

Death of a student

Resort to violence cannot solve road accidents

We deeply condole the death of Polytechnic Institute student Mohammad Ashiqul Alam in a road accident at Tejgaon Industrial area on Friday. The student went under the wheels of the passenger bus he was traveling in while he was getting down from it. It is tragic indeed the way the young life was cut short because of the veritable carelessness of the bus driver. The incident sent a shock wave among the fellow students on the campus who staged a violent demonstration on the road demanding punishment of the driver.

It is however unfortunate that the clashes between the students and law enforcers spilled over entering the second day on Saturday, which caused a terrible traffic jam across the city during busy hours.

This latest accident involving a passenger bus on the road once again brings to the fore the lack of fitness of the vehicles and incompetence and could-care-less-attitude to public life. Ramshackle passenger buses speeding wildly from one end of the city to another and maddeningly overtaking one another is but a common sight in the metropolis. These drivers lack training on basic traffic rules and are known to operate with fake driving license. In a frantic bid to let in passengers they often park their vehicles on the middle of the road, and more often than not, bus helpers drop passengers out from a virtually running vehicle, thereby putting their lives in double jeopardy.

While we want the culprit to get the punishment he deserves, we at the same time consider the violent behavior that was demonstrated following the accident on Friday highly reprehensible. We believe the solemnity of the sad incident was lost in the outburst of people who took law in their own hands. They had no business damaging vehicles of innocent people on the road and causing traffic in the city to come to a standstill.

The sooner everyone in the country comes to realise the imperative of abiding by the laws of the land, the better it will be to maintain civic peace. There is no denying that crushing of the student was an abhorrent thing that needs to be condemned, it however remains to be said that a scourge like road accidents cannot be solved through resorting to violence.

Criminals masquerading as policemen

Uniforms for security forces must come under regulations

A uniform code on the use of uniforms by the police and other forces is now an absolute necessity. This becomes clear through news reports on the random use of police uniforms by gangs as they go about committing crimes in the capital and elsewhere. It is not only the use of police uniforms but also handcuffs that are now a matter of grave concern. We note that there have even been instances where members of criminal gangs masquerading as RAB personnel engaged in crimes, thereby raising some very serious questions about the manner in which this business of uniforms is proliferating.

It is indeed strange, even bizarre, that police uniforms can be easily purchased from such areas as Polwell market in the city. There are two points that arise here. In the first place, uniforms used by the police, armed forces and similar institutions operating under the authority of the government are supposed to be supplied by these bodies to the men serving in their ranks. So there is an element of suspected pilferage or fraudulent manufacture of these. The second point is that since there are authorised dealers for making and supply of uniforms, it is extremely important to make sure that those who buy them provide full and absolute evidence of their being in the department where such uniforms are a rule. Some shop owners have complained that they are often compelled to sell police uniforms to individuals without verifying their identity because of the rude and intimidating behaviour of those individuals. That cannot be an excuse, for we have already seen the consequences of such unbridled trading in uniforms. We have also, in recent times, observed security men in private apartment complexes as well as organisations wearing uniforms that are worryingly similar to those worn by policemen and RAB personnel. There have also been sightings of young men moving around in fatigues similar to those used by members of the armed forces. These must be dealt with an iron hand lest imposters have a field day.

New regulations about the use and availability of uniforms are now in order. One reason is that criminals must be deprived of such easy means of committing misdeeds. Another is to stop these uniforms from getting into the hands of people other than those authorised to use them.

Rivers of poison



A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

THE four rivers that surrounded Dhaka city from four sides are polluted by industrial wastes to a dangerous level. The rivers Buriganga, Shitalakha, Turag, and Balu have been so extremely polluted that these have turned into the rivers of poison. The poisonous waters of these rivers have not only been killing all its aquatic life but also been posing health hazards to the dwellers of the city.

The city of Dhaka was established by the Mughals on the bank of river Buriganga in the early 17th century, considering the immense beauty and potentiality of this river for growth of trade and commerce. Since then the river Buriganga had been serving the people of Dhaka with all of its resources and made this city a flourishing river port.

But the river Buriganga, which was once a mighty river of vigorous flow, has now been turned into a septic reservoir, as about 22,000 cubic meters of toxic tannery wastes are directly dumped into it every day.

BY THE NUMBERS
The river Balu, which has been flowing on the eastern side of the city, is also being sacrificed to the greed of powerful people who have grabbed both of its banks and bed. The river that once flowed in abundance is now dwindling. The grabbing of its bed has gone to such extent that, it has become quite difficult to recognise its existence at many points. The waste emitted by the industries set up along the river, has heavily polluted its almost stagnant waters.

According to a survey, around 50 to 60% of pollution of Buriganga is caused by lethal industrial wastes and the rest by domestic wastewater.

The river Turag, the main tributary of the river Buriganga on the northern side of the city, is being sacrificed to development as both of its banks are grabbed for building construction and its water is contaminated by lethal industrial wastes, making it one among many rivers in the country to face environmental devastation.

With huge encroachments of its banks by the land grabbers and severe contamination of its waters, the river Turag at Amin Bazar area in Mirpur, looks so pathetic that it leads one to think that it is only a matter of time for the river to die down.

Originating from the river old Brahmaputra, the river Turag has a total length of 78 kilometres, out of which 23 kilometres flow along the city. Not only the banks but also the bed of the river has fallen to the greed of the land grabbers in the upstream near Ashulia and Birulia who have

erected huge structures at various points, grabbing the river. The river Shitalakha, a major tributary of the river Buriganga on the southern fringe of the city, is another cruel victim of huge encroachments and severe pollution. The unabated dumping of industrial wastes and sewage has polluted its water to such an extent that it is impossible for any aquatic life to survive there. Its surface water has turned pitch black and emits a foul smell.

The Institute of Water Modelling (IWM) and Aqua Consultant and Associates surveyed and tested the water of Shitalakha in 2006, and recommended relocation of water intake point of Wasa from Sarulia point of Demra as the water over there is severely polluted. The river Balu, which has been flowing on the eastern side of the city, is also being sacrificed to the greed of powerful people who have grabbed both of its banks and bed. The river that once flowed in abundance is now dwindling. The grabbing of its bed has gone to such extent that,

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The statistics available with the Department of Environment (DoE) say that the number of polluting textile mills is 365, tanneries 198, pharmaceutical units 149, engineering workshops 129, chemical and pesticide factories 118, jute mills 92, rubber and plastic units 63, food and sugar 38, paper and pulp 10, cement and fertiliser 5 each, and distilleries 4.

According to the Environment Conservation Act 1995, each industrial unit should have effluent treatment plants in order to get clearance from the DoE, which is mandatory to get power and gas connections. The caretaker government had directed the owners of the industries to install ETP at their respective industries by October 31 last year. But most of them defied the directive and the government did not take any action against the

violators.

The government also enacted Environment Court Act 2000 followed by the amendment in 2002 in order to set up one or more environment courts in each division with a view to deal with the environmental offences. But the environment courts could not ensure speedy trial of environmental cases because of negligence and insincerity of the DoE officials.

The water experts at a seminar held on April 30 said that the river Buriganga can be saved by setting up an augmentation route through the rivers Dhaleswari-Pungli-Bangshi-Turag-Buriganga. According to them, an amount of Tk 616 crore is needed to implement the proposed 140 kilometre long augmentation route and Tk 6 crore will be required every year for maintenance of the route.

Agriculture and Water Resources Adviser Dr. C.S. Karim said in the seminar that Buriganga can be saved by transferring water from Jamuna to it. But the experts differ with him. A project titled "Augmentation of Buriganga's Flow by Restoring Silted up Links of Jamuna" was initiated in FY 2004-05, but it was dropped later on.

The Institute of Water Modelling (IWM) carried out a feasibility study in 2003, funded by Water Development Board, for augmentation of the river Buriganga and suggested immediate relocation of Hazaribagh tanneries. The IWM also suggested augmentation of the river

by channeling water into it from other rivers.

The rivers that surround the city of Dhaka are its lifeline. The total population of Dhaka city grew from 100,000 in 1906 to 12 million in 2008. But the city authorities could not prepare and implement any effective plan to keep the rivers free from pollution and encroachment.

Ironically, indeed, encroachments and pollution of rivers have been going unabated despite having at least 38 government bodies relating to rivers. The caretaker government in a drive in July 2001 cleared huge portions of encroached Buriganga, Turag and Shitalakha rivers.

We really need a powerful body to free the rivers from the clutches of the encroachers and polluters, instead of having so many non-functional ornamental bodies. The government should realise the gravity of the problem and take stern steps to save Dhaka from the looming environmental disaster. Dhaka will be saved if its rivers are saved.

The city has been experiencing acute water crisis. WASA's water treatment plants are now using an excessive amount of chemicals to make the water safe as the pollution of Buriganga and Shitalakha has gone to the extreme. Therefore, it is a burning need for the government to make these rivers pollution-free to ensure water supply in the city.

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For whom the bells toll: They toll for us



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

FROM the time authoritarian regimes passed into the twilight of history and democracy became the catchword of the people of the world, debate has been raging as to whether primacy should be given to social and cultural changes as opposed to industrial and economic ones.

Social change, defined as "alteration of a social system over time" caused by complex and interrelated dynamics, cannot take place in a short period as its gestation period, by definition, is long. On the other hand time required for economic and industrial progress can be compressed because technology and capital as the driving forces for these changes can be imported in a comparatively short time.

The very fact of the militancy displayed by and the challenge thrown to the government by bigots over suggested amendments to the National Women's Development Policy when the country is under emergency rule is a testament to the medieval

GOING DEEPER

We, in Bangladesh, have no reason to stray from the path of democracy that has been promised to us again and again. Despite the mal-governance (2001-2006) by the alliance government, the keen awareness of the general public and the civil society give us hope that the politicians will not tread the trodden path and refrain from using public office for private gains. It will take a few elections for the people to regain their trust in the people they will elect in the coming elections. But then every journey has to begin by taking the first step.

character that a part of the Bangladesh society still nurtures even in the 21st century.

It is difficult to gauge the extent of public outrage in the absence of systems like that of professional and non-partisan polls. This incident alone, though condemned by the "educated class" and the "intelligentsia," proves that our society remains largely influenced by religion and hence cultural confusion can be one of the impediments in our socio-economic progress and may doom the large majority of impoverished people to greater depth of poverty.

Even if we discount the Freudian interpretation of religion as a surrender by mankind to unexplainable post-death state of human beings because we have no experience of what happens after death except what is described in different religious texts, third world societies continue to be patrimonial and deeply "religious," not always

practiced as prescribed in religious texts and interpreted by people of impeccable credentials, but as dictated by village imams, who, more often than not, are not conversant with the real meaning of the different religions they profess.

Albeit there are exceptions, but the third world societies, even if the influence of religion is taken out of the equation, is based on a "highly flexible and paternalistic public order in which the spoils of the office are used by the ruling groups to reward friends, co-opt actual and potential opponents, to satisfy local and regional allies, and generally to incorporate newly emerging groups into the system" (Randall and Theobald: Political Change and Underdevelopment).

Can we, in Bangladesh, with not so hidden followers of Osama bin Laden who consider the "degenerative" influence of Western culture as the greatest obstacle to our path to heaven

and hence has to be obliterated from the earth, expect our country to move towards development as defined by Donald Rutherford as "the movement of an economy from agricultural activities using simple technology to the production of industrial products and a range of services using modern technology"?

Rutherford does not advocate total alienation from agriculture, as it would not be acceptable today in the face of global food shortage due to conglomeration of higher price of oil, agricultural inputs, cultivation of bio-fuels in place of cereals, etc.

What is not debatable is that the contribution of agriculture to GDP has to decrease, keeping in mind food security. Chandrababu Naidu lost the elections in Andhra Pradesh, despite impressive progress in ICT, because he had allegedly neglected the peasantry who in a country like India could remain the mainstay of the economy for

quite some time to come.

World Bank lead economist Branco Milanovich in his analysis of the poor countries (1980-2002) falling further behind the middle-income and rich countries has reached the conclusion that the poorer countries have much greater likelihood of getting involved in wars and civil conflict (Darfur, DRC, Somalia, as a few examples).

He has estimated that this factor alone accounts for an income loss of about 40% over twenty years. In other words, stability is the key word for development. Bill Overholt (formerly of Harvard Kennedy School) gives US credit for winning the Cold War to a "joint military and economic strategy of nation building and reconstruction."

The Western leaders brought about stability by creating major global institutions e.g. World Bank, IMF, GATT (now WTO), Asian Development Bank; created strong policies and economies in Western Europe, Japan and South East Asia prosperity though unevenly spread over the regions suppressed extremism.

The advent of al-Qaeda, however, as a non-state actor capable of inflicting huge damage in the name of "religious purification" has added a new factor in the maintenance of global stability. The world, however, is determined to cleanse itself of this cancer not only through military means but also through immersion in liberal political values.

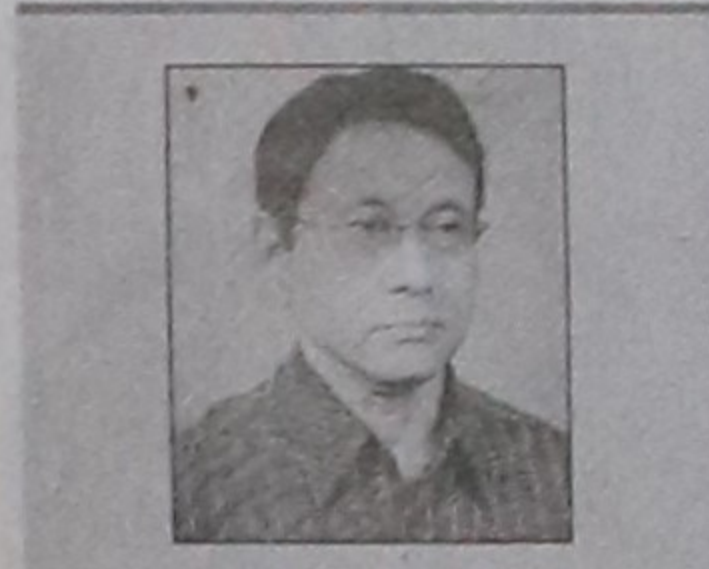
Bill Overholt and others hold

the view that the post-Cold War case of treating democracy as a prerequisite of aid and assistance rests on the theory that democracies are better in economic development than non-democracies. That democracy is the best form of governance is no longer debatable, though, as pointed out by Lella Nadia Sadat (Yale Journal of International Affairs), extraordinary rendition by the Bush administration has not only shattered the Nuremberg Consensus but has opened the US to accusations of violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and violation of the Geneva Convention.

But then, since President Bush may have to account for his misdeeds one day we, in Bangladesh, have no reason to stray from the path of democracy that has been promised to us again and again. Despite the mal-governance (2001-2006) by the alliance government, the keen awareness of the general public and the civil society give us hope that the politicians will not tread the trodden path and refrain from using public office for private gains. It will take a few elections for the people to regain their trust in the people they will elect in the coming elections. But then every journey has to begin by taking the first step.

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Obama the presumptive nominee



ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

AFTER his Tuesday, May 6 decisive 14% margin of victory in the North Carolina primary and a near win in Indiana (lost by only a 2% spread), Senator Barack Obama, according to almost all columnists and commentators, has become the presumptive nominee of the Democratic party, and the clock is ticking for Senator Clinton to wind up her bid for the presidential nomination.

Senator Clinton failed to capitalise on Barack Obama's recent troubles, said Adam Nagourney in The New York Times. Splitting presidential primaries in Indiana and North Carolina "was not a draw," Obama "can certainly

NO NONSENSE

Even with all the tainted weaknesses, Obama's stature has already become larger than life -- unthinkable only a few months ago that a man of African-American origin would come so close to securing the Democratic party's presidential nominee, let alone winning the presidency. Believe it or not -- that is only possible in this land of opportunity. As Obama in his victory speech last week laid out succinctly: "I know the promise of America because I have lived it."

breathe easier now," said The Wall Street Journal.

The only way she can win the nomination is by finding Obama fatally damaged by some earth shattering development that will sway superdelegates toward her en bloc, and having "barred delegates" of both Michigan and Florida reinstated and their votes counted in the total popular vote count.

She's already played that card and she failed, said Steve Kornacki in The New York Observer's Politicker blog. No one believes that the superdelegates would "overturn the will of the people," and Clinton would overtake Obama in either the delegate

count or the popular vote. Thwe outcome of the remaining six primaries is obvious -- Obama winning three, Clinton taking the other three. With nothing to change and if she keeps running now, it will be "for show," only.

Look at the reality: The arithmetic is now so firmly against Senator Clinton (1,422 pledged delegates + 273 superdelegates = 1,695) that Senator Obama's lead (1,588 + 266 = 1,854 short of 177 to reach 2,025 delegates needed) in total delegates is almost insuperable.

Ger this: There are only six contests remaining for 217 (7%) pledged delegates and the number of uncommitted superdelegates remaining are 260 -- the two added

equals 477 delegates to be awarded.

After Tuesday's primary outcome, Senator Obama needs 177 (37%) delegates and conversely Senator Clinton needs 330 (69%) delegates to clinch the nomination.

"We now know who the Democratic nominee will be," said NBC's most widely respected "Meet the Press" host Tim Russert.

One now wonders, why then she is vowing to continue her bid for the presidency and end running until no more states and delegates there to run for. Her rationality is all about her -- divorced from what reality would tell her to do. Even after her debilitating loss on Tuesday, she continues to argue:

• I'm the most qualified candidate
• I believe, I'll be the best president among the three of us (Obama, McCain, and herself);
• My base will (women, Catholics, and Hispanics) will decide the presidential election touting herself as indispensable (some commentators interpret this claim as a remote signal that she may consider being Obama's running mate).

Her federal gasoline tax relief (18.4 cents per gallon) for the three summer months was rebuffed by Senator Obama as old politics of vote chasing gimmick and voter peddling. Her touting that if she becomes the president she will obliterate Iran (and its 71 million people) from the face of the earth if Iran attacks Israel are considered too bellicose and pandering for Jewish votes.

Clinton's argument, as Obama is tiptoeing closer to the 2,025 critical nomination clinching number, is that the real target for winning the nomination is 2,209 (Her newly concocted number, counting both Florida and Michigan delegates). This is a tantamount to shifting the goal

post once the game is on play and you're losing. That's an absolutely no-win case to sell -- a self-fulfilling prophecy -- one that is driven and concocted to penalise Obama for the mis-steps of Democratic officials in the two states that broke the primary election scheduling rules.

Once again, everyone but the Clinton surrogates is saying "the Clintons" will do and make up anything to win but not this time.

"The Clintons are like a cat that gets run over but refuses to die. It crawls off the road and makes it to a backyard, hiding under the deck, in the shadows, eyes like slits, panting for days, stubbornly refusing to give it up" said John Kass in the Chicago Tribune.com

"But no matter what she does, she can't stop Obama, the gentle faun of American politics, supported for years by a compliant, yearning media eager to portray him as a reformer and by the Chicago Democratic machine that has nurtured and protected him for years" added John Kass.

Beleaguered Senator Clinton not only took a beating on Tuesday primary, she also became bankrupt

in the process she loaned \$6.4 million of their own money to her campaign in addition to the \$5 million already loaned weeks earlier. Raising campaign funds is becoming stingier as her candidacy is becoming bleaker. However, her political life doesn't need to end with her presidential bid.

With her hopes of winning the nomination now "a fond wish wrapped in a desperate hope," said Roger Simon in Politico.com, Clinton might want to consider her "endgame." She has "options" still -- if Obama loses, he won't get a second chance in 2012, but she might also run for Senate majority leader or New York governor -- but she needs to plan carefully and astutely. She'll ruin her "political future" if she "becomes known as the candidate who was willing to destroy her party in order to gain the nomination."

There're on-going predictions that Senator Clinton may wind up presidential bid any day now, but Obama's winning the presidency is not all that guaranteed.

The Wall Street Journal in an editorial argues that Obama's "giant step" toward the

Democratic party nomination ironically comes "just when Hillary Clinton has finally exposed his potential weaknesses as a general election candidate." He relied heavily on African-American voters, lost among white Democrats, fared poorly among rural voters, and split the independents with Clinton. Democrats are choosing their latest in a string of "unknown and untested" candidates, and we'll find out in November if Obama is "more like the Jimmy Carter of 1976."

Even with all the tainted weaknesses, Obama's stature has already become larger than life -- unthinkable only a few months ago that a man of African-American origin would come so close to securing the Democratic party's presidential nominee, let alone winning the presidency. Believe it or not -- that is only possible in this land of opportunity. As Obama in his victory speech last week laid out succinctly: "I know the promise of America because I have lived it."

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