

Changes in emergency rules

The right to bail must be restored

THE caretaker government has brought in a new amendment to the Emergency Powers Rules 2007. The amendment, the third to be put in place since the last week of March this year, seeks to amend further the provisions regarding a grant of bail in certain cases. The amendment quite logically raises the question of the rights people in detention are entitled to despite such measures as a state of emergency being in force. Since the imposition of emergency on January 11 this year, the country has noted the very large number of people taken under arrest on various charges. In March came the announcement of a suspension of the right to petition for bail and redress in a higher court of law. The move was obviously a disturbing one, and despite the changes brought about in the provision since then, it remains the feeling of many that the rights of detained individuals should be upheld. That would be a sign that the rule of law is a template this nation always works upon.

The curtailing of the right to bail has created a pretty disturbing situation. In the first place, there are a very large number of people who may be or are actually innocent of the charges upon which they have been held. Yet these individuals, with bail being denied, have little or no opportunity to take themselves out of the legal maze they find themselves in. It is thus a clear situation of justice being denied, indeed of the law being turned on its head. In the second place, the denial of bail only adds to the logistical problems that jails throughout Bangladesh have regularly been overwhelmed with. Our jails are literally bursting at the seams. There are tens of thousands of detainees languishing in sub-human conditions at our jails in normal times. When to that problem is added the number of those who cannot seek bail upon arrest under emergency provisions, one can easily understand the resultant difficulties in terms of space and all other factors associated with detention. One cannot ignore the fact that among those suffering are the innocents. The upshot is then very clear, which is that the government must seriously mull over the idea of restoring the provision of bail across the board as a way of ensuring compliance with the overall concept of the rule of law.

The government, we note, will decide by April 18 which offences under the emergency are to be made bailable. On our part, we propose that a fresh new appraisal of the bail question be undertaken. The standard procedures and provisions regarding a grant of bail ought to be restored. Such a move will ensure the inviolability of the rule of law. We hope the government will give serious thought to the issue.

Boro farming and diesel price hike

Farmers need government assistance

THE price increase in diesel has come as a bad news for the farmers in the 16 Northern districts of the country. The poor farmers are finding the extra money needed to meet the price rise hard to come by. It will be bad news for the country when the added cost of fuel hikes the price of paddy subsequently.

Sources in the BPC said that the hike in diesel price would cost the farmers an additional Tk.80 crore in the smooth running of all the irrigation pumps and shallow tube wells now in operation spread all over the area.

Our farmers with their ever shrinking land holdings are already living under considerable stress with their limited income. Only recently, prior to this price hike, a good number of them had suffered a setback due to loss of their crops caused by untimely planting combined with harsh and unpredictable weather conditions; and now they find themselves in yet another dilemma. And before that, they had to face yet another crisis due to non-availability and irregular distribution of fertilizer. Also consider this that the farmers of Kurigram, the most poverty ridden amongst all the Northern districts of the country, would require an additional of Tk.2 crores in the months of April- May, to have their diesel operated pumps continue to run smoothly.

Despite the presence of such negative factors, our food production in recent times has remained stable. It is therefore all the more imperative that we provide the farmers of the northern district all the support we can.

Agriculture is the most dominant factor of our economy and undoubtedly, our farmers are the best and the most prized of our human resources. In all fairness the present government should take urgent steps to mitigate the sufferings of the farmers to the best extent possible. We strongly recommend that a substantial subsidy in diesel price be given for the benefit of the farmers. It is our strong belief that given the will, a level of commitment and sincerity, it should be possible for the administration to stand by the side of our distressed farmers at this hour of their need.



SYED BADRUL AHSEN

GROUND REALITIES

There have been all the times when even illustrious men have, consciously or otherwise, made people around them feel small and insignificant. When the politician Sitaramayyah, a Gandhi favourite, challenged Subhas Chandra Bose for the leadership of the Indian National Congress, he lost. Gandhi was heart-broken. "Sitaramayyah's defeat," he said to everyone's consternation, "is my defeat." That statement would, in time, lead to Bose's radicalisation and eventual withdrawal from constitutional politics.

adopted by General Azam Khan when President Ayub Khan, facing a challenge from Fatima Jinnah at the 1965 elections, told newsmen that the former governor of East Pakistan possessed a head full of bhusa, or bran.

Humiliating people came naturally to Ayub Khan, and to those who served as his hangers-on for a decade. He remains infamous for that "language of weapons" threat he employed against Bengalis if they opted to support the Six Point plan for regional autonomy.

Lest you think that political insult is a given only in the Third World, you ought to remember good old Winston Churchill. There was a surfeit of wit in the British politician. And with that came a good deal of the caustic.

He once belittled a political rival through telling his audience: "An empty cab drew up before 10 Downing Street, and out of it stepped Clement Attlee." Go a little back in time, to the intellectually stimulating days of Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone.

In the House of Commons one day, Disraeli proceeded to make ample and repeated use of the terms "tragedy" and "calamity." When a member interrupted

him, curious to know what the difference between the two was, Disraeli turned round, cast a mischievous look at Gladstone and said, to much mirth, "Now see Mr. Gladstone there? If he were to fall into the Thames, it would be a tragedy. But if he were to be pulled out of it, that would be a calamity." And that was that.

Jawaharlal Nehru had a way of letting his visitors know when he was beginning to get bored in their company. When a young Congressman named John Fitzgerald Kennedy visited him in Delhi in 1951, the Indian leader heard him out for a few minutes and then gazed up at the ceiling.

It was a sign that he had had enough. Kennedy left. Even after Kennedy became president in 1961, Nehru did not find it exactly thrilling to meet him at the White House. He found JFK intellectually impoverished.

In our times, George W. Bush has been much mocked and much maligned, thanks to people like the film-maker Michael Moore. But no hurt could be greater than the epithet that has always been hurled at Tony Blair. In the late 1990s, people thought he was Bill Clinton's poodle. And after September 11, 2001, with

Clinton gone, he was swiftly turned by a sadistic public into Bush's poodle. That is the worst insult anyone can throw at a politician as high profile as Britain's prime minister, but there you are.

There is little that you can do about it, just as there was hardly anything you could do when, during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s in China, men like Deng Xiao-ping were derided as capitalist roaders. And the group of four politicians, which tried to prevent his return to power in the 1970s, was to be forever tainted with the ultimate humiliation.

These individuals, among whom was Mao Zedong's widow Jiang Qing, were called the Gang of Four, a term that was to become synonymous with things sinister and conspiratorial. In Bangladesh, over the past couple of decades, politicians and their awe-struck followers have liberally sprinkled their opponents with such outrageous forms of insult as "conspirators," "collaborators," and "enemies of the people."

In 1950s America, Joe McCarthy, the senator from Wisconsin, went full-speed into the job of "weeding out" sus-

pected communists from the government. The consequence was a witch-hunt characterised by unprecedented evil.

Perfectly good men had their reputations tarred beyond recognition, careers were flung into deep pits -- until a military officer told McCarthy that he was leading the country down the road to disaster. That was the beginning of the end for the senator. He was eventually censured by his colleagues. Some years later he died a dissolute man.

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India would take a different path to the future. And then there is the oft-told tale of how Mohammad Ali Jinnah undermined the scholar that was Moulana Abul Kalam Azad.

The respected Congressman was patronisingly referred to by Jinnah as a showboy of the Congress. It was a remark that surely did little to enhance Jinnah's reputation as a leading politician in pre-partition India. Post-partition, in 1966 to be exact, Morarji Desai was outraged at the move by the Congress to have Indira Gandhi replace the deceased Lal

Bahadur Shastri as prime minister. It was beyond his comprehension how a "chhokri," a mere slip of a girl, could administer India.

Well, Indira Gandhi did administer her country well for the better part of her career. And with that came an enormous sense of self-esteem. When Richard Nixon kept her waiting for forty-five minutes in the White House in November 1971, she returned the favour, minute for minute, the very next day when the US president visited Blair House to talk to her.

The snub was, as we note, mutual. By far one of the biggest snubs directed at a national leader of global repute was observed at the 1954 Geneva Conference when a communism-obsessed John Foster Dulles, secretary of state in the Eisenhower administration, turned away in contempt from a smiling Chou En-lai because he did not wish to shake the hand proffered by the Chinese prime minister.

Amere eighteen years after that very public demonstration of bad manners by Dulles, President Richard Nixon journeyed to Beijing on a visit that would leave a world dramatically transformed. It was to a waiting Chou En-lai that Nixon offered his hand. That handshake wiped out the bad memories of Geneva 1954.

Azouz Begag was not the first to be subjected to humiliation. And he will certainly not be the last. Consider the obscenities Robert Mugabe has been wreaking on Morgan Tsangvirai in Zimbabwe.

Syed Badrul Ahsan is Current Affairs Editor, The Daily Star.

The class factor in policing a transitional society



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

STRAIGHT LINE

We would do well to remember that the concept of "policing by consent" has worked in Britain because of the incorporation of the working class into mainstream social, political and economic institutions. Such incorporation negated any serious threat that class conflict could pose. We stand to gain by taking note.

ated by a pluralist society, police action can easily rebound. Indeed, the provocation of state repression is itself a means of mobilizing support for militant action.

The police in Bangladesh can find themselves engaged in a political debate with protesters and their sympathizers over the propriety of their respective conducts, the outcome of which is decidedly uncertain. This is essentially a zero-sum game: to the extent that if one party can portray itself in a favourable light to relevant audiences, it does so at the expense of the other party - if one side wins, the other must lose.

The visibility, and the overtly political dimension of public order policing, is the central problem to which the police of our fledgling democracy have to adapt. In a disturbingly polarized society like ours, we find police habitually resorting to coercive methods of maintaining public order. As a result, there is evi-

Central to this has been the relationship between the police and the military.

In Bangladesh, one has to admit that a large number of working-class people could not be incorporated into established political and economic institutions. They do not have entry into the wider institutions of urban life, which have influence in containing and constraining behavior.

It may be pertinent to remember that once conduct is institutionalized, it can be policed with a more or less light touch. In the west, violent conflict was contained by opening the constitutional route to power for the industrial masses.

The policing of a divided society is also marked by lack of autonomy, absence of effective mechanisms of public accountability and relatively unrestrained use of force. It gives rise to a dual role, which comes from responsibilities for ordinary crime and internal security, and fosters the growth of polarization of attitudes

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towards the police and their conduct.

Police in the Indian sub-continent, including Bangladesh, have often thought of shifting towards a model based on the metropolitan British "bobby," but have failed to plan due to the demands of their security role in a pronounced law and order and insurgency driven state.

When our oppressed people achieved independence, they found that political compulsions continued to divide them and encourage internal opposition to the infant state. That resulted in the police suppressing that opposition, thus becoming aligned with the dominant section.

In other words, when the fate of the state is unalterably aligned with that of the dominant group in a zero-sum game, the police role simultaneously becomes that of defending the interests of both, the state and the dominant group.

In such a situation, there is very little opportunity for incorporating different classes, which adds cohesiveness while minimizing friction.

Unfortunately, long after political independence, our political class has not been able to differ-

entiate citizens from a subject population, or understand that free people cannot be injured with impunity. Our political governments have not been restrained in using coercion against citizens for suppressing dissent.

The widespread police indiscretions witnessed during the last decade reflect the crisis of legitimacy faced by the successive governments. It also indicates the increasing exclusion of substantial sections of the population.

We would do well to remember that the concept of "policing by consent" has worked in Britain because of the incorporation of the working class into mainstream social, political and economic institutions.

Such incorporation negated any serious threat that class conflict could pose. We stand to gain by taking note. The danger we face is that we are developing in the direction of greater exclusion, and in so doing we are defining sections of our population as beyond citizenship and hence beyond restraint.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Daylight saving time: A positive initiative

If, at present, Bangladesh can save around 400 MW of power daily by ordering shops and businesses to close by seven pm, applying DST can achieve more regarding the power management. DST not only saves energy but also prevents traffic injuries and crimes. It allows more people to travel home from work and school in daylight, which is much safer than darkness.

RIPAN KUMAR BISWAS

and the energy crisis can be managed.

In a statement to the advisory meeting, adviser to the Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry, Tapan Chowdhury, said that the country could save on an average 250 megawatt power a day if they could start DST and zone-wise load-shedding across the country.

Obviously, DST does not change the length of the day. DST is the convention of advancing clocks so that afternoons have more daylight and mornings have less.

In DST, the clock jumps forward from 02:00 standard time to 03:00 DST, and the day has 23 hours, whereas in autumn the clock jumps backward from 02:00 DST to 01:00 standard time, repeating that hour, and the

day has 25 hours. Artificially delaying sunrise and sunset tends to increase the use of artificial light in the morning and reduce it in the evening. Daylight saving time has been around for most of this century, and even earlier.

Benjamin Franklin, while a minister to France, first suggested the idea in an essay titled "An economical project for diminishing the cost of light." The essay was first published in the "Journal de Paris" in April 1784. But it wasn't for more than a century after that that an Englishman, William Willett, suggested it again in 1907.

Willett was reportedly passing by a home where the shades were down, even though the sun was up. He wrote a pamphlet called "The waste of daylight"

because of his observations. He wanted to move the clock ahead by 80 minutes, in four moves of 20 minutes each, during the spring and summer months. During the First World War, England recognized that the nation could save energy by changing the clocks according to Willett's idea.

Observing the British summer time, established by an Act of parliament in 1916, where clocks were put one hour ahead of Greenwich mean time (GMT), the US congress placed the country on DST for seven months in 1918 and 1919.

The Uniform Time Act of 1966 (15 US Code Section 260a) created DST to begin on the last Sunday of April and to end on the last Sunday of October. Any area that wanted to be exempt from DST could do so by passing a local ordinance. The law was amended in 1986 to begin DST on the first Sunday in April.

DST increases opportunities for outdoor leisure activities during afternoon sunlight hours, and offers more opportunity to shift apparent daylight from morning to evening so that early morning daylight is not wasted.

One of the biggest reasons for changing the clocks to DST is that it saves energy. Energy use, and the demand for electricity for lighting homes, is directly connected to bed-time waking up time. Bed-time is always late evening through the year. Everyone turns off the lights and TV when he/she goes to bed.

People will use less electricity if they stay fewer hours at home during the longer days of spring and summer. Most people plan outdoor activities in the extra daylight hours.

In the average home, 25 percent of all the electricity is used for lighting and small appliances, such as TVs, VCRs and stereos. A good percentage of energy consumed by lighting and appliances occurs in the evening when families are home. By moving the clock ahead by one

hour, it is possible to cut the amount of electricity we consume each day.

Similarly, markets need not be

opened for so long in the late evening. DST increases retail sales and business development. According to the study of the US Department of Transportation in 1970, DST reduced the country's electricity usage by 1% during March and April.

If, at present, Bangladesh can save around 400 MW of power daily by ordering shops and businesses to close by seven pm, applying DST can achieve more regarding the power management.

DST not only saves energy but also prevents traffic injuries and crimes. It allows more people to travel home from work and school in daylight, which is much safer than darkness. Similarly, it reduces people's exposure to various crimes, which are more common in darkness than in light.

In a study in the county of Cheshire, UK, between 1983 and

1993, risk of pedestrian injury for all ages was reduced by 16