

STRAIGHT LINE

Saving buildings from quakes Code implementation crucial

WE understand from the minister for food and disaster management that the government will bring all the new buildings across the country under Bangladesh national building code standardization (BNBC) to minimize the fatalities from earthquake. Although we would like to take the decision on a positive note, we cannot help feel skeptical because of the ground realities pertaining to implementation status on a number of existing codes.

We are talking of a national programme whereas in the capital city itself the building code is extensively violated under the very nose of authorities. While this is happening at the seat of administration and at the hub of business including real estate activities, how can we expect that a national programme of building code implementation will meet with success?

A glaring example of flouting construction code is provided by how poorly implemented has been the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) which did zoning prohibiting construction activity in certain earmarked areas.

Also, government's relaxation of height restrictions provided that a land-owner or a builder leaves some specified portion of his plot out of his construction plan has been purposely taken undue advantage of.

We believe the codes and rules are all in place but what is of crucial importance now is their implementation. This must begin with the capital city itself where the need is the greatest if we are to save buildings from the onslaught of earthquakes of moderate to slightly higher magnitude. For the established notion is that most of the buildings in Dhaka city will collapse in the face of any serious earthquake.

Our vulnerability to earthquake is all too known. And if we are to prevent fatalities then we have to energetically and unflinchingly render the city buildings reasonably earthquake-resilient. Otherwise, talking big about a national programme will only be meaningless, misplaced rhetoric.

Diplomacy win-win for both Cricket result notwithstanding

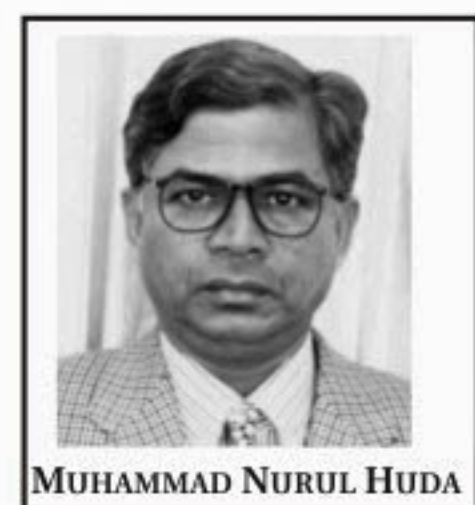
THE WC semi-final encounter between India and Pakistan, two cricketing rivals brought heads of government of the two arch rival countries under the same roof and for hours together. It was indeed, in terms of duration and quality, a diplomatic engagement, not on the sidelines of cricket, but turned out to be something of a mainstream event in its own right. It was uninhibited by formalities or schedules or any rigidity of pre-arranged agenda.

In contrast to the high tension inside the Mohali stadium, there was no result-scoring pressure on Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh nor on his Pakistani counterpart Yusuf Raza Gilani. The added value was in the host-guest friendliness in the field at the crowd level of supporters of both teams.

Relaxed, Manmohan and Gilani made full use of the huge block of time at their disposal talking a whole range of bilateral issues and sharing concerns for resolving them in the enlightened interest of both countries.

After the post-match dinner while meeting the press both prime ministers sounded a positive note of resolve to grapple with outstanding problems. Manmohan said, "Whatever may be the differences between the two countries, we have to devise ways to resolve them bilaterally". Gilani reciprocated saying, India and Pakistan have the capacity to settle their differences bilaterally. Their realization that they have to solve their problems all by themselves will be welcomed everywhere.

Cricket has really played a catalytic role in a specific way in the sense that both the prime ministers have expressed their joint resolve to start a long term process of negotiations to come to terms with each other on a wide range of issues. If they go about building tangibly on the positive vibes from cricket-centred Mohali diplomacy, the region as well as the two countries will benefit from an ambience of peaceful coexistence.



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

EXPERTS of all shades tell us in no uncertain terms that balanced socio-economic development is largely contingent upon good governance.

According to their considered view this conditionality of governance is a sad deficit in developing countries including Bangladesh. It is no wonder, thus that the imperative of governance is too often highlighted by the pundits of development studies.

This writer has been of the view that to achieve balanced and harmonious growth the governance dimension of the regulatory organs of the government requires special attention; of such organs the professionalisation, particularly of the apparently corrective organisation of police assumes significance. Such a view is held with the conviction that ensuring equality in the eyes of law and its protection of all citizens irrespective of identity can be demonstrably guaranteed by the Police; and such guarantee would assure the human dignity that is a prerequisite of harmonious development.

Under circumstances as above, it is relevant to know what is entailed by professionalisation of police in Bangladesh. The views of this writer and others concurring with him are stated below.

In our parlance, professionalism would mean organisational, legal and structural change to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the police to meet contemporary policing requirements based on human rights

Imperative of police professionalism

Police professionalism demands that in addition to the police, the government and society at large need to know the organisation, their potentialities, deficiencies and opportunities.

standards and the principle of rule of law; in specific terms this would require strengthening of planning, policy and research capabilities to support strategic reform based on planning, budgeting and performance measurement.

A vital aspect of professionalism would demand the strengthening of oversight and accountability mechanisms; and improved strategic partnerships and communication between Bangladesh Police, civil society, public and other governmental agencies to support police reform.

The urgency of a professional and dedicated human resource department has to be appreciated and given

effect to. Consequently, human resource management policies, structures, systems and procedures have to be updated to promote transparent and merit-based recruitment. One has to ensure comprehensive improvement in capacity to deliver competency based training to all ranks.

Professionalism would mean the shift from confession and oral evidence to hard evidence based procedures in investigation and prosecution processes; entailing improvement in investigation capacity, particularly in crimes against women and children and emerging crimes like terrorism, cyber and financial crime. It would also include effective working level

collaboration between police and the judicial system.

Police professionalism strives for the integration of community policing philosophy in policing operations at all levels. Practically speaking, this would mean establishment of apolitical effective community policing forums with a focus on prevention of crime.

A very important dimension and indicator of professionalism would be the increased participation of women in Bangladesh Police and their representations in positions of authority. At the same time, the gender awareness and sensitivity has to increase amongst police personnel along with the provision of victim support services.

Last but definitely not the least, professionalism would urgently demand the presence of an information, communications and technology master plan that puts in place a cost-effective and structured approach to the acquisition, installation and application of ICT. The goal is the improvement of crime response and prevention and enhancing community safety through appropriate application

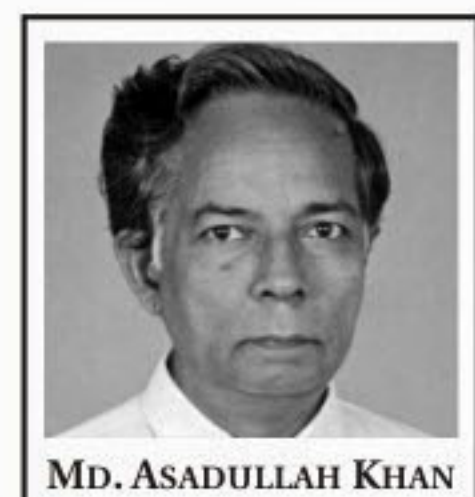
In Bangladesh disproportionate emphasis on enforcement is fostering and patronising authoritarian practices. This is not helpful in ensuring democratic rights. Police professionalism demands that in addition to the police, the government and society at large need to know the organisation, their potentialities, deficiencies and opportunities. For harmonious growth policing in democratic society has to seek an ethical basis and rest on a form of social contract between the police and the public.



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BITTER TRUTH

Cleaning up the rot in politics



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THERE was a time when in every walk of life there were men and women who rose to dizzying heights of professional excellence, yet led austere lives. Politics was a blessed vocation. Till 1970, some of the best minds were drawn to politics. They had no goal except fighting for freedom and economic emancipation of the people and reaped no reward except imprisonment.

In every part of Bangladesh, one could point to a freedom fighter, a trade union leader, a communist, or even a social worker who lived frugally and died penniless. Many of them belonged to political parties and were regarded as political icons, and their portraits adorned many homes.

Consider the sea-change that has taken place in the political landscape in just 40 years. Politics is no longer considered a service, but has become an industry. We not only have full-time politicians, we also have full time student leaders who are married. They don't hold full or part-time jobs or own businesses or practice professions. They enjoy commissions from business magnates and corrupt persons.

Being full-time in politics breeds an attitude towards money, power, the law and fellow humans. A full-timer with no known source of income devises ways and means to make others feel obliged to give him money. There are hundreds who live off money provided by far-sighted and clever businessmen.

It is because of the politicians' attitude of bending the law to suit their own convenience that the country now bleeds. In consequence, callousness, indifference and connivance -- or rather defiance of law -- have become a Bangladeshi trademark. Even those elected to the Parliament are engaged in debates over issues that are so trivial and have hardly any relevance to the problems the country is facing.

Analysing the dismal trend, one

would see that the present unhealthy situation is the handiwork of these self-serving politicians who, in their greed for money and perpetuation of power, have put the whole country on hold.

Sure enough, we don't have rule of law. We have rule by law. There are laws but the administration and keepers of the state are above the law. Among the full-time politicians there may be some exceptions, but they are rare. But no democratic society, as we understand it, can do without political parties and politicians.

Corruption is now a buzzword in the country and has sent shockwaves across the world, causing a sharp dip in donor assistance. Politicians must now understand that rhetoric can neither feed the people nor keep the

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nation marching towards prosperity and stability.

Power and glory ultimately come from the economic muscle, and that is the greatest challenge a sensible government must try to meet. Unless we can imbibe the age-old credo that honesty, hard work and commitment bring rewards, the whole society is doomed to destruction. True, in a society that increasingly covets money over glory, a politician's job has lost its luster.

The situation prevailing in the country prompts conscious citizens to suggest some guidelines worth being discussed and adopted in the Parliament.

No one should be allowed more than two terms or 10 years as MP, minister, or prime minister. That practice, if enforced by legislation, will help groom a new breed of politicians;

Yearly public disclosure of assets and liabilities of ministers, MPs and party functionaries, including assets and liabilities of spouses, children and grand-children;

Prosecution for not filing income tax returns, followed by electoral disquali-

fication.

Unless we can resurrect politics as well as curtail this greed for power, money and influence, our country will be heading towards a catastrophic situation. Already ominous signals are there on the horizon.

Sir Winston Churchill vehemently opposed granting independence to India. He said to the House of Commons in 1946: "Power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues, and freebooters. Not a bottle of water or a loaf of bread will escape taxation, only air will be free and the blood of the hungry millions will be on the head of Atlee (the then prime minister of Britain). They will fight among themselves and India will be lost in political squabbles."

Forty years after gaining a free Bangladesh, we should reckon how much we have proved ourselves an exception to Churchill's derogatory comments. Today, the thought looms large in people's minds as to whether power has been handed over to people unfit to govern the country by men of straw lacking in vision and pragmatism.

The country, from independence till now, has suffered from leadership crisis that ultimately led to a political culture of hatred, greed, sycophancy, animosity, and lust for power and influence. The two groups -- politicians and people -- are from the same country, but they could well be from different planets. The political scenario as well as ugly manifestation of ideology and aspiration, in total conflict with the spirit of the liberation war, symbolise the gulf between the people and politicians of different hues.

Our leaders failed to target the priorities to be taken up in the face of all challenges. These priorities are educational opportunities for all, containing population explosion, healthcare for

all, and creating employment opportunities by setting up industrial bases (mini and macro) and info-tech centres.

The country is now virtually in the doldrums. As the mud flies thick and fast, all manner of subterfuge is in evidence. People have lost faith in politics and government. Unhappily, party spokesmen, including ministers, talk glibly about the achievements made by each of them during their tenure in power when people are struggling for survival, going without food, medicine, clean drinking water and even proper roads in the countryside. They list achievements that would not be considered achievements by anyone with minimum discernment.

For me, the most poignant image on our Independence Day was the sight of barefoot and half-clad children selling the national flag and flowers at road intersections. They work from dawn till late hours at night even on our national holiday, nay a day of national jubilation, just to survive. The political parties must explain why more than 40 Independence Days on, this is still the face of the Bangladeshi child.

People elect the members of the Parliament to speak about their (people's) sufferings, their need for work and their survival. But the politicians seem to be oblivious to the pledges they made to the people before election. Going by the parliamentarian's propensity, or rather habit, to skip Parliament sessions, one would presume it was a task of scant significance, stripped of the gravity usually associated in running a country.

On the boycotting of Parliament, citizens feel that it is criminal for the MPs to shirk their constitutional responsibility and obligation towards the people for any reason -- inter-party conflict or pre-occupation with business -- whatsoever. The people's representatives should value the enormous amount of money spent on running Parliament, other than the fact that the MPs have pledged to speak about people's need in the Parliament.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 2

1865
American Civil War: The Siege of Petersburg is broken Union troops capture the trenches around Petersburg, Virginia, forcing Confederate General Robert E. Lee to retreat.

1865
American Civil War: Confederate President Jefferson Davis and most of his Cabinet flee the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia.

1917
World War I: President Woodrow Wilson asks the US Congress for a declaration of war on Germany.

1930
Haile Selassie is proclaimed emperor of Ethiopia.

1945
Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Brazil are established.

1972
Actor Charlie Chaplin returns to the United States for the first time since being labeled a communist during the Red Scare in the early 1950s.