

A death on our conscience

While the death of Choles alone is shocking, and a vicious reminder of the status of minority people in Bangladesh, it is also a reality check for those of us congratulating ourselves on the brink of hope of a new nation emerging from the ashes of the old. Undeniable, these are times of change. Political possibilities are opening up to a nation denied for over thirty years, demanding greater dedication, participation and contribution from every citizen.

Tazreena Sajjad

READING Naeem Mohailemmen's article "Sorry, Choles" (*The Daily Star*, April 6) reminded me of a UNICEF session that was held in Dhaka several years back. The topic of the conference was women and children's health and security. As the discussions about the status of both women's and children's health flowed, the topic of the indigenous people was also touched on. I will never forget the government official burst out laughing, as if sharing a joke: "What rights are you talking about? They are not a civilised people -- they

need to first read and write Bengali; if the Bengali people are already suffering from health and security concerns, the rights of the indigenous people are certainly not a priority."

I remember finding these statements not only shocking. They were crude, frightening and reflecting the realities of the complacency always felt by a majority population anywhere. They reeked of self-indulgent justification that legitimises why the "others" can never lay claim to what is "ours."

The laugh in itself delivered a simple, yet clear message. In laying claims to the "golden Bengal," we have also graciously

accepted the mantle of the oppressors. And so the legacy of the rights denied to a people, not just to rights but also to dignity, plays out again.

While the death of Choles alone is shocking, and a vicious reminder of the status of minority people in Bangladesh, it is also a reality check for those of us congratulating ourselves on the brink of hope of a new nation emerging from the ashes of the old.

Undeniable, these are times of change. Political possibilities are opening up to a nation denied for over thirty years, demanding greater dedication, participation and contribution from every citizen. Pride in the liberation struggle is

being reinstalled; memories are being recalled of how the Bengalis, the oppressed, stood up to their oppressors.

The dialogue of the past and discussion of a future are running parallel. Yet, lurking in the shadows is another side of the new political change -- the ease with which we make heroes of mere mortals and the complacency we slip into once a victory is won.

Lulled into the comfort of political stability, we are forgetting to hold those in control accountable, this time for the death of a citizen. The torture and death of a political leader, and a leader of the minorities is a discomforting development, and we choose to rally around the flag and talk about ideals and principles, pride and glory of a nation, rather than put them to practice.

The nation is not mourning the death of a leader. The nation is not protesting the torture and extra-judicial killing of a Bangladeshi. The nation is being strangely silent

about the simple argument not being Bengali does not deny a citizen his rights, his privileges and access an echo of he same demands we had in '71.

The similarities are strikingly obvious, and our commitment to silence and our own exclusivity glaringly obvious. It seems in our desire to be special; we prove once again that we are nothing but the same.

Over the past few years, I have attempted to raise an interesting though highly controversial argument. In doing so, I concede my intention to be both polemical and provocative. Yet, form an objective point of view, what we know to be facts are irrefutable.

In our, i.e. Bangladeshi practice to be a Bengali nation, and legitimise claim to the state as exclusively as possible in terms of assumed superiority of language, religion, cultural values and practice, the distinction between us and the nation of Israel becomes quite blurry.

In stating this, I do not undermine the sufferings of the Palestinian people, nor do I down-play the magnitude of destruction wreaked by the Israeli military in West Bank and the Gaza. I do not dismiss the extent of military prowess, access and technology and arsenal at the IDF's disposal to carry out war crimes and crimes against humanity.

I recognize the humanity with not just impunity, but also, with international support and complacency. I also recognize that the dynamics of the insider vs outsider, majority vs minority in the case of Israel/Palestine is to some extent shaped by, and understood and couched in terms of a "holy war."

Despite these differences however, I argue there is a glaring list of similarities, when instead of scale of atrocities, one compares the similarity of ideology, and mindset of the politics of exclusivity, of legitimacy of the insider (Bengalis) over the constructed interloper (the indigenous). Displacement, dispo-

portionate access to social and political structures, land grabs by the military, severe human rights violations, rape, unequal access to political, social and cultural space, extra-judicial killings and a culture of fear and tyranny has percolated in indigenous areas in the 36 years of "our" independence.

Except in terms of scale, some degrees of magnitude and international recognition, the plight of the indigenous in many ways echoes the realities of Palestinians, the realities of Darfurians, and dare I say, of Bengalis in 1971. In our demand to be different and special, we emerge as the same. Yesterday's oppressed -- today's oppressors.

The game of exclusivity is a manipulative one. It not only proves might is right; it makes it the only defining truth there is. It limits our capacity to see shades of grey, or digest the ugliness that truth also exposes.

In the case of the rights of the situation of minority rights in our

country, it has constrained the frame of our critical lens -- how to embrace the military that performs so well in international peace-keeping operations to protect the weak and vulnerable, to maintaining the law and order situation of today's Bangladesh, could, in some ways, fall from the heights of heroism perhaps descend to committing mortal but unpardonable crimes? Surely something is amiss.

We might seek answers to explain away such an anomaly. A country in crisis needs to make certain critical decisions some might say. This is the price one has to pay for law and order. Let me forget, this is the same price Pakistan tried to extort from us in 1971. It was a price that we refused to pay yet demand from our own indigenous communities.

Our hearts bleed for the Palestinians. It is time to let them bleed for our own.

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Sustainable development

Shalim Uddin

SUSTAINABLE development is used to describe policies that balance the needs of people today against the resources that will be needed in the future. For a community to be sustainable, it must adopt an approach that considers economic, environmental, and cultural resources, both in the short and the long term. Sustainable development also implies using renewable natural resources in a manner, which does not eliminate or degrade them, or otherwise diminish their usefulness for future generations.

In brief, sustainable development means such things as cutting forests no faster than they can grow back, using groundwater sources no faster than their recharging by precipitation, stressing use of renewable energy sources rather than exhaustible fossil fuels, and farming in such a way that soil quality does not get degraded. In addition, economics must be utilized to take into account environmental costs as well as capital, labour, raw materials, and energy costs.

In general, the prime objective of sustainable development is to find the highest level of interaction among three systems, such as the biological and resources system, the economic system and the social system.

Through a dynamic and adaptive process of trade-offs, it can be obtainable.

Different types of principles have been developed to help guide efforts for sustainable development, often specializing in one area, such as building design, site design and energy management, etc.

In the 1970s, the term sustainable development was first introduced by Gro Harlem Brundtland (also known as the Brundtland Commission) and later, in the 1980s, sustainability entered the global debate. According to Goodland and Ledec (1987), sustainable development is "a pattern of social and structural economic development which optimises the economic and other social benefits available in the present without effecting the likely potential for similar benefits in the future."

The primary goal of sustainable development is to achieve a reasonable and equitably distributed level of economic well-being that can be perpetuated continually for many human generations. In 1987, Oxford University Press published a report, "Our Common Future," which recognized that limits on population size and resource use cannot be known precisely; that problems may arise, not suddenly but rather gradually, marked

by rising costs; and that limits may be redefined by changes in technology. It also demonstrated that limits exist and must be taken into account when governments, corporations, and individuals plan for the future.

In a broad sense, the concept of sustainable development encompasses the following terms such as:

Helping the poor because they are left with no option other than to destroy their environment.

The idea of self-reliant development within natural resource constraints.

The concept of cost-effective development using differing economic criteria to the traditional approach; that is to say that development should not degrade environmental quality, nor should it reduce productivity in the long run.

The great issues of health control, appropriate technologies, self-reliance in food, clean water and shelter for all.

The possibility of sustainable development is built on the idea of carrying capacity. The carrying capacity of an ecosystem is the amount of resource consumption and pollution production that it can maintain without undergoing a significant transformation.

If the carrying capacity is exceeded, then life cannot continue unless it adapts to a new level of consumption or receives external resources. Carrying capacity is affected by a few factors, such as the size of the population, consumption of resources, and the pollution and environmental degradation resulting from consumption of resources.

The task of residents of any ecosystem is to determine what level of resource consumption and pollution production is sustainable. That may not be obvious until it is too late. But there are some intermediate indicators, such as the buildup of pollution and an increase in the resultant harm, or a decline in availability of a resource as it is depleted faster than it is replenished.

Several branches of society, such as government, business, public interest groups and consumers, have an important role to play in contributing to sustainable development. They

must work in partnership, bringing their values and experience to bear on the challenge.

Sustainable development will only be achieved if each one plays its part. Each branch should focus on what it can do best, but through partnerships, local, national or even global, we can build on the strengths of each group.

Finally, sustainable development would create the greatest good or least harm by allowing the inhabitants to exist in a world where the air is breathable, the water is drinkable, the soil is fertile, and renewable resources thrive.

From the above discussion, and literature reviewed, it can be inferred that sustainable development represents an action that would be correct and valid even if everyone were to violate or break it in actual conduct.

Sustainable development is, then, an important and ethical value to be upheld by business. But some aspects of sustainable development are more clearly pursued, or pursued to different degrees, by some people than by others. The following future challenges and possible commitments can be considered for sustainable development:

To ensure the continued availability of affordable, secure, environmentally sound and socially acceptable energy products and services for a growing world population.

To improve the social dimension of our business sector in order to increase the benefits of wealth creation and, thereby, contribute to the alleviation of poverty.

To demonstrate a balance in consideration of security of supply, and environmental, economic and social issues in meeting growing energy demand. Thus, the environment and development will be better managed to increase the prospects for environmentally sustainable improvements in human well-being.

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Musharraf -- the wheeler dealer

Ms. Bhutto is ready to return to Pakistan, and to lead the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in a free and fair election. She is also clear that she wants to pave the way for the army's withdrawal to the barracks, and the emergence of a functioning democracy. She will not take hasty steps that might perpetuate khaki shadows over Pakistan.

Husain Haqqani

EACH time General Pervez Musharraf comes under pressure at home or abroad, his minions float rumours of an impending deal with opposition leader Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. Musharraf's emissaries fly to Dubai, meet Ms. Bhutto, and then both sides deny that a deal is in the making. Ms. Bhutto's willingness to keep open channels of communication with all political forces in Pakistan is abused by the Musharraf regime to create the illusion of a deal, without actually pursuing one.

Over the last few weeks, General Musharraf has emerged as an increasingly ineffective military ruler, facing widespread resentment at home and growing ridicule abroad. There is only one thing worse than a military strongman running a country, and that is a strongman who is clearly weak. Even Musharraf's American armour has started to show some chinks.

As if to defuse the pressure, the rumour of a deal with Ms. Bhutto was spread. To make the rumours plausible, the government abolished the cell that was supposedly investigating the foreign assets and offshore bank accounts of some politicians, including Ms. Bhutto's. The impression was given that this was part of "confidence-building measures" preceding a Musharraf-Bhutto deal.

But the substantive issues, such as guarantees for a free and fair election and the restoration of civilian rule, were not addressed. A deal between Ms. Bhutto and General Musharraf would suit the United States, and is supported by the liberal



segment of Pakistan's oligarchy. Ms. Bhutto would bring popular support for a power-sharing arrangement, and could provide Pakistan's army with an exit strategy.

Through a deal, Musharraf could phase himself out of power in a predictable and planned manner, avoiding uncertainties that past military rulers in Pakistan's history faced. What, then, prevents a deal?

Whether it is the handling of India and Afghanistan, or relations with the political opposition, Musharraf negotiates not for a deal but to buy time.

Once the immediate crisis is over he feels no need for a deal, and the negotiation process falls by the wayside until the next major crisis. Furthermore, Musharraf is willing to give immediate payoffs, but is unwilling to bargain over the near-divine right of army chiefs to rule.

In the case of negotiations with Ms. Bhutto, the two sides are far apart on fundamentals. Musharraf considers changes in his (and the Pakistani intelli-



gence machinery's) relentless pursuit of Ms. Bhutto and her family as major concessions for which she should be grateful.

From Ms. Bhutto's point of view, the cases against her constitute persecution, and an end to persecution is the precondition for talks, not the desirable outcome. She wants negotiations to focus on political and constitutional matters, such as Musharraf's uniform and guarantees for a free and fair poll.

The cases against Ms. Bhutto and her husband have lost their significance and, though still an inconvenience, do not have the same leverage they might have had a few years earlier. Fewer people around the world believe in the validity of the charges, which have largely remained unproven after almost eleven years.

Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos was removed from office in 1986. The graft cases against him and his wife, Imelda, were wrapped up by 1993 -- a total duration of seven years. The cases against the Marcoses involved "billions of

dollars" in cash and assets in several countries, but still took no more than seven years to conclude.

In the case of Ms. Bhutto and Mr. Zardari, eleven years have passed since Ms. Bhutto's removal from power in 1996, and not a single case has been finalized. Just as Musharraf and his military-intelligence machine use the rumours of a deal for advantage, the corruption cases too are proving to be illusory.

Why, under such circumstances, does Ms. Bhutto not agree to a grand alliance between Pakistan's mainstream political parties, including the Islamist Mutahidda Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), and use violent protests to oust Musharraf?

Ms. Bhutto has clearly been weighing the pros and cons of joining an agitation, which runs the risk of being hijacked by the Islamists and their structured organization. She has to take into consideration the network of Islamists within Pakistan's military and intelligence services.

After all, liberal politicians (notably Air Marshal Asghar Khan) contributed strongly to the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) campaign of 1977, only to find General Ziaul Haq ready to take over and rule for eleven years with the help of the Islamists within the PNA.

Ms. Bhutto is ready to return to Pakistan, and to lead the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in a free and fair election. She is also clear that she wants to pave the way for the army's withdrawal to the barracks, and the emergence of a functioning democracy. She will not take hasty steps that might perpetuate khaki shadows over Pakistan.

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Saga of PSC and the candidates of 27th BCS

No sooner had I completed my speech, the officers of the PSC snatched my microphone and the chairman switched it off. I had to speak in front of thousands of antagonistic people. The staff of the PSC, and selected candidates of 27th BCS, tried to gag me. I instantly sought the help of the reporter friends, without whose presence I might have been beaten to death.

Sheikh Hafizur Rahman Karzon

THE public service commission, as a very important constitutional body, and the chairman and members of the commission, as individuals, has lost their credibility. Allegations of anomalies in the examination process, manipulation of results, and corrupt practices of the chairman and members have been well-established by a series of reports by almost all the national dailies, including the Daily Star and Prothom Alo.

Given the agony of hundreds of students, and the image-crisis of the PSC, the caretaker government should have taken some

measures to redress the corrupt practices and to reconstruct the public service commission.

Last month, I prepared a research paper outlining the present structure of the public service commission, pinpointing its structural and procedural lacunae, which has been enjoined to scrutinize the candidates for the cadre and non-cadre services of the republic.

The Public Service Commission is an institution which is not only the recruiting and screening agency for selecting the first class officers of the Republic, it also recommends names for promotion in different categories of non-cadre services and plays an important role in

determining the seniority of the civil servants.

When an allegation of corruption is filed against any bureaucrat, it is investigated by the concerned government body and sent to the PSC, which gives an opinion on whether major or minor penalty should be awarded to the convicted.

In my research paper, I put forward a number of recommendations for the reconstruction of the Public Service Commission. I recommended stopping appointment of people to the key posts of the Commission on political consideration, which requires amendment of Article 138 of the Bangladesh Constitution.

The lists of recommendations

are numerically 14. I recommended abolishment of all quotas, including district quota, women and indigenous people's quota, even the quota of the sons and daughters of the freedom fighters. In no way do I undermine the contribution of the brave sons of this deltaic land, but the problem lies in the absence of any authentic list of the freedom fighters, which was alleged to be have been prepared by the major two political parties during their tenures.

The findings of the research were published in different national dailies, as a result of which the Public Service Commission invited me to attend the 25th March views-exchanging meeting, a cooked-up comedy by the incumbents to save their skins. I went to that meeting, and after completion of the speech of Professor Zinnatunnessa Tahmidia Begum, present Chairman of the PSC, I went to the stage and, with the kind permission of the Chairman, started

speaking.

I tried to describe the image-crisis of the PSC, which the incumbents of the body very successfully created during the last five years of alliance government. I demanded "There are specific allegations of corruption against the chairman and members of the Public Service Commission, which have been published in all the national dailies including the Daily Star. All the allegations must be investigated by the Supreme Judicial Council. If the allegations are proved, the chairman and members will be arrested and sent to the jail. All their illegally acquired property will be confiscated and deposited to the Public Exchequer, and will be distributed among the poor people of Bangladesh."

No sooner had I completed my speech, the officers of the PSC snatched my microphone and the chairman switched it off. I had to speak in front of thousands of antagonistic people. The staff of

the PSC, and selected candidates of 27th BCS, tried to gag me. I instantly sought the help of the reporter friends, without whose presence I might have been beaten to death.

The reporters of print and electronic media vociferated and urged to the chairman to give me floor. After getting the microphone, I presented, shortly, the findings of my research, and presented specific allegations and other evidence relating to the anomalies, corruption and abuse of power of the chairman, members, examination controllers, officers and staffs of the PSC.

A brief account of the views-exchanging meeting is enough to understand the level to which the chairman and members had brought the PSC down to. I had thought that members of the civil society and journalists would be present in the views-exchanging meeting, but I was surprised when I saw that thousands of "successful" candidates of the 27th BCS were present. I want to

raise a valid question, how did the "successful" candidates get news of the meeting, and why did the "unsuccessful" candidates not get it? If they had, they would have blocked the street in front of the PSC.

If the members of the Task Force (Task Force Number 31) of the Anti Corruption Commission interrogate the 27th BCS candidates present at the views-exchanging meeting, they will be able to unearth valuable leads to the gross irregularities in the PSC.

The way the "successful" candidates of 27th BCS behaved are, I consider, unbefitting of would be first class officers. They do not have the passion to hear something, which is rational and well documented.

The way the "successful" candidates tried to save the present chairman and members of the PSC clearly substantiates the fact that there is an unholy deal between them. If the intolerant and arrogant candidates, many of

whom were alleged to have been selected by the PSC on political consideration, get final appointment, they will be abusing state power until their retirement.

These candidates should be identified and their selection should be cancelled, otherwise they will create great danger in the future. The caretaker government may appoint a Scrutiny Committee, consisting of six members, namely, Professor Syed Anwar Hossain, Professor Mohabbat Khan, Law Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Dr. Shah Alam, Professor Farhat Anwar, and Professor of Economics Dr. S. M. Asikuzzaman.

Proper scrutiny will make clear who was appointed on political consideration or through corruption. Their selection will be cancelled, and the state and civil society should be careful of them, so that they cannot carry out any corrupt practice in any state or private office.

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