abuse and mental health counseling, if they need it.

In the future, many Iraq homeless war vets will need mental health counseling, Boone predicted. "Studies show that mental health issues for homeless vets begin later in their lives, as much as 12 years later," she explained. "They will seem to be doing well mentally, despite being on the street, and then

as of July 2004, nearly 28,000 Iraq War vets sought healthcare from the federal agency, and that one in every five was diagnosed with a mental disorder. A study that appeared in the July 2004 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine revealed that 17 percent of service members returning from Iraq met screening criteria for major depression and general anxiety disorder.

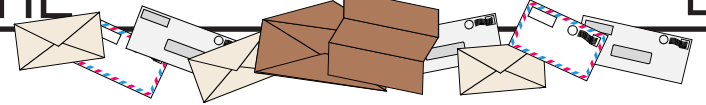
A recent NCHV survey shows that combat veterans who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq are beginning to request help from homeless volunteer service providers. The survey was in response to the growing number of inquiries from the journalists and government officials involved in veteran and

back into American life once their tour of duty ends," Stoops said.

In a recent ABS television nightly news report, Dr. Alfonso Batres, the head of VA's transition assistance program, said it was up to retiring vet to seek help. "You may offer all the programs in the world, but if they don't come in to receive those services then it's very difficult to provide them access," Batres said.

Homeless advocates said the VA is wrong to put the onus on vets and expect them to know what services are available. "Isn't it the job of the VA, as a federal agency, to make the people it serves aware of how they can help?" Boone questioned. Stoops said, "That type of attitude shows that the system is broken and why we will see more (returning)

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.

Let's be smart!

Obviously a man cannot be 'real smart' if he has problem of bad pronunciation, no matter how costly his dress might be! It's really beyond my understanding how far we can go if we cannot even pronounce a word correctly.

I've seen many educated people saying "ispirite"(sprite), "istupid"(stupid), "ischool"(school). What the hell? Do we have any idea how odd this may sound? We tend to think that pronunciation does not matter, it's quite enough if we can only speak English. But unfortunately the truth is we cannot (or do not) even speak. Now don't ask about pronunciation. Tooba Arbab and Alvee were right; few people know the correct pronunciation and people with bad pronunciation can't get our attention. Actually, our problem is we don't want to solve our problems, moreover if anyone calls a spade a

spade, we start criticising him/her. The problems of accent and pronunciation are not the same. The Arabian and Indian accent can't be changed, no matter how hard you try. If you carefully listen to Indian accent you will see that "T", "D" etc sound quiet harsh. And in Arabic or Spanish/Latin accent, you will hear "to" "do" instead of "T" and "D". People around the world have different accents, but that's not the point.

The problem begins when you don't utter a word correctly in correct form. We, the Bangladeshis, don't have that weird problem of accent. It's just that we need to be a little careful, especially when we speak in a public meeting or in the media. Practice is needed.

English will always remain a mere "foreign language" if we can't speak it correctly! If we have any limitation, we should not be ashamed of it. We should not have

any problem with learning and gaining knowledge! Should we? **Cantara Wali Ruh**
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Zimbabwe elections

In his letter (Daily Star, 05/04/05) concerning the recent triumph of Mr. Robert Mugabe in the Zimbabwe parliamentary election, Dr Rashiduzzaman Khan displays powers of observation denied to even the most acute viewers of elections.

Even though the numbers simply do not add up in many of the constituencies (more persons voting for Zanu (PF) than actually registered as voting etc), Dr Khan saw nothing untoward in the fact that most people were afraid to venture out to record a vote for the opposition.

This is wonderful, because a number of British and I have a problem with the upcoming election

in the UK. We do not want Tony Blair to win. Another five years of political correctness, and socialist generosity with other people's money will see all of us British immigrating to Bangladesh, and you do not want that, do you?

So, Dr Khan, put on your best set of myopic specs (preferably the dark ones), and come to observe the elections in the modern cradle of democracy.

I will put out the word that anyone found voting for Tony and his miserable lot will be hit over the head with a bag of fish and chips. Then use your powers of acuity to record that everything was fair and well as good as elections in Zimbabwe. This will ensure my favourite party, the League of Empire Loyalists' gets into power.

An offshoot of Zanu (PF), they do not recognise the independence of the United States, for example.

Just one slight problem, they do

not recognise the independence of Bangladesh either. But I am sure that a generous soul such as Mr. Mugabe will look after you. Just do not say the wrong thing.

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Achieving excellence in classroom

I read the article captioned "Achieving excellence in classroom teaching" by Dr. ASMA Haseeb published in DS on 5 April. He wrote, "It is true that in this country there is generally lack of students' motivation for socio-politico-economic reasons, many of which are beyond the control of teachers." Factually, teachers' politics along with students' are directly linked to mainstream political parties, where intellectual freedom is needed most, but is sadly absent. That has a devastating effect on university

education.

He also wrote, "Universities in advanced countries do not consider the views of students as a taboo. They rather take students' concern quite seriously and put continuous efforts to the quality of teaching." Admittedly, this is exactly what we need most.

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Saarc without India

At the initiative of Bangladesh the leaders of India, Pakistan, Bhutan, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh reached a consensus and formed the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (Saarc) for peace and cooperation, socio-economic development and welfare of the teeming millions of South Asia.

More than two decades have since lapsed but unfortunately

nothing tangible and fruitful has been achieved.

Because of the mammoth size, length, breadth and huge population of India, it suffers from some kind of superiority complex and thinks in terms of hegemony only. It treats its neighbours with a disdainful attitude. It pokes its nose in the internal affairs of other Saarc countries. It also creates one problem after another for them and insists that all problems with Delhi should be resolved bilaterally, without any arbitration or interference by any third country or party.

India's Kashmir problems, with Pakistan, river water, Tin Bigha, Talpatty, trade imbalance and border smuggling with Bangladesh, camouflaged activities against Nepal, and malicious and baseless propaganda against all other South Asian countries have made the aims and objectives of Saarc ineffective and useless.

We admire and appreciate the tremendous services rendered by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) consisting of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. It was established in 1967 but China was left out.

So why cannot we recast, refurbish and give a fresh lease of life to Saarc by excluding India from it?

Yes, we need a new Saarc without India, we repeat Saarc minus India for smooth functioning of the regional grouping and to ensure socio-economic development, peace, friendship and welfare for the peoples of Nepal, the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

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