

The corrupt and the criminals in politics

Urgent need for laws to debar them

IN expressing his wishes to see politics purged of the bad eggs, the AL secretary general has exposed the polluted nature of our politics very clearly, while also acknowledging the presence of criminals and the corrupt in the political parties. Thus it would be very pertinent to ask how the criminals and the black money holders came to find a place in both the AL and the BNP.

We recall that both Abdul Jalil and Mannan Bhuiyan, several years ago, made public pledges from the same platform, not to nominate black money holders, criminals and godfathers of the criminals, for election. But the nation was disappointed to see that nominations were sold, at very high prices, by both the parties to people who, in public perception, were of dubious antecedents, not only in 2001 election, but also in the preparations to the one scheduled for 2007.

It betrays the lack of moral conviction and sincerity to say that if a party were to purge its ranks of the criminals and the corrupt others would take them into their folds. This has also exposed the symbiosis between the criminals and the politicians that has corrupted our political culture. At the same time, it has demonstrated the fact that it is political expediency only that parties rely upon for political gains. Unfortunately for the nation, politics is now captive in the hands of these elements that call the shots, and getting rid of them may cause one party to end up in the losing side, as acknowledged by no less than the secretary general of the AL.

Cleansing of politics is a popular demand; without it the system cannot be redeemed. And this demands of the politicians to base their acts on morality and ethics. No amount of laws and legislations can infuse these essential qualities in any political party; it has to develop from within.

While we welcome the intention of the AL secretary general to rid the political parties of the criminals, their godfathers and the corrupt we feel that one does not have to wait for legislation to actualize the need. It requires internal policies and actions of the political parties based on moral and ethical values, not on political convenience.

However, while cleansing of the political parties must come from within and initiated by the parties, the election commission also should consider introducing such electoral laws that would debar people of questionable background from participating in politics and elections.

Wages for garment workers

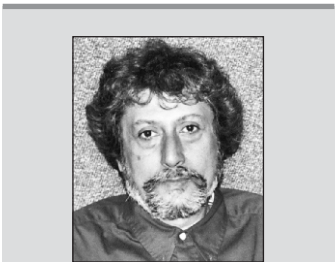
Tripartite agreement must be implemented

THE assurance by the BGMEA that the garments sector will implement all aspects of the tripartite deal relating to wages and other facilities for workers by June 30 is encouraging. Under the terms of the agreement reached last year, workers in the garment units are to receive minimum wages amounting to Tk. 1,662. The unfortunate reality is that with about a month and a half remaining before the different aspects of the agreement are fulfilled, there are as many as 90 garment units, which have failed to carry out the provisions of the deal.

The BGMEA leaders have let the government and the country know that those units, which fail to uphold the agreement by June 30 will have to close down their businesses. That is indeed a strong warning and a necessary one. Beyond such a warning, though, comes the question of what action the authorities plan against such defaulting units. Adviser Anwarul Iqbal has answered the question, through suggesting that if garment factory owners fail to provide minimum wages to their workers or do not live up to the provisions of the deal, the government itself will as a plaintiff take these owners to court. That is again a strong statement of intent and garment factory owners would do well to heed it. Now, the ninety units, which have fallen behind in keeping to, the terms of the deal might try to wriggle out of it though somehow. It is a possibility both the government and the BGMEA must be on guard against. No one can afford to forget the recent incidents involving non-payment of arrears and implementation of other rights involving workers at a number of garment factories. Those incidents all had the makings of broader civil unrest and might have indeed moved in that direction had timely steps not been taken to contain the crisis. It is against this background that garment owners need to do their necessary bit in ensuring that a recurrence of unrest at their units does not happen. A surefire way for them to do that is to keep their side of the bargain by June 30.

Bangladesh's garments industry has been playing a pivotal role in the national economy. That simplest of considerations should alert everyone to the dangers that might lie ahead if the tripartite deal between the workers, management and government begins to develop cracks.

Galloway's last punch at Blair



SHAHNOOR WAHID

IF you are wondering who has most gall among the present lot of British MPs then you will invariably end up with the name George Galloway, the Labour MP, for a number of reasons. This gregarious and wickedly witty MP with a runaway tongue is known for his anti-Bush and Blair utterings, which, at times, even his staunch supporters find difficult to digest.

Galloway has an everlasting reservoir of invectives, all tailor-made, to launch his attacks on his two prized political enemies. He has been the most vocal critique of the Iraq policies of Britain and the USA, and he never tried to hide his feelings in private or in public.

But many across the world found his

way with words not quite palatable, which, more often than not, touched upon the profane, to say the least. But, no doubt, this burly politician is pure entertainment to the non-political and non-partisan audience.

Last week, Galloway again came on centre stage to both enrage and entertain the audience with his sarcastic yet scathing comments. In fact, he was on CNN news and never lost a moment to let loose a barrage of verbal volleys laced with abusive words at Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and George W Bush.

He was invited by the CNN newscaster to comment on Blair's announcement regarding his resignation. He immediately referred to the Iraq war, and explained how the British prime minister had lied his way through

to convince the nation to join the unjust war.

He held Blair and Bush responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, and many American and British troops. When the newscaster tried to draw his attention to the successes of Blair at home, on many fronts, he simply brushed him aside by saying that in ten years that was the least one should be able to do. It was apparent that Galloway was not ready to give Blair any credit whatsoever.

Galloway's bitterness towards the British prime minister was manifest when he tried to imply that Blair's relationship with Bush was as scandalous as that of Clinton's with Monica Lewinsky (By golly Galloway! Have a heart! Leave those two in peace!).

At this point the CNN newscaster tried to divert his attention to something else, but Galloway was not to be unnerved. He kept on mauling Blair and Bush in his characteristic style and evoked laughter among his audience.

Perhaps to change the subject of the Iraq war, the newscaster asked him to comment on Blair's recommendation of Gordon Brown as the future British prime minister.

What Galloway said in reply is totally unprintable here but, in essence, it meant Blair and Brown were two sides of the same coin. So, Mr. Gordon, be prepared to be at the receiving end of the blaziest possible verbal tirade during the entire length of your tenure in office. Good luck!

George Galloway had angered his opponents when he urged the Arab

world to rise up and kill British troops in Iraq. He also called on the British soldiers to disobey, in his words, "illegal orders." Somewhere down the line he uttered: "Iraq is fighting for all the Arabs. Where are the Arab armies?" In a blatant call he even urged the Gulf states to "cripple the West by cutting off oil supplies.

He further commented: "Even if it is not realistic to ask a non-Iraqi army to come to defend Iraq, we see Arab regimes pumping oil for the countries who are attacking it. We wonder when the Arab leaders will wake up. When are they going to stand by the Iraqi people?"

But the worst shock came when this maverick politician said in May 2006 that it would be "morally justified" for an assassin to target Prime Minister Tony Blair for Britain's support for the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

In his words, "It would be entirely logical and explicable, and morally equivalent to ordering the deaths of thousands of innocent people in Iraq as Blair did." The monthly GQ magazine quoted Galloway as saying the above. However, in the same breath, he said that if he knew that anyone was planning such an attack he would inform the police.

Here is more on the incorrigible Galloway. In an interview, Galloway

had claimed to have been the best fighter in his school, and that he would enjoy going a few rounds with both Blair and Bush, taking on the two together. In his own words: "They are the sort of men who are ready to fight to the last drop of other people's blood. They couldn't personally punch their way out of a paper bag. They send other mothers' sons to their death, and I find them both deeply repugnant."

Galloway had called a congressional subcommittee "the mother of all smoke screens," after he traveled to the United States to deny accusations that he had profited from the UN oil-for-food program.

Well, surely, such unsolicited words of sympathy for the Iraqis did not go down well with most of the politicians in the West. As a result, it is no wonder that George Galloway is not the most popular politician on the two sides of the Atlantic.

But Galloway will surely go on entertaining the world with his raw humour, reminding older audiences of the same genre of humour in the famous "Carry on ..." movie series of Britain.

Shahnoor Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

From energy gap to energy crisis



NURURDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

OUR energy troubles did not erupt overnight last summer. During a protracted heat wave, there were widespread power breakdowns. Utility organizations were forced to cut back services. The western part of country received less electricity help from the eastern part, where almost eighty five percent of the total gas based electricity generating units are stationed.

In the western part, fuel-oil or diesel-based electricity generation is moving towards a difficult phase. The need for use of more gas-based electricity there seems vital. A power infrastructure has been built within the next five to seven years, with emphasis on the western part of the country to balance the ever increasing power shortage.

The newspapers in Dhaka carried front-page stories that there was gas shortage in winter and load shedding in summer. But, as usual, the Ministry of Energy either ignored the prevailing difficulties or did not find any truth in those news items.

The people were caught by surprise due to the recent Barapukuria coal mine explosion and Titas gas well flare, but they pointed their fingers towards the government in general and the Energy Ministry in particular. Some public sector bodies such as Petrobangla and the Power Development Board paid very little attention to their assigned responsibilities because they were busy in manipulating tender documents and corruption.

The media also reported that a serious blame game was going on between the country's bureaucrats and the political pundits. Some of

Now, it is only natural that officials who enjoy many financial benefit/rewards and advantages from the government, BGFL and Bapex should be absolved of criminal responsibility when things go wrong. The authorities must, therefore, not try to protect the higher management of the companies operating under companies law when casualties result from inaction of the company executives. Petrobangla's concerned supervisory officials must also have to explain their conduct during the two disasters, one regarding Barapukuria cowl mine and the other about Titas gas field, in the recent months. Investigation documents should be made public.

them are now suffering the unbearable heat in jail, and scorching criticism from many corners. One bureaucrat sneaked away from the country; perhaps expecting to return as usual to hold higher position in future. Some alleged corrupt bureaucrats are still safe.

It appears that due to politico-bureaucratic clique in Bangladesh's energy sector management, the situation may not improve soon. This is not a pessimistic attitude, rather a realistic one that must change soon. From late 2005, the energy sector activities continued to deteriorate fast. Yet, no one in the government, including the energy minister (who happened to be the honourable prime minister), was visibly perturbed. However, the last state minister for power of the previous political government, Maj. General Talukdar, before his exit, gave inside information, including the missing 6,000 crore taka in the power sector. He also let the citizens know about the irregularities in the proposed Meghnaghat-2 450MW and Chandpur 150 MW projects in particular. After about four months, since the present caretaker government took over power, the authorities okayed five controversial power projects based on the recommendations of an experts' committee headed by Professor Abdul Matin Patwari. The media story is that the committee cleared these projects not because they found them to be clean but, because of the persisting power crisis, the country cannot afford to sit on new power projects!

Perhaps, they have a point. But

people want to know what was the ministry doing since, at least, January 11? They knew that those tenders (including Meghnaghat-2 and Chandpur 150 MW) were not only non-transparent; they were corrupt bids as well. Instead of Rejecting them, the Ministry of energy intends to make them "halal" through the experts' committee.

One would be tempted to question the goodness of our government from this avoidable act. Fresh tenders could easily be called. As a general practice of international tendering, 45 days for tender dropping and 30 days for evaluation of bids would have solved the matter. In 1997, under the first ever Independent Power Projects (IPPs), a clean, transparent, and internationally accepted tender document was floated for a 450 MW Meghnaghat project, which was commissioned in about four years.

With minimum modifications in the tariff structure, payment in taka, fuel supply agreement (FSA) and the land lease agreement (LLA) within a month or so, negotiations with PTC qualified participants could start. As an additional information, a similar document was also prepared for the aborted Sirajganj 450 MW power plant. People will be flabbergasted when they hear that a non-transparent and unclean tender was being considered instead! This is not on allegation. But people would have been happy if they were not cheated.

Incidentally, the present power crisis cannot be met only by implementing the proposed combined cycle power project. If it is really given a "go"

signal, the proposed 450 MW Meghnaghat-2 project would probably get operationalized by 2011, when the country's gas supply would start to decline fast and the present proven gas reserve will be exhausted, by 2015 (Gas sector Master Plan, 2006).

Secondly, the concept of "rental power" would not only be financially ruinous but supply will also fall flat. Rental power at best can be procured for 3 to 5 years, but a 15-year operational life will turn into an operational oversight. So, the government needs to be more cautious.

Indeed, what was happening concerning gas and coal mining was only part of the energy drama, which is now moving toward its climax. The government's, and some professionals (from BUET), forecast for gas demand proved inaccurate.

They anticipated neither the interaction of changing energy developments nor the big jump in consumer gas demand over the past several years. To make matters worse, they put their bets on the wrong horse that never arrived in the energy domain of Bangladesh. For instance, from a maximum demand of 1,142 million cubic feet (Mcf) per day in 2002, the demand has exceeded 1,670 Mcf in 2007, a hard to believe story, in about five years!

The BGFL and the energy ministry officials seem to have succumbed to the April 18 disaster like cowards. They even forgot to meticulously follow the international gas field practice, and are now playing into the hands of gas brokers instead of seeking assistance from reputed independent expert services such as Red

Adair of USA. In the 1990s, some 700 oil well fires were extinguished by such professional services within a reasonably short time frame.

Titas well number three is still bleeding -- after destroying huge natural gas by now. People are wondering why a snubbing unit was bought to kill the well? Unocal/Occidental did not have to procure equipment at a high price for extinguishing the Magurcharra or Tengritilla gas blowouts. Instead, the company hired the services of experts. People are saying that the energy secretary Mr Nasiruddin is venturing to enter into a new, contentious deal to "Snub" the citizens of Bangladesh.

Our concern is that those who warned the government, in 2003-04, of an impending energy crisis that did not occur, were accused of crying wolf. The wolf was indeed at the door earlier, in winter 2005; he has merely gone away for a time. He did come back in 2006 and showed his teeth. But the government was so complacent that it even forgot to appreciate the ominous signals, rather ignored them. As a result, electricity situation worsened in 2007, the peak summer load shedding may rise up to 2500 MW.

Many people by now know that we are in the midst of environmental problems. Like the energy crisis, it had been long in the making in Bangladesh, and the two are interrelated. Concerns about what we are doing to our environment had been increasing steadily for the past decade or so. Social protests were beginning to crystallize on both the professional and the activist level. Thanks to Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (BAPA), and its competent chair, Dr Muzaffar Ahmed, for their tireless and sincere efforts to help mitigate the environmental concerns through people's participation.

Suddenly, the under discussion energy secretary found a new ball game. He, in an unambiguous voice, uttered: "The draft coal policy will be approved by June 2007." Everybody knows that the proposed anti-people policy is very closely linked with Asia Energy Company's open-pit proposal that they want to buy against a 6 per-

cent royalty.

The Phulbari coalfield, for instance, has a total coal reserve of 572 million tons. The estimated price of the coal would be around \$34 billion at \$60 per ton. Through a royalty payment of \$7 billion, the "ownership" of coal will be transferred to Asia Energy Company. This is not commensurate with the country's constitutional provisions. I plan to write about the subject soon.

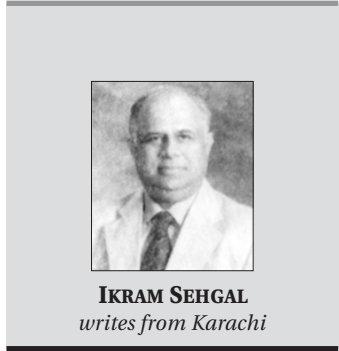
Yes, I am neither an expert on constitution nor even a law practioner. But, I presume, I can appreciate that with royalty payments the "ownership" of coal/mineral that belongs to the people of Bangladesh as per constitution cannot be transferred outright to a foreign company. One would wonder, why the energy secretary Mr Nasiruddin is so keen on pursuing such a contentious draft coal policy now?

Now, it is only natural that officials who enjoy many financial benefit/rewards and advantages from the government, BGFL and Bapex should be absolved of criminal responsibility when things go wrong. The authorities must, therefore, not try to protect the higher management of the companies operating under companies law when casualties result from inaction of the company executives. Petrobangla's concerned supervisory officials must also have to explain their conduct during the two disasters, one regarding Barapukuria coal mine and the other about Titas gas field, in the recent months. Investigation documents should be made public.

In conclusion, we painfully observed earlier that political panic had reached an apogee during 2004-06 with respect to our energy sector activities. We neither hope nor wish for recurrence of such incidents that turned the energy gap into deep energy crisis. The sooner we realise this, the sooner we will stop stepping on our own feet and creating more energy problems rather than solving the ones we are faced with now.

The author is a former senior official of the Ministry of Energy and a former chairman of Bangladesh Gas Field Company.

Political and judicial crossroads



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

THE welcome for the Chief Justice (CJ) of Pakistan, Mr Iftikhar Chaudhry, along the GT Road was unprecedented. Clearly the common man, who had remain quite aloof from the weeks of protests by lawyers all over the country, had now started to join the fray. Whether he will engage in earnest only the next few weeks will tell.

This will also be directly proportional to the ham-handedness of the ruling party's administrative minions. The protest was emotional and intense, and those who waited for over 24 hours in the car park of the Lahore High Court registered vociferous opposition to one-man rule. They constituted, for the most part, lawyers.

AS I SEE IT

There is seething resentment among the masses at the attitude of some among the ruling clique, particularly the agencies, that they can get away with anything. As for the president's close advisors, the less said the better. Every time he listens to them, and their advice is usually motivated, he gets into trouble, and the country along with him gets into a crisis. If the president has to seek advice, why not choose the best that is on offer rather than rely on the motivated "yes-men" around him. Bad people usually give advice as bad as they are.

People are generally ambivalent about lawyers, with honourable exceptions, and first and foremost one must include the Quaid among these exceptions. Lawyers do not generally inspire confidence in the Pakistani community. To quote Dr. Mohd Nawaz from his letter to Col Riaz Jafri, "The lawyers are a very special class, in addition to their political leanings and prejudices, one major problem with demonstrating black jackets is their intellectual bankruptcy in terms of understanding the issues in a broader national and international context. I have always believed that the lawyers are very narrowly focused on rules, without connecting them to the social

environment. Unfortunately, any situation into which they get involved always becomes messy and complex. They lack the intellectual agility to apply laws to resolve the social issues. They have memorized from their books the concepts like the independence of judiciary but have never tried to understand that how these concepts are to work properly in a social framework. There is a total disconnect between the legal concepts that they tend to scream and the social environment in which these concepts are practiced." Though one does not agree with Dr. Nawaz verbatim, his observations do represent the common perception among both the intelligentsia

and masses in Pakistan.

Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry continues to give adequate reason to be admired. Any man who stands up against the odds and defies rampant authority if he believes authority is not being exercised judiciously deserves our admiration. The CJ has conducted himself extremely well throughout the crisis, and above all he has not lost his cool.

In the Ingall Hall of the Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) it is written, "It is not what happens to you that matters, but how you behave while it is happening!" The Honourable CJ is a good enough speaker, all of what he said was true and had to be said, every

law abiding, patriotic citizen of the country will endorse his views. For the lawyer community, the Chief Justice has become an icon; even among the general public the welcome and the applause was neither orchestrated nor manipulated. It was the genuine article, "the real thing!" One can say that the Honourable CJ has caught the imagination of the public. His defiance has made him an underdog, and the world loves an underdog.

One must to objective about all the facts. Look at the video coverage of the cavalcade passing through every town on the GT road; one side of the road remained open for traffic, which is quite impossible in spontaneous situations.

Lahore's crowd was indeed big, commentators compare it to Ms Benazir's arrival in Lahore in 1986 and Mian Nawaz Sharif's triumphant entry into the city after the May 28, 1988, nuclear explosion. One must conclude that, while there was no doubt about the size, the protest was not overwhelming.

The government, for once, was politically sensitive in not being stupid by placing hurdles between Islamabad and Lahore. That would have meant sudden death for the government if violence had taken place and the situation had gone out of control.

In fact, the political element in the CJ's camp must have hoped that any such incident would lead to the situation escalating out of control. The government deserves some credit for allowing the pent-up steam to escape by letting all and sundry vent their grievances in public.

While the CJ has every right to address Bar Councils, one has to respectfully state that he cannot, in all conscience, call his speeches in the present circumstances being anything but political, particularly when political speeches were the order of the day.

All around him political activists abounded, albeit with those lawyers who have only legal discipline as their profession. When Marc Anthony requested Brutus and his fellow conspirators to be allowed to give the funeral oration for the assassinated Julius Caesar, he was cautioned not to be political, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears! I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him!"

He then proceeded into history as one of the great political speeches ever. The CJ's speeches were as much political as Antony's funeral oration, and as much as I admire the man, the fact remains that he has now become a political figure of some consequence in Pakistan, and we should start getting used to having lost this great judicial activist from the Supreme Court Benches, and I for one feel sorry about it. One can already see him as a consensus opposition candidate for the presidential elections later this year.

The CJ is human, and Pakistani, and while praising the lawyers for being at least LLBs, he took a cheap shot at the officer corps of the armed forces by talking about "under matrices, matriculates etc." For the record, no officer can get his (or her) commission without either a BA or BSc degree, and again, for the record, both the curriculum and the teaching standard in PMA (and equivalent) is above the general norm in universities in Pakistan.

Field Grade officers i.e. a Major, must qualify for the Command & Staff Course by getting a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree. General Officers cannot attain that rank (i.e. Major General and above) unless they have a Masters Degree from the National Defence University (formerly National Defence College (NDC)).

The perception now rampant among the armed forces is that he

hates the Khakis! If he has political aspirations he must remember that much as he may desire democracy, the armed forces will have their say in Islamic countries like Pakistan, Turkey, etc.

There is seething resentment among the masses at the attitude of some among the ruling clique, particularly the agencies, that they can get away with anything. As for the president's close advisors, the less said the better. Every time he listens to them, and their advice is usually motivated, he gets into trouble, and the country along with him gets into a crisis.

If the president has to seek advice, why not choose the best that is on offer rather than rely on the motivated "yes-men" around him. Bad people usually give advice as bad as they are. The president has been inadvertently placed at a critical crossroads, only a few months before his re-election. The Honourable CJ's defiance will make power-sharing come about sooner than later, in the power-sharing arrangement one believes Pervez Musharraf still has a role to play.

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