

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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# The nature and practice of sycophancy

## Home adviser's alarm at law and order

### Take action, but let people not be harassed

THE Home Adviser's expression of alarm at the slide in law and order is a matter of serious concern. It is not that the deteriorating state of law and order has escaped citizens' attention, but when no less an individual than the Home Adviser admits to the growing problem, it says something more about the situation. It was only on Monday that a businessman was killed in broad daylight in the city. And over the past few days, there has generally been a spate of crime committed in different parts of the nation's capital at a time when Eid-ul-Fitr approaches. If such is the condition in Dhaka, the situation in other regions of the country can only be imagined.

The palpable public feeling is that the law and order situation has been getting increasingly bad of late. A perceptible laxity in maintaining order on the part of the police has been noticed. Given the fact that under the state of emergency, there were no political problems to be handled, such as public rallies or similar programmes, it was expected that the police and other security forces would maintain a solid grip on the situation. That does not seem to have been the case, though. If anything, there appears to be a slackening of control where containing and rolling back crime is concerned. The question may legitimately be asked: if criminality can go up despite a state of emergency, might matters not get even worse when such a measure is not there anymore? In the last few weeks, the authorities have spoken of the varied security measures they intend to take in the on-going month of Ramadan. Part of those measures is the presence of plain-clothed policemen at markets and shopping malls. One wonders if such measures are already in place. There are a number of vulnerable places in the city where strong steps are needed to combat this growing menace of crime.

The government has made it clear that it will take tough action against criminals. That is a laudable goal, but it can only be appreciated once people see actual results. Meanwhile, it should also be borne in mind that misplaced toughness on the part of the authorities should be avoided. All too often, the vigilance that should have been there as a normal happening is conspicuous by its absence. So, while we welcome effective action in curbing crime, we also expect that nothing will be done that will accentuate people's sufferings in the name of law and order.

## DMCH's requirements must be met urgently

### Its full potential as public hospital needs to be realised

THE drawbacks of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, the Medicare facility of the last resort for the poor and middle income group patients and the premier medical teaching institution of the country, are much too known to bear any repetition.

So severely understaffed is the institution that whatever infrastructure exists cannot be utilised optimally. Given the size of the hospital and the number of patients, indoor and outdoor, totalling 4100 per day that it has to handle, the existing manpower strength needs to be tripled. Evidently, the cap on recruitment since 2004 has been a glaring blunder that needs to be immediately removed. The huge gap in the patient: manpower ratio cannot be bridged overnight, but there are two options that can be applied in the shorter run. Six hundred and fifty additional pairs of hands including doctors are assessed as the bare minimum recruitment requirement for the present to handle the patient load with any degree of efficiency. Secondly, the implementation of the ECNEC-approved proposal for building 600-bed new strength at the DMCH which has got underway must be expedited.

Much of the deplorable performance of the DMCH can be put down to poor administration and management fuelling corruption and abuse of facilities. There are two problem areas where the dross needs to be cleared up: first, the chief obstacle to patients' receiving prompt professional medical attention and in-patient treatment is personified by the brokers' racket. There is an abject lack of any elaborate system of help desks, let alone that of signs and directions pointing to where the patients need to go with their different kinds of ailments. Merely displaying posters reading "beware of brokers" is a cruel joke when otherwise they are actually allowed to thrive by corrupt minions of the hospitals on whom manifestly the writ of the administration does not apply.

Granted, the doctors are short-handed, but then it should be quite possible for them to give a reasonably patient hearing to the desperate care-seekers rather than scribbling out prescriptions in a huff and hurry as they often do.

It's time the hitherto neglected maintenance staffing and budgeting receive some attention. Poor maintenance is eating into the vitals of the DMCH's equipment base. In this context, the overall need for the ministry of health and family welfare to reduce its bureaucratic stranglehold on the hospital can hardly be overemphasised.

## It's time to look forward

Beautiful words cannot make lives better, but a person who always puts country and people above himself and above politics, and who understands the minds of the people, can. Although Bangladesh is now at a critical political juncture, the people still have faith and hope and want to say like John Fitzgerald Kennedy: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

RIIPAN KUMAR BISWAS

THE two presidential nominees, Sen. John McCain and Barack Obama, made the ground-zero their common ground, free of politics and infused with memory as the 9/11 attacks remain a deeply emotional issue in the United States, even if polls show that pocketbook concerns, particularly the parlous state of the housing market, now top

terrorism fears.

Getting together to bring peace for all is a noble endeavour. In most countries, parties largely concern themselves with how to allocate power and to what end it should be used. Very few political parties follow country first, politics second.

It means that if something isn't noble don't do it. It means doing something for the good of the country, not just for the candidate. It means being a servant of

the country and someone for the people.

Negative political rhetoric will only serve to drive the people further apart at a time when everyone needs to be working together. Too many in Dhaka are putting politics first and country second. Too few are setting aside their own interests to work together on solutions for Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina carried on political attacks instead of talking

about the policies that could make the country better. Instead of finding common ground among diverse views, she criticised the caretaker government (CTG) and the BNP-Jamaat regime in her address to AL's US chapter leaders in New York City on September 14.

According to her, the CTG was now busy making the corrupt clean. The government has made things worse by not taking necessary actions against widespread corruption, looting, and killings by the BNP-Jamaat regime, she added.

The people of Bangladesh are aware of politicians who attack personality rather than examining and debating other politicians' policy proposal. They will fight for the plan Sheikh Hasina promised if her party won the next elections.

Because of the diverse beliefs and opinions in politics, politi-

cians should build support for an idea, convince other people of its merits, and accommodate others' points of view without undermining their core goals, and, ultimately, find the points of agreement that will allow them to forge consensus.

Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia should sit together in the interest of the country and democracy. Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman said: "Major political parties are expected to show tolerance, shunning the practice of mudslinging in the interest of democracy and the nation." He and adviser Hassan Arif, asked Barrister Rafique-ul-Huq, who defends both former prime ministers in court, to try to bring them to a discussion table.

Most of the political leaders and activists reacted positively to the government's attempt to bring the two top leaders for a dialogue, while AL acting chief

Zillur Rahman questioned the CTG's motive behind the attempt and said that it was unnecessary.

Bangladesh needs a leader who does not mind stepping on toes to get the job done. Now is the time that future generations will look back to and say, this is when Bangladesh started working again. Now is the time when political parties need to return to the basic democratic ideals and values.

Politicians don't need to find common ground among themselves on every single issue, but to find those areas on which common ground can be found. They should put emphasis on the potential for cooperation rather stifling the competition.

People believe that political parties should exist for the convenience of like-minded people working together to promote candidates. In legislatures, their function should be to help like-

was a risky affair.

Sycophants thrive on flattery, which is why they have little need of principles. Not everyone can be a Justice Ibrahim, who joined Ayub Khan's military administration in the sincere belief that he could help steer the country back to democracy, but left when the dictator's intentions began to appear suspicious. Sabur Khan, Monem Khan, and all the Khans you can think of, did not for a single moment try to persuade themselves that they needed to be with the masses. Which is a very logical reason why they are today forgotten.

When you observe the inexorable manner in which the Nehru-Gandhis have prevailed as a dynasty for years, you have that uncomfortable feeling somewhere inside you that sycophancy has not quite left the world's largest democracy untouched and untainted. It was Pranab Mukherjee who, as the most senior cabinet minister at the time of Indira Gandhi's assassination in October 1984, should have taken charge as acting prime minister.

That was the way the system had worked in 1964 and 1966, when after the deaths of Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri, Gulzarilal Nanda officiated as acting prime minister.

In 1984, President Zail Singh, an unmitigated Indira loyalist, saw little that was wrong when he bypassed procedure and convention and asked a young, patently politically naïve Rajiv Gandhi to return to Delhi from Calcutta and take over as prime minister. You notice the continuation of this disturbing trend, with Sonia Gandhi being the power behind Manmohan Singh and her son Rahul Gandhi meanwhile sending

demands of Brazil and India during the current economic environment. The demands from Brazil and India posed hurdles to Washington and Brussels, and EU Trade Commissioner Mendelson (from Britain) was sharply criticised, especially in France, when he ultimately agreed to significant changes in EU agricultural policies.

Likewise, in the US, where trade representative Susan Schwab needed to consult very closely with the Congressional leaders, the Congress was not prepared to listen to her as the law-makers were heavily influenced by America's always-powerful farm lobbies, especially in the election year.

Observers say none of this could have happened had the US retained its moral and political weight in the global economy and in world affairs generally.

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America under the Bush administration has been distracted by wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan and, accordingly, it has not paid adequate attention to its vital interests, in the Asia-Pacific region. That is why Japan, China, now India, Asean and Australia have each looked to their "own" interests.

Those are the implications and warning signs that emanated from the Asean-India FTA, that the global trade system has fallen under the radar and nobody is interested in concluding a deal under WTO, although it is the best system available for all countries.

There is another dimension to be noted, and it is the perception about WTO. WTO is perceived to be looking after the interests of multinational corporations in exploiting the resources of developing countries as the rules of WTO are believed to have been framed by these multinational corporations. Furthermore, Japan, US and European countries largely control the activities of WTO.

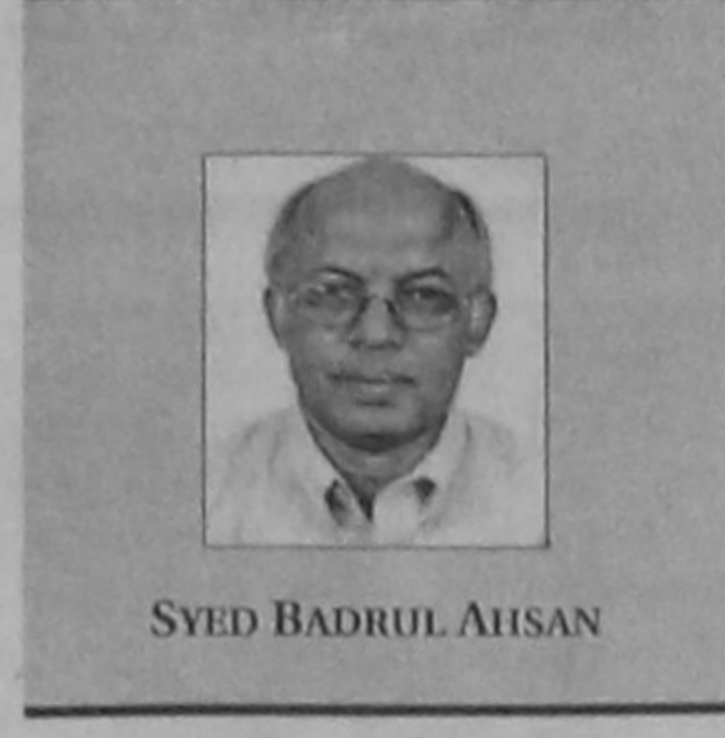
The institution is undemocratic and lacks transparency. Poorer countries and LDCs find it difficult to get their views on board. It is the big and middle-income countries that play a hard ball game during the negotiations within the WTO.

Observers say that to restore confidence in WTO, a new set of transparent rules in consultation with all countries - rich and poor - need to be formulated. Until then, FTAs would continue undermining the Doha Round under WTO.

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## GROUND REALITIES

Political sycophancy throws up all the quirks of history. There is the mechanical applause and the plastic smile, as on the countenances of those around North Korea's Kim Jong-il. And then there are the men who decide that their leader is a *polli bondhu*. Z.A. Bhutto encouraged his frenzied followers into equating him with Jinnah. They ended up calling him Quaid-e-Awam.



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

A veteran politician was unambiguous about it the other day. Begum Khaleda Zia, he informed the country loudly and with a clearly perceptible sense of happiness, would provide leadership to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party for as long as she lived. He probably did not realise - and neither did anyone else around him - that it was just the sort of attitude that had made a casualty of democracy in this country over a long stretch of years.

There have been far too many people consistently and constantly ready to fawn over the men and women who have often presided over their lives to understand the damage they have done by their ingratiating behaviour. Of course, we are all quite relieved that Begum Zia has politely declined the offer of a life-long leadership role of her party for herself. But it is a move that ought to have come sooner, before all this public outcry that erupted when it appeared that she was quite happy to go along with the decision.

You are reminded of Julius Caesar. In the days prior to his assassination, indeed at a time when conspiracy against his authoritarianism was beginning to sprout, he was offered the crown thrice in the senate. And thrice did he put it by, seeming

increasingly loath to do so every time it came his way.

In the end, though, he did decline the offer of the monarchy his sycophants had offered him on a platter. That was magnanimity of a kind, a gesture Begum Zia should have replicated when Tanvir Ahmed Siddiki and his friends proposed that she enshrine herself permanently at the top of the BNP organisational structure. But then again, we are all happy and relieved that she has turned down the offer.

For the future, we will hope that this gesture will open the door to the infusion of new blood in the party, that indeed the BNP will have other men and women ready to serve as its chairperson in the times to be.

Indeed, it remains our fond expectation that all political parties will break out of the mould of entrenched feudalism and truly go for democracy through liberalising their own modalities of internal party behaviour. That goes for the Awami League, the Jatiyo Party and any other organisation, which seriously believes in the idea that democracy is the national objective.

But, for now, go back to this malady we have known as sycophancy. Of course, you see it everywhere around you. In government offices, in business organisations, et al, it has turned

out to be an ailment that continues to stultify our growth as a nation. It is a malaise that often has had its roots in politics. Go back to the year 1963, when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, serving as both Pakistan's foreign minister and secretary general of the Convention Muslim League, proposed loudly and unabashedly that Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan, then Pakistan's military ruler, be anointed the country's president for life.

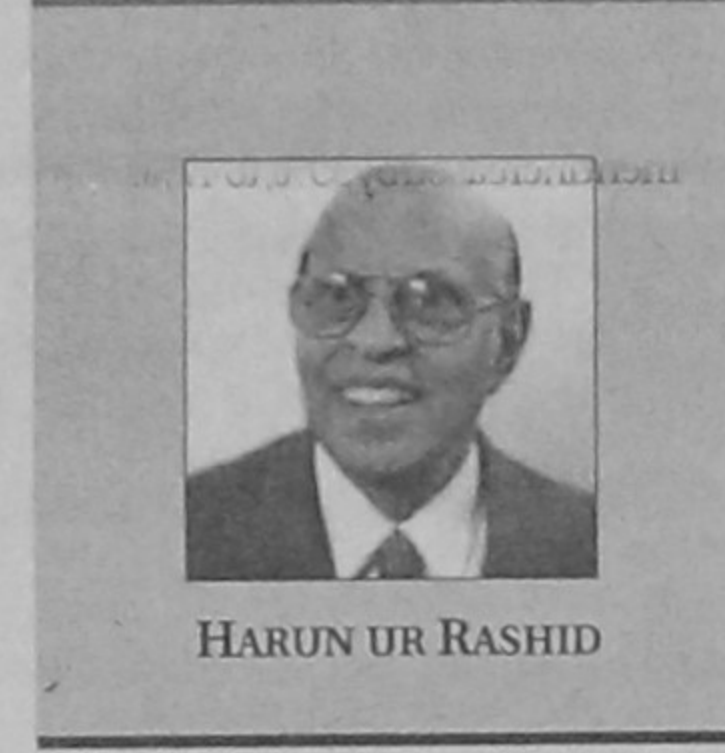
It was a gesture Ayub must have appreciated. Nevertheless, Bhutto's objective did not come to pass, one reason being that within three years of making that grandiloquent gesture, he fell out with his mentor. He was asked to leave the government. The rest is, of course, history as we have known it.

The point here is that men like Bhutto have always been around. In 1958, when Bhutto was inducted into the cabinet by President Iskandar Mirza (and that was in the early days of the coup Mirza and Ayub had together brought about, to undermine the course of democracy), he was moved so much that he sent off a hugely fawning letter to Mirza. The immediate cause of that was, of course, to thank the president for giving him a chance to serve the country.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the nature of sycophancy. Think of the Ershad years. Those were times when a pretty large number of politicians, bureaucrats and journalists made a beeline to his office, the objective being an acquisition of power, or slices of it. General Ershad obliged a good number of them; and yet when he fell, many of these people deserted him in droves. Some of them even went to the extent of castigating him as an autocrat.

The surprising bit is that it had not dawned on them, while they served as Ershad's minions, that the master they were serving was indeed an autocrat in whose hands the future of democracy

## Do free trade agreements undermine the Doha Round?



HARUN UR RASHID

### BOTTOM LINE

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FREE Trade Agreements are being concluded among many countries. In South Asia, India and Sri Lanka concluded a FTA, while India proposed to conclude a similar deal with Bangladesh. Bangladesh reportedly replied that it would consider the proposal once the implementation of South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) took place.

### Are they really free trade agreements?

FTAs are not "free trade agreements" at all because so many commodities are taken out of the list. They may be called, at best, preferential agreement. They deal with some sectors of trade and are against Rule 24 of the GATT's Charter. That rule allows for regional and bilateral trade agreements as long as they cover substantially all trade among the parties. But these FTAs have a long negative list that does not fall under FTA.

East Asia has led the way in the recent proliferation of free trade agreements. India and Asean (a group of 10 nations) concluded FTA in Singapore recently, in which Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath played an active role.

The Telegraph in Kolkata reported that the commerce minister "persuaded Asean that India would not have to cut duties at all on 489 items and only partially on 606." Yet the agreement is called "Free Trade Agreement." The devil is in the details. The Asean-Indian FTA will take effect from January next year. At the same time, Asean also agreed to establish FTA with Australia and New Zealand.

Washington has concluded FTAs with Singapore, Australia, Chile and a group of Central American countries. It also negotiated the North American Agreement in the 1990s. Currently, the most prominent effort is its still-to-be ratified agreement with South Korea. There are a number of others at various stages, includ-

ing ongoing US talks with Malaysia, Thailand and Peru, as well as early stage discussions with Indonesia.

Statistics show that roughly 400 FTAs have been concluded and were notified to the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Although the ministerial level meeting of the Doha Round collapsed in Geneva last month, another try to keep it alive will be made this September. But the prospects are not bright, and academics and observers have regularly warned that FTAs, which are, in fact, preferential trade rather than free trade agreements, are both a cause and a consequence of the breakdown of the WTO system.

### Why did the Doha Round collapse last month?

There are many reasons for the breakdown of the talks. Many analysts blame France in Europe and the election year in America.

Moreover, recession has hit

many major economies of Europe. The time was not appropriate for a successful outcome because of the current economic slowdown environment. Every country became alert about what it surrendered and what it got in return.

While India's commerce minister has been successful in concluding this important agreement with Asean, many observers say that his role in the Doha Round ministerial talks in Geneva had been questioned in many capitals. Along with Brazil, India insisted that a successful Doha Round would require severe European Union and US cuts, both in their agricultural subsidies and their farm-import restrictions. But some allege that Brazil and India were not ready to provide access to the manufactured goods of European Union and the US to their markets.

Certainly, many believe that the European and American domestic factors seemed to be the main cause of the stalled Doha Round as they could not accede to the

demands of Brazil and India during the current economic environment. The demands from Brazil and India posed hurdles to Washington and Brussels, and EU Trade Commissioner Mendelson (from Britain) was sharply criticised, especially in France, when he ultimately agreed to significant changes in EU agricultural policies.

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