

Between hope and despair



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

STRAIGHT LINE

Politics cannot be restricted to politicians and their indiscretions and intermittent interventions from outside because that will mean reducing it to a mere spectator sport.

The remaining political parties also suffer from above-mentioned ailments with no party members daring to challenge the word of the leader, no internal debates, and no merit-based system of vertical movement from the junior rungs of the ladder to the top echelons.

The current events contain an amazingly accurate description of our disenchantment with the present state of affairs, while they also provide hope for the distant future.

The apparently bleak environment need not make us unduly despondent. Things have been difficult and disquieting at most times in human history.

The current situation pertaining to

In fact, quite often the years which followed gloomy predictions saw nations rise to the height of glory. The salutary part of the present situation is that many of our politicians displaying clear pretensions to infallibility and being promise-bound never to become wiser, have awakened to the reality that at some point of time they may have to account for their reckless disregard for propriety.

There are, however, reasons for worry. While the movement for independence of judiciary and rule of law is lofty and noble, there is not much effort for the reform of the entire judicial system and addressing the ailments that are hampering the process of delivery of justice.

The current situation pertaining to

the incapability of the civil judges to decide cases, the conditions in which they are forced to work, paucity of staff and furniture, paints a dismal picture, but not much attention is paid to that.

There are additional reasons for despair. The fact that we have not been strong enough to effectively book the bigger suspects would mean that nothing adverse will happen to the hundred thousand petty tyrants that mushroomed all over the country.

Bangladeshis have to admit that democratic and the political party reforms have not received the due attention because our political elite have not believed in the concepts of modern governance.

increasing greed and lust of less than conscientious politicians. Greater concentration of power at one point is undoubtedly bad for the political health.

It is time to think if by means of legal and institutional measures we can make life difficult for the corrupt elements. We have to ensure that such elements do not get time to relax and are subjected to real inconveniences in displaying their ill-gotten worldly possessions.

It is time for our society to ensure that the political scene is not dominated by people whose real sources of income cannot be ascertained. For most people politics must not turn into a fulltime occupation, and prominence in public life should be accorded only after some positive record of public service.

Running the affairs of State is a solemn and grim business where we need individuals of true grit. It was indeed pathetic to see occupiers of very high political office enjoying largely the perks and privileges of power without feeling the burden of responsibilities.

It may be the time to strengthen the local government, now that we have an extended caretaker government that has supposedly no narrow and partisan interests.

It is time to effect transition from autocratic whims to representative governance, institutional development, revival of learning, scientific enquiry and thoughts about organized municipal services.

the dirt from the art of politics brooks no further delay.

It is time to remind ourselves that politics is taking one's agenda in one's own hands. It is about the process of change; how society is organized; what is its power structure; who are the actors; how they interact with each other and with the outside world.

We have to decide about the inclusion of social organizations and planning processes in the purview of politics. A good number of citizens groups should know how physical development takes place from designing to implementation.

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shortage of electricity and water, deficiencies of public transportation and unemployment. It should also cover all developmental activity of the government, small acts of social organizations and attempts to find solutions by NGOs and community based organizations.

In mature democracies people are more concerned with their neighborhood, their borough and their city—in that order. The central government has hardly any direct significance in their lives.

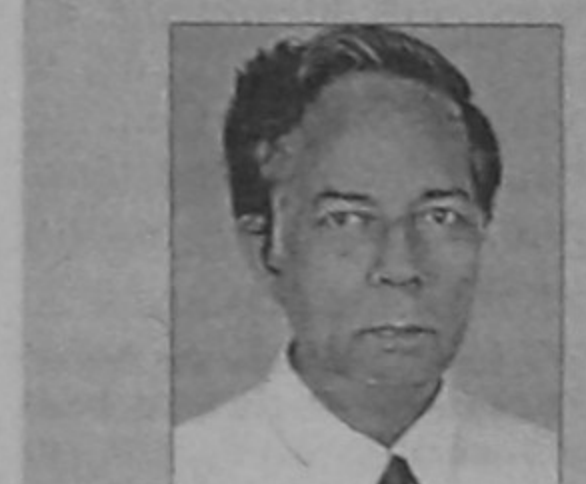
If we have a powerful, effective and financially supported local government, changes of government at the national level would not affect people's lives as they do now.

In the recent past our political scene did present an incredible array of pudding-headed mercenaries but it is time to replace them by men and women of honour and knowledge.

Our politics is in need of redefining.

Muhammad Nurul Huda is a columnist of The Daily Star.

Unguided youngsters slip into crime cauldron



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

BITTER TRUTH

The great society we had dreamt of, meaning a social fabric free of the vile scourges of disease, poverty, corruption and illiteracy and cherished it to come into being, since the days of liberation war, has not come to pass.

day of easily preventable diseases like malaria, measles, whooping cough, diarrhea and jaundice. They are the most disadvantaged group of the total population. The neglect of these youngsters by the society and last of all by the government is most depressing.

As these children grow in absence of opportunities for education and work, their derailment and drift towards evil association and criminal-

ity go unabated. Drug addiction, extortion, beating, rape and even murder are the images of violent crimes associated with the most deprived individuals. Sensible citizens are shocked to hear of the atrocities committed by these innocent looking boys and even some girls who have turned into mobsters, hijackers and drug pushers.

Over the years hundreds and thousands of poor people in the age group 15 to 30 have flocked to the capital city in search of work and a better life.

crime to make a living working under the protection of some very influential godfathers who operate this clandestine business but have always evaded arrest allegedly because of high connection and money dealings.

Our failure to delve deep into this tenuous issue and grapple with it properly might explode into a catastrophic situation. This will mean turning the country into a snow-capped volcano—pretty and calm on top but seething within.

How do we fight shy of the problem that warrants our attention most? What a horrifying drudgery and waste of human energy at the prime of one's life due to lack of economic protection, guidance and motivation?

Juvenile crime in Bangladesh has exploded in recent years along with

organised crimes by local youth gangs. Punishments often meted out to the offenders but when they are released, they go back to the families which are not better than what they left. The situation has reached such a nadir that poor parents, sometime indulging in crimes themselves, encourage their children to work as couriers.

While analysing the present pathetic situation, we are led to believe that it is the government's failure in the past days to create opportunities for education and work that has pushed them to take up such criminal activities, in most cases as a

way for living. On the other hand these crimes have awakened the country to the beast that has broken loose in its young people.

However, with resources gobbled up by some self-seeking politicians and opportunist business syndicates and the government machinery vacillating and adrift, the country can't get rid of the dreaded scourges like disease and poverty. This leads the grotesque and violent nature of the youngsters crippling the growth of the nation.

With climate change causing heavy rainfall in unusual times and increasing frequency and intensity of flood that ultimately affects food security, the country now faces the worst of times. Experts in a media workshop held in the city on August 29 last suggested the formulation of a comprehensive action plan which will have to be friendly to both environment and infrastructure for sustainable development.

Political leaders and people belonging to all shades of opinion in the country must wake up to the fact that the time for reckoning has arrived. If the country has to rise up

from the quagmire of past neglect, has to prosper and carve out a self-sustaining future, then it should not have a lacklustre education system or an infrastructure that is falling apart.

The great society we had dreamt of, meaning a social fabric free of the vile scourges of disease, poverty, corruption and illiteracy and cherished it to come into being, since the days of liberation war has not come to pass.

Drug addiction and drug trafficking among youths are eating into the vitals of the nation. Many of these disgruntled youngsters are resorting to unethical and illegal means of earning a living because of the lack of opportunities of doing anything else.

or gone abroad by selling their last belongings like land and jewelry.

Within the country the drug trade and 'contract killing' have in many cases become the last options for these disgruntled youths. These crimes, perhaps obviously, have shown them that in a little time they can make a lot of money and they have accepted it. Government effort in the past days to root out criminal activities of 'Oggan party and Malam party' as well as drug trafficking, vandalism and child trafficking has been far from satisfactory other than what RAB has been doing at the present moment.

The way the whole country is plunging into chaos, because of the apathy and neglect shown towards the vital section of the society signals a potential calamity for the nation. In fact, the country has inherited decades of benign neglect, misplaced priorities and outright incompetence at every level.

At this hour of crisis and need, sensible leaders irrespective of their affiliations have to come forward to heal the rifts developing between groups and lead them in building a new society based on equal rights and opportunity.

Md. Asadullah Khan is a former teacher of physics and Controller of Examinations, BUET.

You can't grow a 100-year old tree in 99 years

ENAM UL HAQUE

ANY of us rushed to the Jahangirnagar University on Tuesday to join a human chain of teachers and students in a bid to stop its administration from felling several hundred trees of the campus.

Some tens of years before, the trees were planted on the grassland of the campus by students and teachers including a few VCs who were great tree lovers and keen to have a shade over their heads in summer.

After a big cyclone in 2006, we saw the University of Philippines making a huge effort to upright the half-uprooted giants of old trees at Dilliman campus.

other expediences; but to make money. The three rationales the felling lobby used for promoting its cause were ludicrous and possibly threaded together clumsily to mask the money-motive.

Their first rationale grew out of the stumps of five Teak trees sawed and carted away from the fringe of the campus at night by the thieves. Believe it or not, the rationale is: we should cut the trees of the campus before the thieves do it, we have the power to do at daylight what the thieves do at night...

The second rationale, ridiculously, is: the trees of the campus are old, and the aging trees are a health hazard. This is first time we learn that Bangladesh has old trees. The Americans are proud of the Red Wood forests that are 500 years old. The Noridics are proud of the trees that are 1,200 years old.

After a big cyclone in 2006, we saw the University of Philippines making a huge effort to upright the half-uprooted giants of old trees at Dilliman campus.

All over the world we met many people proud of old trees -- older the prouder. We also met a few people eager to see the old trees felled -- but they were loggers, not professors.

Never before we heard anyone claim that the aged trees were a health hazard. Our oldest known trees are in the Sundarbans. How many people were killed or maimed by the presence of a large number of old trees in Bagerhat, Khulna and Shatkhira? On the contrary, they seemed to have protected a lot of people against the fury of the Sidr. No wonder many of us were baffled by the invented health hazard theory.

The third rationale is: the trees are the 'resources' of the campus, and can be traded by a committee managing the internal resources. The trees are seen as 'resources' of the university exactly as its land, lakes, fish, fruit, etc. to be leased or sold to make money.

Those were the depressing sides of the story. On the brighter side there was a very big turn over of teachers and students out in the



street in rain vowing to resist any large scale tree felling in the campus. The VC and most of the faculty seemed not to favour the felling plan. Many said that felling would benefit the loggers more than the university. The log-dealers and saw-mill owners are likely to earn ten fold more than the Internal Resources Committee would gain.

Enam Ul Haque is an ornithologist.

Reminiscing '62 education movement

QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

THE other day (September 17) was the 'Education Day'. 46 years ago, that day students of the then East Pakistan waged a huge movement against the 'Sharif Education Policy' announced by then Pakistan government.

In 1947-48 the number of primary schools in East Pakistan was 29633, which came down to 26000 within a span of 5 years. The Pakistan army chief Ayub Khan hatched a conspiracy with the Governor General Iskander Mirza to topple the coalition civilian government headed by Prime Minister Feroz Khan Noon.

Some of the features provoked serious agitation. They clearly pointed out that the door of education was closed to the poor and low-income people. The very connotation of 'investment in education' triggered sharp reaction.

Features of Sharif Commission Report included: (1) Urdu should be made the language of the people of Pakistan. (2) English should be made compulsory from class VI. (3) To intro-

duction a Lingua Franca for Pakistan, common script should be introduced and for that, Arabic should be given priority. (4) Education should not be available in minimum cost and at cheap rate. (5) There is reason to see at par investment in industry and education. (6) The concept of free primary compulsory education is Utopia. (7) We emphatically recommend that the 2-year degree course should be upgraded to 3-year for improvement of quality at the higher education level.

University campus. On 10th September a representative character meeting was held at the Dhaka University Canteen where almost all the colleges of the city were represented.

Students started picketing from early morning on the day Agitating students set some vehicles ablaze as contingents of police chased demonstrators from Sadarghat to Nawabpur railway crossing. By 9am Dhaka University campus was packed up with students coming from different institutions of Dhaka city.

However, the students' movement took a new turn on 10th of August when Dhaka College students meeting announced general strike of students throughout the province on 15th August.

worker Wazullah and many others were seriously injured. Wazullah later died in the hospital. The firing at Abdul Gani Road infuriated the processionists which not only included students but also workers and employees of different mills and factories, rickshaw pullers and boatmen from Buriganga river.

Two chief characteristics of the 62 education movement which deserve special mention are: first, the movement was initiated by the students alone without any outside influence and secondly, the central student leaders could not foresee that such a huge movement was possible based on education and academic problems faced by the students alone.

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