

Playing game with HC directives

The very intent of the govt comes under question-mark

THE Supreme Court's rejection of the government's 21st plea for time extension for implementation of the 12-point High Court directive issued in 1999, to effect separation of the judiciary from the executive, has brought to the fore the government's long-winded failure to accomplish the task. Apart from the time extensions sought and received by the past AL government, the BNP-led alliance government has had a disgraceful track record of dithering on the constitutional obligation whose requirements were clearly spelled out through the HC directives some half a decade ago.

The deplorable fact is that the interregnum between one time extension and another always passed off without any concrete advance being made in complying with the directives. For example, the last prayer for extension of the deadline was for six months which was granted; but when confronted with the question at the court as to what the government did in all that time to take matters forward, the government side could not come up with any satisfactory answer. The law minister has never tired of talking about the need for amendment to the CrPC to make the transition to judicial separation. But why no initiatives have been taken to bring the change about? The government has also constituted a seven-member judicial service commission to separate the lower judiciary from the executive and bring it under the control of the SC, but only two of its members are from the judiciary. Its composition is overwhelmingly executive in nature.

So the conclusion that one is constrained to draw is that the very intent of the government is open to question.

The moot point is that the HC directives were not questioned by the government. On the contrary, by seeking all the time extensions it has, in effect, accepted the court's directives and the responsibility to comply with them. Why the consistently negative and diffident approach to the issue then? It lays bare the moral bankruptcy of the government and its credibility is severely compromised.

What was the necessity of this type of game play when separation of the judiciary was an election pledge of the government? And why the continual reiteration of the pledge without delivering on it in real terms? The government cannot evade these questions.

What the SC has ruled echoes the demand and sentiments of the nation as a whole. The government must fully abide by the HC directives and facilitate judicial independence before the next general election.

Rab above law?

A journalist stands his ground, makes the point

WE FIND no word strong enough to express our shock and consternation at the manhandling by some Rab elements of media correspondent Atiqur Rahman in Meherpur. He was roughed up to the point of being taken to hospital. What was his fault? He had merely asked a Rab vehicle parked in the middle of a side street to be removed to make way for the rickshaw he was riding home on, following Tarabi prayers after day-long fasting.

Irate over someone's 'temerity' in ignoring the visible signs of an elite force's presence, a Rab man inquired about his (Atiq's) identity -- to be only told, modestly, that he was a member of the public.

It was a red rug to the bull, as it were, and the Rab men started beating him; even when he identified himself as a journalist he would not be spared!

The local Rab chief in an attempt to explain away the incident regretted it happened and said if Atiqur Rahman had identified himself as a journalist it would not have taken place at all. This attitude is repugnant to our sensibilities, because it implies that law enforcement people are free to do anything with anyone identifying himself as a member of the public. What is a better identity than that of a citizen to be demanding that a certain courtesy is shown to him, a legitimate request is met and his right of way through a public thoroughfare respected by lawmen paid out of the tax-payers money?

Besides, what was that setting up of a 'check-post' by a Rab vehicle blocking public road space? Smacks of a cock and bull story.

Let's raise the core question about the abuse and arrogance of power in their worst manifestations through the so-called crossfire deaths which were sought to be explained away in such a manner as to breed an impunity culture in the mindset of the special force to do whatever it pleases. Meherpur incident was symptomatic of a deeper malady that must be cured with great compunction and far sight -- in a stout defence of the rule of law.

Religion and politics

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

PERHAPS both the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun and Scottish philosopher David Hume (who greatly influenced Skepticism and Empiricism school of thought) shared oscillation theory in their observation of religion. While Ibn Khaldun believed that popular religion in Muslim societies tended to oscillate between periods of strict religious observance and of devotional laxity, David Hume believed that men changed from polytheism to monotheism, not in a continuous unilinear change, and back again because "men have a natural tendency to rise from idolatry to theism and sent again from theism to idolatry". This oscillation, argues Hume, is not caused by thoughtful and considered reasoning but by politics of fear, uncertainty and a "kind of competitive sycophancy".

Hume was, therefore, not surprised that Hercules, Theseus, Hector and Romulus were replaced by Dominic, Francis, Anthony and Benedict. Hume was a protestant and a skeptic at that. His distance from Catholic philosophy, however interesting, does not form the core of our discussion. What is important is the relevance of the commonality in the perception of Hume and Ibn Khaldun of oscillating devotion of human beings between monotheism and polytheism and also differences in the character of devotees in both creeds which have plunged the world today into a black hole of holocaust because a minuscule part of the adherents of one creed would repeatedly inflict upon the world their weapons of hatred.

It has been surmised that Christianity's urging of its followers to give unto Caesar what is Caesar's is because it initially flourished among the politically disinherited, among those who were persecuted for their belief in a monotheistic religion when "competitive sycophancy" obliged most people to practice idolatry

because Caesar had both gold and sword which an unseen God in His wisdom did not chose to use to save His followers from the jaws of death. It took the Christians thousand years to get relief till Emperor Constantine converted himself to Christianity and Emperor Charlemagne converted Europe to Christendom. Before that time a faith born without political power could hardly have been expected to preach otherwise.

By contrast the initial success of Islam was so rapid that it did not have to give anything unto Caesar and it spread its wings often at point of sword and grew into a rich civilization

temporal and spiritual powers(how can one forget President Bush's communion with God ordering him to attack Afghanistan and Iraq and to establish the State of Palestine). Whether the Americans have relected an evangelist and fundamentalist as President could have been ignored by the world had not that person also at the same time been the most powerful man in the world presiding over a country described by some as one which has so much economic, cultural and military power not accrued by any nation since the days of the Roman Empire.

One hopes that despite the horrific

The merchants of death today are exploiting differences not only to promote sectarian violence within the Islamic world but also to deny the fruits of technological advancement to the Muslim subalterns of the yesteryears. Our misfortune is that these ideologues of hatred, semi-literate themselves, are convincing the ignorant (of secular education) madrasa students of their inerrant moral and intellectual "superiority" over others to the extent that these "others" being moral degenerates need to be physically eliminated to purify the earth of apostates. This kind of Hitlerian menace (who believes in superiority of faith in place of racial superiority) has now assaulted our shores.

dominating a large part of Europe. By the eighth century Muslims had conquered North Africa, the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, most of Spain, established bases in Italy, substantially reduced the size of the Eastern Roman Empire and besieged its capital Constantinople. The Ottoman Empire's assault on the gates of Vienna could perhaps provide a background to the stringent Austrian opposition, though mellowed down temporarily, to start European Union's talks for Turkey's entry into the EU.

If historian Bernard Lewis' clash of civilization denoting those between Muslims and Christians and post-Christians, rigid theocratic hierarchy vs. permissive secular modernism is to be given credence then one could imagine that the seat of non-Catholic Christianity has now taken residence in the White House combining both

terrorist transgression into America -- both physical and psychological -- President Bush would not be totally converted to Bernard Lewis' perception of the Muslim world's "downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression" having been caused by the defeat of the Muslims at hands of the Judeo-Christian civilization but would retain his belief in the conviction expressed by John F. Kennedy in his posthumously published book A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS that Jefferson and Madison's America would not see immigrants as ethnically-hyphenated (e.g. Arab-American) or as ethnicity of origin (e.g. Bangladeshi). In reality, however, the Muslim Diaspora in the West is seen through tinted glass by their predominantly white neighbours (a recent survey shows that a majority of both whites and African-Americans favour a decrease in the

current level of immigration) reminiscent of the internment of the Japanese-Americans during the Second World War.

In self-defence the Muslims have adopted, as Professor Kay Deaux points out, many taxi drivers in New York city (immediately after 9/11) who by appearance could be labeled as Arabs or Muslims pasted American flags on the windscreen of their cars. Another tendency displayed by the Diaspora is to turn inward, a tendency to "circle the wagon" in the face of unfriendly stares which a western liberal values imbibed modern person would have been loathe to do under

frustration has been occasioned by the unqualified support given to the Israeli genocidal and expansionist policies in the Middle East.

While the expression of this anger and frustration through terrorism can never be justified because terrorism even in its most expansive definition can only be abhorred, one has to address the root causes of this malignancy not in terms of "defeat" of one civilization by another but to secure a coherent globalised society where prosperity and poverty are not totally segmented. It is natural for the West as it is for the victims of terrorism in some developing countries to attack

the terrorist where ever they may be as Plato had advised centuries back that the price of civilisation is the need to defend its own material preconditions by force of arms if necessary.

Equally it is necessary to recognise that the Muslims of the world differ substantially not only in their religious views but also in their politico-cultural orientation. Islam is trans-ethnic, trans-social and trans-national yet it is far from being homogenous as the simplistic view would tend one to believe. Indeed as Professor Ernest Gellner points out, Islam provides "a scriptural faith; a completed one is available and there is no room for further accretion or for new prophets; also, there is no warrant for clergy, and hence for differentiation, and there is no need to differentiate between the church and the state, between what is God's and what is Caesar's".

But there are cleavages between the Sunnis and the Shiias (the current situation in Iraq provides the most glaring example); between the Arab and non-Arab Muslims; between those who believe in hereditary and hierarchical system as Bernard Lewis put it "The Imam is central to the Ismailia system of doctrine...the Imams were divinely inspired and infallible" and those who believe that no intermediary is necessary between God and His devotees.

These differences have arisen with the passage of time and have caused both social and political conflicts. The merchants of death today are exploiting these differences not only to promote sectarian violence within the Islamic world but also to deny the fruits of technological advancement to the Muslim subalterns of the yesteryears. Our misfortune is that these ideologues of hatred, semi-literate themselves, are convincing the ignorant (of secular education) madrasa students of their inerrant moral and intellectual "superiority" over others to the extent that these "others" being moral degenerates need to be physically eliminated to purify the earth of apostates.

This kind of Hitlerian menace (who believes in superiority of faith in place of racial superiority) has now assaulted our shores. As it is, according to Human Development Index, Growth Competitive Index, Failed States Index and Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, Bangladesh has fared miserably. Unless our authorities can free themselves from the vortex of being a politician who can see only up to the next elections and graduate themselves to the status of a statesman who thinks of the next generation Bangladeshis may have to account for their failure to the elders of the global village.

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PRSP misses strategy to fight corruption

ANM NURUL HAQUE

HE much talked about Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) entitled 'Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction' has been approved by the Executive Committee on the National Economic Council (ECNEC), the highest policymaking body of the government. The 400-page PRSP, a three-year strategy for the government's development programmes was completed in December 2004 and released for review and comments by the donor agencies and experts. The General Economic Division (GED) of the planning ministry also requested all 300 parliamentarians of the country to give their inputs and suggestions by May 15 to the PRSP, a document that will contain the road map for development and poverty reduction for the next three years (2006-2009). The process has been delayed reportedly to accommodate the maximum number of suggestions from all major stakeholders of the country including all members of the present parliament.

The General Economic Division (GED) earlier submitted the draft PRSP to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on July 31, 2004. The PMO formed 14 thematic groups like macro-economic stability and pro-growth, financial sector reforms, infrastructure development, domestic resources mobilisation, reforms in governance, judiciary reform, health and population, education, rural development and information technology to prepare the PRSP. Twelve major ministries, mainly finance, commerce and planning were assigned as lead ministries for the thematic groups. The PRSP being

framed with an action plan to reduce poverty level chalked out a set of projection back in December. But these were criticised for being partly out of context. The donor agencies put stress on a wide range of consultation on the PRSP to reach a broad-based consensus to make it more functional.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) advised the developing countries to prepare a PRSP, corresponding to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as declared by the United Nations in September 2000. The IMF supplied a guideline of around 1,000

governance. In tackling growth-induced income inequality, the document said that accelerating growth and bringing a pro-poor orientation in the growth process would be achieved through emphasising four priority areas: 1) accelerated growth in rural areas and development of agriculture and non-farm economic activities, 2) small and medium manufacturing enterprises, 3) rural infrastructure and 4) information and communication technology. The PRSP also featured a policy matrix of the government's future programmes including complete separation of the judiciary from

million to implement the three-year PRSP programmes. But the World Bank's funding will be conditional on the government's implementing the programmes under the PRSP. The Finance Minister also said, the delay in endorsing the PRSP was among the causes for which the World Bank has suspended the disbursement of the third tranche of the Development Credit Support (DCS) amounting to \$ 200 million which was due in August.

A three-day meeting with the donor agencies is scheduled to be held from November 15 in Dhaka to discuss how the donors will contribute to the

strategy (CAS) for Bangladesh for 2005-08 to harmonise their development support activities. Japan, which is the biggest bilateral donor for Bangladesh, is also expected to join the others in this exercise.

The chief of the World Bank who visited Bangladesh recently said, Bangladesh can achieve even an 8 percent GDP growth a year instead of the present 5 percent, if corruption and confrontational politics are contained. 'You have wonderful, talented people. But the problem of corruption is big drag on your economy,' he added. He also said that

According to an estimate, about 75 percent of Tk 2000 billion of foreign aid and grants received since independence for poverty reduction allegedly has been siphoned off. Many of our economists have made it clear that, poverty reduction is simply impossible without curbing corruption. So, the PRSP must contain a strategy of direct approach to address corruption as its top agenda, bringing home the point that poverty cannot be stamped out without combating corruption.

pages for preparing the PRSP, which was also considered as the pre-condition for providing the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facilities (PRGF) loan by the IMF. Bangladesh has already received two tranches of the PRGF loan from the IMF within the framework of the PRSP, which is only 0.5 percent interest based and to be repaid by 10 years with a grace period of 5 years. In fact the PRSP is an initiative supported by the donor agencies for poverty reduction and is committed to development assistance by the donors within its framework.

The PRSP has set a seven-point strategic agenda with employment topping the list. The other agenda include nutrition, maternal health, quality education, sanitation and safe water, criminal justice and local

the executive, establishment of a human rights commission, reconsidering setting up of a central bonded warehouse, hiring talented people for top level public administrative positions from outside the government by 2007.

The PRSP showed a projection of expenses in some of its prog-ammes, such as, \$12.12 billion for primary education and \$343.8 million for sanitation programme. Planning and Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said that 14 percent resources of GDP a year is needed for implementation of the programmes under the PRSP. Out of this, 10 percent will be mobilised from the internal resources while the rest 4 percent will be collected from external sources. Four donor agencies would provide funds of about \$ 150

implementation of the PRSP. The forthcoming meeting with the donors has been styled as 'PRSP Implementation Forum' instead of the previous Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) as the donor agencies have decided that their development assistance will now be based on the PRSP. The Local Consultative Group (LCG), a forum of the country's bilateral and multilateral donors also made a number of recommendations for reforms in few programmes of the PRSP. The donors Joint Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) is being prepared in the light of the PRSP. The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom (UK) have agreed to prepare a joint country assistance

World Bank's future assistance for the projects including those in the power sector would depend on reducing corruption. 'We cannot commit money unless we are convinced it is going to be spent in the right way' said Wolfowitz. Before his departure, at a short press briefing at Zia airport he, however, said World Bank would continue assisting Bangladesh in its endeavours to reduce poverty.

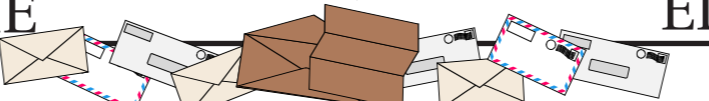
The critical shortcoming that has turned the PRSP into a virtual non-strategy from practical point of view is that it does not contain the strategy to fight the unabated corruption in the country. Corruption is perceived to be most acute in Bangladesh and it has again been crowned as the top corrupt state in the world for the fifth consecutive year. The local consultative group

suggested inclusion of a number of specific measures in the document to get rid of confrontational politics, corruption and law and order situation, but the PRSP barely reflects them. With the government fine-tuning the much-vaunted PRSP, no direct approach to address corruption has been outlined. The PRSP, however, observed that the problem of corruption and poor governance lied largely in the fact that certain strategic sector, particularly the police, judiciary and transport remain largely unreformed. The PRSP policy matrix also said little about its strategy to make the Anti-Corruption Commission effective which needs to pull its socks up. The Anti-Corruption Commission was setup on November 21, 2004. But this much-hyped Commission is yet to put its feet down.

The PRSP, first of its kind in Bangladesh, is framed to serve as a strategic tool for combating the country's pervasive poverty. There is no denying that all pervading corruption is the major impediment to our economic growth and poverty reduction. Most of the people of this country living in the abject poverty are deprived of their basic needs due to widespread corruption. According to an estimate, about 75 percent of Tk 2000 billion of foreign aid and grants received since independence for poverty reduction allegedly has been siphoned off. Many of our economists have made it clear that, poverty reduction is simply impossible without curbing corruption. So, the PRSP must contain a strategy of direct approach to address corruption as its top agenda, bringing home the point that poverty cannot be stamped out without combating corruption.

ANM Nurul Haque is a banker.

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.

Tourism

Our Dutch friend Twin van Leeuwen makes perfect sense in his letter on tourism (The Daily Star, 30.9.05). I am sure many in the Bangladesh tourism sector have been thinking on the same lines but have been unable to implement, for various reasons, policies on practical research. However, keeping track of what tourists and travellers want and whether the host country can deliver on these, are tantamount to good returns on any investments made. In other words, to be successful, we need to do our homework. Regular or periodic information/research on tourists' background, movement, needs and preferences should be the basis of a country's tourism policy and action. There are lots of ways in which this information can be gathered and shared among relevant agencies and institutions.

As Mr. Leeuwen rightly points out,

it is necessary to advertise Bangladesh where tourists are most likely and frequently to see and hear about it. Read any good travel literature or information on the net on popular destinations and you will find everything you need to know in terms of safety, travel routes, fares, accommodation, currency exchange, the weather, festivals, events, sightseeing and so on.

Now the question is whether tourism is in fact seen by the private sector and the Bangladesh government as a development priority and foreign exchange earner on par with say, the garments export industry, or if it inspires the same interest as our growing pride in cricket.

Some countries, especially in our region and in Southeast Asia, continue to reap the benefits of tourism with far less than what Bangladesh has to offer in terms of natural and historical attractions; articles in our local

dailies and magazines highlight these destinations more than those within the country the key eye-opener being information, readily available, relevant and widely circulated. The market for domestic holidaymakers and tourists should also be explored and organised.

But what are we doing to promote Bangladesh's image as a tourist destination abroad? Shouldn't it require more conscious effort on our part? I say this despite the concern for safety or security that weigh on the minds of tour operators and tourists alike from Cairo to Bali. Although holidaying itself has become a threat, it will not stop the number of tourists in need of recharging their spirits and minds forever. And increased security measures everywhere have not hindered the desire of people to travel, whether by necessity or choice. I would urge travel agents and tour operators to make up to date, relevant, accurate

and interesting information through various channels available in readable English (and other international languages) for prospective customers and not wait for people to discover Bangladesh on their own. They should also look into recruiting people to act as hosts, tour guides and interpreters at home and explore agencies abroad which will promote Bangladesh. As a widely travelled individual myself, I would be happy to assist with ideas and suggestions.

A word of caution, though: Let's deliver on what we promise, and neither inflate or deflate expectations. **Naema C. Quayes**
Male, Maldives

Our tourism industry

I'm thankful to Mr. Twin van Leeuwen for his valuable suggestions on tourism in Bangladesh, published in the DS, 30/9/2005. We're grateful for his tips. In fact, he came to visit

Bangladesh for the second time. Actually, we've lackings in tourism sector, I admit. Simultaneously, we've some heritage to be proud of, I won't strike at that point, rather I believe that tourism is, by any logic, a business. And we've much trade deficit with India, the big neighbour. On the other hand, we're victim of information terrorism. Due to propaganda, many tourists don't wish to visit Bangladesh. Yes, this matters!

Because of propaganda via Internet about the Bangladesh garment industry, there was a serious decrement. We don't have direct air communication with Europe. These are our drawbacks, but recently we've allocated more budget, and enhanced security and other facilities for the tourism sector. The government is also serious. Nevertheless, we will not forget the suggestions offered by Mr. Twin van Leeuwen. **Engr. Mohammad Ariful Islam**
B.S. In EEE

Ramdebpur, Tangail.

"False hopes or achievements falsified?"

I did not intend to be drawn in between a Major General and a fellow economist in the debate about "False hopes or achievements falsified?"

I took an exception to General's comments which state "Although concerted efforts have been made at home and abroad to portray our country as a fundamentalist nation, there have been statements from Washington and London branding Bangladesh as a religiously moderate country, despite the letter mailed to US Secretary of State by 19 US Congressmen (pro-AL lobby) suggesting to call us as such, what a shame!" The General then writes, "Those that made a desperate bid to falsify the achievements of the present government would regret the partisan view

that they took." General, how does one falsify achievements? You are not suggesting that Professor Bayes broke into the office of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Are you?

What are those achievements, General? Forget about the Awami League now. Let me tell you a story. A child returned from school and showed his math and English grade to his parents. He received 11 in English and 13 in math out of 100 in each subject. The parents started dancing because of their son's strength in mathematics.

No one takes any pleasure that the level of corruption is so deeply pervasive in Bangladesh that it maintained its lowest ranking in corruption for the fifth consecutive year. However, that is the only statistics one needs to know to see everything else inside out about a country; all other indices or statistics simply reinforce the notion about the country's economic, social and politi-

cal health. For example, based on Freedom House's 2004 Legal System and Property Rights Index, rule of law index dipped from 5.0 to 3.2; judicial independence dipped from 3.7 to 3.2; impartial courts index dipped from 4.2 to 2.8; integrity of the legal system index dipped from 7.0 to 3.3. This degradation happened during the last five years and the meter is running for the worse. These and all other worsening statistics are discouraging FDI and straining relationships with WB, IMF and all development partners worldwide. No sir, I have absolutely no allegiance to any political party but to my place of birth.

Is there anything else you would like to know?

Dr. Abdullah A. Dewan
Michigan, US