

## Hawkers' rehabilitation

A timely and laudable step

Welcome the decision of the government to provide the evicted hawkers of the capital city with specified areas to restart their business before the onset of the month of Ramadan. We believe it is a timely and a laudable step that should be implemented by the city authorities at their earliest. And the decision to issue ID cards against about 12 thousand city hawkers, we feel, will make them easily identifiable in case of any law and order situation.

We believe the decision, emanating from a meeting between the adviser, Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) and hawker leaders, will help resolve a crucial problem that has been haunting this government ever since.

There is a tendency amongst some quarters to assess hawkers as a nuisance group but we believe such an appraisal is done without ever looking into the fact that their value addition to commodities has substantial bearing on the overall economy of the country. These self-employed men and women demonstrate admirable entrepreneurial spirit with a very small capital, and they generate plenty of selling and buying activity to keep the currencies circulating. There is a common observation that in a way they also contribute to keeping the prices of goods in the shopping malls in check.

While appreciating the steps to give the displaced hawkers a place to carry on with their trade and commerce for subsistence, we expect the city authorities to provide them with toilet and electricity facilities, and protection from toll collectors. The patrolling policemen must also be told about their importance and given instructions to treat them with compassion. On this note we would like to suggest the relevant authorities to consider the possibility of creation of a body in the line of a board, like Hawkers Development Board, to bring them under the fold of a unified authority. This would help them avail small credit, channel grievances and seek legal help in an official manner.

But we believe no facility should come without responsibilities. Once given a place to run their business the onus to keep the premises clean and orderly will rest on the hawkers. They must also ensure that motorists and common pedestrians are not subjected to harassment or intimidation by any member of their community.

## Park management

Associate the community with it

A recent media report has shown that public parks can be better managed through participation of the local community. Shining examples are Tank Park, Baridhara Park and the Lake Park in Gulshan. While the Baridhara Society takes care of Baridhara Park, Gulshan Society looks after the Lake Park, Dhaka City Corporation along with local community looks after the Tank Park.

Nearly all city parks managed by Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) are in a bad shape with illegal encroachments and leasing them out for commercial purposes. A worse scenario prevails in the case of children's parks. They are either abandoned or hardly exist. Government is taking measures to reclaim illegally occupied wetlands. These should now be extended to include move to vacate the parks and playgrounds now under illegal occupation. Strictest of measures must be taken against them. We are surprised there is no overseeing body to take care of legal impingement with regard to parks and open spaces.

Essentially, as Prof. Sirajul Islam, an adviser to DCC's high level committee on lakes and environment, says, "The people have to make DCC accountable for its duty." We believe, all ward commissioners have to basically fulfil their respective obligations under the leadership of the mayor who must make it a point to associate community participation. DCC should extend full support and co-operation to all community members willing to take part in park management.

Such a fusion can only take place if the government formulates specific policy guidelines for composite management committees which are inclusive of private participation.

With ever increasing degradation of our environment due to unplanned construction of high-rise buildings including filling up of major lakes and other water bodies, city dwellers' last hope for breath of fresh air and periodic relaxation is the park. It is vital particularly for the elderly section of our population, women and children.

## About time



ZAFAR SOBHAN

EVER since the arrest of Sheikh Hasina in July, the entire country has been waiting for the other shoe to drop, so to speak. On one hand, the arrest of Sheikh Hasina but not Khaleda Zia seemed inexplicable considering the fact that the latter had been the head of the most corrupt government that Bangladesh had ever witnessed

and that had been most recently in power, during which time she had presided over the country turning into a virtual kleptocracy, to say nothing of its steady transformation into a nasty police state, complete with extra-judicial executions and a plethora of other ills.

Certainly there were allegations of corruption and wrong-doing on the part of the last government headed by Sheikh Hasina, but these paled into comparison with the sins of the most recent BNP-Jamaat government.

The arrest of Hasina but not Khaleda perhaps made some kind of sense if looked at from the point of cold, pragmatic political calculation, in that the current government has always been more apprehensive about the threat posed to it by Hasina because of her party's strength.

In addition to this, the fact that Tarique Rahman was behind bars and that charges had been leveled against her other son obviously

on its side were of the utmost importance.

Even the appearance of leniency towards the BNP was beginning to present real problems for the government. Thus it seems that the arrest of Khaleda together with the recent meeting of the chief adviser with leaders of the business community to address their concerns and assuage their fears is an acknowledgement on the part of the gov-

ernment is being soft on Khaleda and the BNP is one that is important to dispel. After all, the bulk of the problems that the nation has faced over the past five years and that need to be fixed now have been created by the BNP under Khaleda's leadership, and the public instinctively understands how to apportion the blame.

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## STRAIGHT TALK

The most important thing for the current government is public acceptance and acquiescence. In fact, for a non-elected administration, this is the only thing. Its credibility has been enhanced by the arrest of Khaleda, albeit belatedly. It seems as though this message has got through. If you are cleaning up the political landscape and hoping to fix a dysfunctional system, it is vital that there not remain pockets of dirt and dysfunction that escape your attention.

has acted and would continue to act as leverage over Khaleda and ensure that her opposition to and criticism of the current dispensation would remain relatively muted.

Nevertheless, the disparate treatment of the two ex-prime ministers had been doing serious damage to the credibility of the government, and certainly in the wake of the recent unrest around the country, the government must have realized that affirmative steps to maintain public confidence and to keep the populace

government that it needs to be more responsive to the people of the nation and that steps in this direction are being taken.

This is a welcome recognition, and perhaps the recent unrest has had something to do with the government coming to such a realization. Regardless of the proximate cause of such a development, a more responsive administration, closer attuned to public opinion and sentiment is certainly a good thing for the country as a whole.

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ment is being soft on Khaleda and the BNP is one that is important to dispel. After all, the bulk of the problems that the nation has faced over the past five years and that need to be fixed now have been created by the BNP under Khaleda's leadership, and the public instinctively understands how to apportion the blame.

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one of the advisers that the Jamaat is less corrupt than the other major political parties, and certainly there does not appear to be an issue of dynastic leadership in the party stifling reform from within.

Nevertheless, if the existing top leadership of the AL and BNP is being targeted, then to give the top leadership of the Jamaat a pass leaves the party in an unfair position of advantage. The senior

ated if the government wishes to pursue them, and, in any event, some crimes are worse than corruption and do not have any statute of limitations on them, either. Let a new generation of Jamaat leadership, not tainted with the crimes of its past and present, rise up.

Finally, there is the perceptual issue. If there was discontent in the country over the unequal treatment of Khaleda and Hasina, this is nothing to the storm of discontent that would continue to brew if it is perceived that the current administration is soft on the Jamaat.

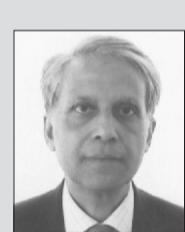
The most important thing for the current government is public acceptance and acquiescence. In fact, for a non-elected administration, this is the only thing. Its credibility has been enhanced by the arrest of Khaleda, albeit belatedly.

It seems as though this message has got through. If you are cleaning up the political landscape and hoping to fix a dysfunctional system, it is vital that there not remain pockets of dirt and dysfunction that escape your attention.

Second, as I have mentioned before in this space, it is not as though actionable charges cannot be brought against the senior Jamaat leadership. I am by no means persuaded that the allegations of corruption and sponsorship of political violence that exist against them cannot be substantiated.

Zafar Sobhan is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

## Crisis of options in Pakistan



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

PAKISTAN appears to be at the crossroads soon after celebrating the 60th birthday of its independence. Its President, General Pervez Musharraf finds himself sitting on a volcano that is being periodically shaken by convulsions. Right now he appears to be confronted by the gravest crisis of his eight-year rule and faces an ever-shrinking menu of options. He also has just a few days left to find a way out of his labyrinth before a constitutional crisis paralyses Pakistan.

There are many threats facing Musharraf and every day the list is getting longer. Right now, it includes an Al-Qaeda backed insurgency in Waziristan, pressure from US politicians, the Taliban, a suicide bombing campaign by Islamic fundamentalists, the impending return of two exiled civilian opponents, a hostile Supreme Court (basking in the glory of true independence for the first time in many years) and his own re-election. The situation has deteriorated in recent weeks after the Supreme Court delivered its momentous verdict by voting to reinstate Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhury.

The General, long considered by the West as indispensable in the fight against terrorism, appears to have run himself into a political cul-de-sac. On paper, he continues to wield supreme power. However, in fact, he appears to be multiply circumscribed. He still relies on the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency, the senior generals

within the Army and certain rightist Islamic parties that have flourished under the military dictatorship. They have helped him over the past few years in tackling the terrorist problem as well as in the governing of unruly North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan. Musharraf still considers himself essential to his country's stability and the West has fostered that belief till now. Unfortunately, today, some of his supporters appear to be melting

Time appears to be running out for President Musharraf. He is consequently, desperately trying to find an acceptable remedy. At one point he toyed with the idea of declaring emergency but was supposedly talked out of such a course of action by the US Secretary of State. His Allies have a resurgent Taliban in their hands in Afghanistan and the last thing they want is expansion of further instability in the bordering regions of Pakistan.

General waits for a new -- and probably more hostile -- Parliament, his chances of re-election will, in all likelihood recede. To this has now been added the prospect of greater volatility through the return of Pakistan of his two arch civilian rivals. That, most certainly, will further change the dynamics of the dilemma.

Reports coming out of Pakistan clearly indicate that the old dogma of Pakistan's army,

in Islamabad might affect relations with New Delhi. These are imponderables the US Administration can do without over the next year that will see the US Republican Party fighting a grim battle for survival in Washington.

The inner coterie in Pakistan, beneficiaries of Musharraf's largesse, is reputedly still tinkering with the idea of imposing emergency. That would mean suspension of fundamental rights, placing restrictions on the Supreme Court and delaying elections.

I personally believe that undertaking such a path would be a mistake on the part of the Pakistani President. The United States and her allies, in the interest of regional and domestic stability, should instead persuade him to refrain from such a measure.

President Musharraf and his team have played an important role in the fight against terrorism and extremism. In his own way, he has helped to strengthen the Pakistan economy through economic liberalisation and consolidated moderation. He has also assisted in the empowerment of women, in the spread of primary education and family planning. These have contributed towards the reduction of poverty in Pakistan.

He should now, instead of waving a red flag at the Supreme Court, take off his uniform, hang it in the wardrobe and participate in the theatre of politics the regular way.

Consequently, Washington, in the last two weeks, has tried its best in urging the isolated General to broaden the political base of his support. This has included efforts to form an alliance with Benazir Bhutto, former Prime Minister and leader of the Pakistan People's Party and to reduce his dependency on religious parties. Unfortunately for Musharraf, this has not worked.

This concept of cohabitation was shot down with the Supreme Court casting its own spanner within the political wheel by adjudicating that former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his brother (another influential member of the Pakistan Muslim League-N faction) were eligible to return to Pakistan 'unhindered' after spending seven years in exile. This abruptly changed Benazir Bhutto's willingness to consider entering into any power-sharing arrangement with the General.

The end result is that a crunch is emerging in the political calendar within Pakistan. If the

Constitution. He has responded by saying that 'once pardoned after conviction, a sentence cannot be revived'. The question that will then emerge on Sharif's return will be whether the sentence was remitted or whether Sharif was pardoned. If required, in all possibility, a clarification will be sought from the newly empowered Supreme Court. The adjudication might then go against the interest of Musharraf.

The issue has gained particular momentum as jurists are of the general opinion that a person can only be disqualified from contesting the polls if he has got a conviction in a NAB case -- and Sharif has never -- convicted in any such matter.

The changing political scenario is obviously becoming a cause for concern for the United States. It knows that a fresh equation, with Nawaz Sharif playing a pivotal role in Pakistani domestic politics, might not entirely suit US interests in South Asia. It is also aware that a change in the political leadership

fish and poultry feed. However, the European traders who are exporting MBM to Bangladesh do not specify whether the MBM they are selling is classified as Category 1, 2 or 3. The Bangladeshi feed industry and the government appear to be blissfully ignorant of the significance of these categories, but the fact is that Category 1 MBM is BSE-infected material which could spread BSE (to cattle) and vCJD (to humans) in Bangladesh. It is possible that this dangerous material is already being imported and used in fish and poultry feed.

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There is a simple solution to this problem. Bangladeshi companies are currently required to get permission from the government before importing MBM. This permission should be given only if the European exporter presents documents proving that the MBM offered is certified as Category 3 material (ie. made from healthy

## We must protect ourselves from mad cow disease

SM ABDUR RAHMAN

THOUGH in Bangladesh there has not yet been diagnosed any case of mad cow disease, we should all be cautious about it. European companies produce meat and bone meal (MBM) from slaughterhouse waste. As the use of MBM in Europe is severely restricted by EU law, it is reportedly exported to Asian countries (including Bangladesh) where it can legally be used as an animal feed.

Mad cow disease, or BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), is a disease which attacks the cow's nervous system. One of the unusual things about BSE is that the infection is not spread by a virus or a bacteria; the infectious agents are proteins called prions. Prions are not alive; they cannot be "killed" with heat treatment, and prionic infections cannot be cured with antibiotics or any other medi-

cine.

If humans consume meat which is infected with prions, they can also become infected. The disease in humans is called vCJD (variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease); it attacks the human brain. It is not treatable and causes dementia and death (about 14 months after the onset of the disease). About 200 people have been diagnosed with vCJD (mainly in Europe, with the largest concentration in the UK) since it was first diagnosed in 1996.

Prions generally infect animals through feed. When cattle are slaughtered, three products are obtained: meat, hide (which is made into leather) and slaughterhouse waste. Slaughterhouse waste is mainly unsellable parts (feet, intestines, bones) and blood.

In industrial countries, slaughterhouse waste is "rendered" (it is cooked, dried and ground) into a product called meat and bone

meal (MBM), which is used in animal feed. Farm animals can become infected with prions if they are given feed containing MBM made from BSE-infected cattle.

Humans can, in turn, become infected with prions by eating the meat of infected animals. This is why the UK government has culled over four million cattle to this regulation, MBM is divided into three categories, each of which must be processed, stored, and used separately.

Category 1 MBM is made from animals which were known (or suspected) to be infected with BSE. This MBM is produced primarily to dispose off BSE-infected cattle. It cannot be used for any other purpose; EU law requires that it must be incinerated or landfilled (buried).

Category 2 MBM is made from animals which were not suspected of BSE infection but which showed signs of some other disease. This MBM can be used as fertilizer (in the EU), or exported for use in animal feed (outside the EU). European companies are required by EU law to ensure that all the MBM they export for use in

feed is Category 3 MBM.

The feed industry in Bangladesh imports large quantities of MBM from Europe for use in fish and poultry feed. However, the European traders who are exporting MBM to Bangladesh do not specify whether the MBM they are selling is classified as categories 1 and 2 should be completely banned; these are made from sick animals and should not be used in

feed. The long-term solution, however, is for the government of Bangladesh to sign bilateral agreements with each European country exporting MBM. The agreement should make the government of the exporting country responsible for ensuring that only certified Category 3 MBM is exported to Bangladesh. EU regulations require EU member countries to sign such bilateral agreements with any country to which they are exporting MBM.

Abdur Rahman is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

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