

Politics of litigation

The issue is strengthening the ACC to fight corruption

OPPPOSITION leader Begum Khaleda Zia has accused the government of filing false cases against her party men, and also made no secret of her plan to adopt the same strategy of cornering political adversaries with a barrage of litigations, when her party comes to power again.

Her purportedly sarcastic remark that the BNP is taking lessons from the ruling party in using litigation as a political weapon depicts how the two major parties are interested in trading charges and counter charges rather than being serious about combating corruption. Change of guard invariably leads to piling up of cases against political rivals. Many of these cases fail to stand judicial scrutiny and fall through cracks of weak prosecution. Small wonder also that corruption does not subside when the ruling party targets the opposition and much of the force of the anti-corruption drive is spent on politically motivated litigations.

The culture of drawing political opponents into legal battles also makes it necessary for the ruling party to try and have control, obviously unlawfully, over the entire justice dispensation system. Only that can explain why they have always tried to emasculate the Anti-Corruption Commission, instead of strengthening it. It is the ACC which can, and should, play a pivotal role in the fight against corruption provided it is allowed to work independently. Yet, the report on the ACC Act 2004 finalised by the government-formed committee last month includes 23 amendment proposals, six of which have been objected to by the ACC chief himself. It is really not possible for the ACC to enjoy functional freedom if it has to take the government's permission, as proposed, to initiate legal proceedings "under certain circumstances." If the government tries to control the ACC by incorporating such provisions in the ACC Act, the anti-corruption body will degenerate into a toothless organisation as fighting corruption remains a far cry.

Both the ruling and the opposition leaders, aspiring to be back to the helm of power, have to not only admit but also insist on the truth that the ACC needs to function neutrally without any interference by the executive if transparency and accountability of the government is to be fully ensured. It seems they realise it a bit when they are out of power, but forget everything once they are in power. It is really a sad reflection on our politics that the politicians are eager to take only the counter-productive lessons from their rivals.

Passports easy to come by

Strengthen the issue regime

THE disconcerting news of militants and anti-state elements being able to easily procure Bangladeshi passport speaks of the slipshod manner in which passport issue procedures are being followed. It is a pity that those who are involved in the process of passports issue appear to deliberately disregard the harmful consequences of circumventing laid down procedures for petty personal gains that allows international terrorists to travel in and out of the country with Bangladeshi identity and passports. Thanks to the fact that some of these terrorists have been arrested, but for whose confession we would have been perhaps ignorant of the grievous scope of the matter. The issue should cause relevant agencies to sit up and act immediately.

In the matter of issue of passports there are a few imperatives that we suggest are a must for strengthening the system while making it difficult for unwanted elements to acquire the same.

Firstly, issue of machine readable passports (MRP) should be accelerated so that all old passports are replaced quickly. And although the new system would be helped very much by the personal information on the national identity card (NID) there is need to undertake police verification of all passport holders to obviate the chances of miscreants, terrorist and anti-state elements misusing the system. In this regard all must be issued with NID as quickly as possible.

On the matter of ascertaining the credentials of the applicants, it is a regrettable reality that the biggest flaw has been in the procureability itself, and we feel the police administration has much work to do to make it foolproof. The fact is that police verification occurs in name only, the matter taken care of with some palm greasing and the clearance given, in most cases, without the police actually determining the applicant's credentials and identity. The report in yesterday's paper is ample testimony to the nature of verification conducted by the police. And in this respect the evil nexus between the middleman, police and system operators within the department of passport and immigration has to be snapped for good.

Evidently too, the matter of issue of passport within 24 hours has to be revisited. The idea is very good indeed but open to misuse given the loopholes in the existing system. We suggest that no passport be issued without prior verification. Given the extensive use of IT in vogue in the country today the process should not consume much time, more so when we all will eventually possess NID which will help the process.

Our lessons in politics

Truly, politicians in Bangladesh, with their unabashed style of saying and then denying, doing and then undoing, in and out of parliament, have opened our eyes and sharpened our senses, and as a result, now we can perceive their intent even before they open their mouth or make a move.



SHAHNOOR WAHID

PLATO learned from Socrates. Aristotle learned from Plato. Then Alexander tried to learn a few things as a pupil of Aristotle. In the last ten/fifteen years, under the much-trumpeted and much-paraded democratic system, we have also learned a few things. In fact, we have acquired profound knowledge on how politics operate and how politicians play their weird little games in countries like ours. We have seen enough. We have heard a lot. We have tested plenty. So, no more an iota of doubt remains in our minds about why the *deshdoradi netas* and *netris* would walk through muck once before every election.

It is for no greater cause that some people do politics. There is nothing noble about it, except for some rare instances. *Janatar durdosha* is hogwash, nonsense, rubbish, humbug. Sacrificing the last drop of blood for the people no more appeals to

the people. In this country it only happened in case of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In today's reality, it is only for self-accentuation; to earn inexplorable amount of wealth and experience the maddening, misty taste of power that they are ready to give away everything, including *mann* and *shommann*.

Truly, politicians in Bangladesh, with their unabashed style of saying and then denying, doing and then undoing, in and out of parliament, have opened our eyes and sharpened our senses, and as a result, now we can perceive their intent even before they open their mouth or make a move. We know what they say and what they mean. We know how much to take and how much to bin.

We have been silent spectators on the sidelines for decades. Today, we are wiser by degrees about why politics appear so weird, so mischievous, so misleading, and so deceitful, despite people's sincerest trust and faith in the political process as

being the rightful way of governance.

But every time a new government comes, people are left cheated all over again and yet they queue up at the polling booths all over again, hoping that a change of heart has taken place; hoping that this time things would be done the way they wanted; hoping that the rulers would solve their basic problems first before going for projects that have nothing to do with the

strength to curse your tormentors. You have repeatedly requested them to go for quick, short-term solutions but no one listened. Then suddenly you are told that to acquire electricity on an emergency basis one cannot wait for the time-consuming tendering process, therefore, some firms have been short-listed who would install machinery to produce electricity within a short time. You see it was a perfect deal. Somewhere some politicians would now make a few millions.

The same goes for the traffic congestion problem. Though hundreds of recommendations have reached the government for undertaking short-term solutions, nothing has been done in this regard. Instead, we have been told of colossal projects that would take ten years to complete.

Ideas related to making new roads, making underpasses under major roads, making fly-overs above all railway crossings, shifting inter-city bus stoppages, taking unfit vehicles off the roads, making some roads one-way and so on were not given any consideration. Maybe the "deal" issue did not mature in this regard. So, we are waiting to hear about signing of billion-dollar contracts with some big companies to construct mega projects to solve the traffic-congestion crisis.

Then, one fine morning, we heard that no old ship having toxic cargo on board would be allowed for import. And credulous fools that we are, we became very happy and thought how judicious and environment-friendly and ecology-friendly the government really was. But our euphoria did not last long. Another not-so-fine morning, we heard that laws were bent conveniently so that the handful of old ship importers would be able to import those ships. It was the 16 crore people versus the handful-of-old-ship-importers, and the latter won. The deal was perfect.

Then in the last two decades or so we have learned that no government would touch river-bank grabbers, forest land grabbers, forest tree grabbers, hill grabbers, sea-beach grabbers, minibus owners, truck owners, water vessel owners, hoarders, smugglers, stockists and black-marketers. We have been told that central and local party leaders and supporters earn "two-pice" from those sources so party bosses would not touch them. If they come down heavily on one of them then they would lose about 2,000 votes. It is the 2,000 votes against 16 crore people. It is the people who always lose.

Our lessons in politics is complete. We are now ready to enter politics.

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Campus violence that involves non-students

The violent face-off between locals and students should not be taken as a passing occurrence. The distrust that has developed between the students of the Chittagong University and the local villagers should not be allowed to get bitterer and fester.

SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

NOWADAYS, eyebrows are hardly raised over any news item on violence in educational campuses, because reports of violence among the various student groups and factions leading to injuries and deaths are carried by the news media about everyday.

People are more or less familiar with rival student groups being locked in conflicts either on ideological grounds or as part of turf wars on campus. But these are totally internal affairs of the students and under normal circumstances there is no reason why such battles among the student groups should involve non-students and people outside the campus.

Unfortunately, both in the past and very recently we came across news about such undesirable happenings. What alarms us is that the number of such unfortunate incidents is on the rise.

The recent clash between the students of Chittagong University with villagers exemplifies one such incident where student violence has spilled over into localities nearby. The clashes have even led to the death of a student and serious injuries to others.

Earlier, too, we heard of similar stories of bloody brawls from Rajshahi University where villagers attacked students with lethal weapons. As in every case of such encounters, the violence cannot be blamed on only one of the parties. In any case, the results have been tragic.

It is not only the physical injuries and deaths that are unfortunate, the fallout of such incidents is also often very damaging, especially for the students, most of whom are non-locals coming from different districts. Though the violence-mongers are few in number on either side, the general students caught in the crossfire become the victims in the long run.

The media gave various overtones and twists to the reports from Chittagong University, specifying the political identities of the students who happened to be involved in those incidents. However, to the man in the street, it matters little as to which particular political groups or factions those students belong to.

Common people, who are not heavily charged with political dogmas, do not see any difference between the various student groups and their political colours. The common people's interpretation of those unpleasant incidents is simple. To them, it is like their own sons and daughters who are engaged in such scandalous activities!

And the conclusion they would draw is; what a colossal drain those boys and girls have proved to be on their families and their resources! They may even wonder, why should a student land himself in such undesirable situations in the first place?

The student who died due to serious blood loss from the stab wounds he received during the attack by the villagers hailed from a very poor family in Rajbari district. The boy, who reportedly had no scores to settle with anybody, not at least with the locals, became the hapless victim of circumstance.

What answer do the university authorities have to give to the bereaved parents who thought it would provide safe custody to their son?

If the university authorities think they are helpless about these painful and undesirable incidents, then the question that naturally arises is, can they anymore claim the moral high ground with the noble cause they are supposed to stand for and continue in their positions?

In a similar vein, the government, too, cannot wash its hands of those violent incidents and their sad outcomes. What were the local administration and the police doing on the first day of the new



Bengali year on the campus to ward off any untoward incident?

Were not the university administration and the police aware that the campus or any place with so many people -- men, women, children, locals, outsiders could turn into potential powder kegs on such special days of festivity? Moreover, are there not enough reasons to be on guard, especially in these days of mounting concern over growing militancy and terrorism everywhere?

Lastly, one cannot be but appalled to know about the deplorable condition of the medical centre on the Chittagong University campus, which could not provide the fatally injured student with the emergency treatment that he so badly needed before being shifted to the Chittagong Medical College and Hospital. Is that clinic only meant for first aid? How could it be that a university that has residential halls for students has no well-equipped and well-staffed clinic on its

campus?

What is worse is that the distance of the Chittagong city centre from the campus is around 20 kilometres. But due to jams and other reasons the journey to the city may even take more than an hour. In that case, wouldn't it be better to have a self-contained clinic with necessary medical facilities available on the campus to avert the kind of tragedy the latest casualty of violence had to experience?

The violent face-off between locals and students should not be taken as a passing occurrence. The distrust that has developed between the students of the Chittagong University and the local villagers should not be allowed to get bitterer and fester. The local administration and the university authorities should waste no time to intervene in the matter and remove the mutual distrust and hatred that have grown between students and the nearby villagers.

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