

## JS hearings on appointments

*Process will strengthen democracy*

THE parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendments is considering making individuals' appointment to constitutional posts subject to confirmation by the Jatiyo Sangsad. We unequivocally endorse the idea. Such a process of filling important positions of the state will not only ensure a bipartisan approach to governance but also reassure the nation that those appointed to and confirmed in such positions have the competence to do the job. Given that for years positions of extreme significance in Bangladesh, such as those of the chief election commissioner, judges of the Supreme Court, chairman of the Public Service Commission, et cetera, have come under a cloud because of a blatant politicization of the appointments, this new step, if it truly comes to pass, will be a boon for democracy.

We, however, note the view of a member of the special committee to the effect that the prime minister's thoughts have to be ascertained before the proposal can meet with success. A severe parliamentary scrutiny of individuals appointed to core state positions, as also of the men or women appointed attorney general, will in our view not only enhance the credibility of the government but also convince the country that good, honest and capable people are in the right positions. The idea of parliamentary confirmation of executive appointments may be new for Bangladesh, but it has been a rule in such countries as the United States where the relevant Senate committees and the whole Senate vote on crucial appointments made by the President. There have been moments when presidential appointees, such as Supreme Court nominees, were rejected by the Senate. In the process, accountability was ensured.

We therefore see no reason for the prime minister to have reservations on the issue. The system will make it very hard for people of dubious reputation to occupy sensitive posts since the hearings, made in public, will scrutinize every detail of a nominee's background before certifying his or her ability to do the job. Let the idea be worked upon, in the greater national interest.

## Dhaka rivers face shrinkage

*This time in the name of demarcation*

DHAKA'S rivers are getting thinner ever since the gate-keepers of rivers are turning out to be poachers.

The latest move by the government itself is self-destructive. The rivers of Dhaka will shrink further as the district administrations are demarcating those excluding the foreshores. Authorities have pitched boundary pillars along the rivers allowing loss of hundreds of acres of land which are natural part of the rivers. Shitalakhya alone will lose 1860 acres of land. Without foreshores the rivers will turn into large-sized drains.

How could the district authorities, who were charged with delineating rivers, decide on such damaging moves? Rivers are supposed to be lifelines of ecology and economy. These seemingly expedient decisions allowing for private encroachment of the river banks will further upset environmental balance and encourage the land grabbers.

From the legal point of view, posting of boundary pillars along the bank excluding the foreshores is violation of the High Court orders. The HC, in June 2009, came up with a judgment and directions including demarcation of the rivers, building of walkways and plantation of trees on the banks.

The HC rulings, media campaign and awareness programs by the environment activists and lawyers have been a big stride forward towards saving the rivers. But this move of putting up pillars tends to cancel out the gains.

If the foreshores were not taken into consideration during the survey it has been a gross error on part of the authorities and a clear deviation from the HC orders.

This decision of setting up boundary pillar excluding the foreshores should be immediately scrapped and legal environment friendly measures ought to be taken to restore the rivers to their original position. This will help our waterways to a normal life otherwise we will be play-

### GROUND REALITIES

# Of bauls, of things Mephistophelean



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

DEAD-FUL things are happening in the country. And if they keep happening, it will be our heritage, our cultural traditions

that will eventually mingle with the dust. It is no laughing matter when twenty eight bauls, followers of the venerable Lalon, are put to public humiliation on the orders of a half-baked cleric in Pangsha of Rajbari. Their beards and hair and moustaches were clipped or shaved off on the orders of a fanatic on the wild charge that these worshippers of divinity were apostates, were indeed Hindus and therefore needed to be brought back to the 'right path.' You wonder where all this audacity in these zealots springs from. More seriously, it is this audacity that sends tremors going all across and over your sensibilities, this black courage that not even the government appears to be able to put down with a firm hand.

We will not go into a discourse on Lalon and his philosophy of God and of the universe we are part of. Spiritual figures like Lalon hold a niche far above our power to analyse or subject to academic dissection. And because they do, it remains our faith that Lalon, that indeed all men of God who have caused Creation to be manifested so potently in this land of poets, mystics and preachers, will hold, now and for all time, the Olympian grandeur we associate with their holy existence. Remember if you will the desecration the Taliban subjected the Bamiyan statues to in Afghanistan. Those statues have been ground to dust and yet the calming memory of the statues remains in men's consciousness. It is the Taliban who struggle for respectability in a world they would rather mutilate to their liking.

Which is as much as to suggest that the misdeed perpetrated on the bauls in Pangsha by men with skewed notions of Islam ought not to be blown out of proportion. No, we do not blow it out of proportion. But we do understand, given the viciously mediocre times we inhabit, that there is a need for firm action against those who have of late sought to undermine the values



STAR

*It is time to draw a line in the sand. The moment is here and now to beat all these forces of darkness back into their caves. Shaming the bauls is to shame all of us. It is time to shame those who have caused us that shame.*

we have for generations lived by. When Fazlul Haq Amini threatens Sheikh Hasina with doom, when the late Moulana Obaidul Haq informed an audience of the Islamic faithful some years ago that women were not ordained by the Lord of the Universe to govern nations, it is time for good men and women, for those who comprehend the essence of this free country, of civilized living, to sit up and take notice. These are men who have their acolytes in the shape of those ready

and willing to commit sacrilege at the resting places of saints. The imam who had those twenty eight bauls hauled off to the barber's thought he was doing the work of God. It did not occur to him that he was trying to play God and that in doing so he was flailing away at God.

No, there is no surfeit of these blasphemers in Bangladesh. But, then again, do not forget that once upon a time not long ago the numbers of the Taliban in Afghanistan were negligible.

Then these Taliban went on to create havoc in Afghanistan. Today they create havoc in not just Afghanistan but in Pakistan as well. Here in Bangladesh, the historical fact of religious militants setting off simultaneous explosions in all but one district in the country six years ago is a reality we have not pushed aside. Those men share something with the men who went after the beards and hair and moustaches of the bauls in Pangsha the other day: in the name of God they are forever ready to raise misanthropy into Mephistophelean anti-faith.

Which is why this nation, in the name of those who died in defence of its liberty, in the name of all faiths -- Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism et al -- must watch out for these elements. Their evil-driven political ancestors once razed the Shaheed Minar to rubble in Bangladesh. Those ancestors left no trace of the Kali Mandir that once highlighted the expanse of the Race Course. It may well be that given half a chance, the likes of those who went after the bauls' beards and moustaches will one day go after the monuments that stand witness to the cultural legacy of this land. If these men can take to the streets not just in the name of the Creator but armed with copies of the Quran hugging their perspiration-driven chests, they can do anything. Remember the Spanish Inquisition, when self-professed representatives of God burnt good people at the stake and left the soul of society singed for centuries?

There is a malaise abroad in the land. It comes in the shape of fanatical persecution ... of Ahmadiyyas, of bauls, of men drawn to the spiritual glow inherent in Sufism, of helpless women, of enlightenment. It insults poetry and drags music through the mud. It seeks to stifle laughter and happiness. It aims at commandeering our faith. It undermines the good and the beautiful and the sublime in men and women.

It is time to draw a line in the sand. The moment is here and now to beat all these forces of darkness back into their caves. Shaming the bauls is to shame all of us. It is time to shame those who have caused us that shame.

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### SYED NAQUIB MUSLIM

THE profile of today's public service is significantly different from what it was only a decade back. The governments of developing countries are therefore crafting training approaches matched with the market demand. Demand for good governance, need for coping with ever-changing technology, irresistible impact of globalisation and persistent pressure of the market economy necessitate an overhaul of the public service training system.

Almost all developing nations have realised that to meet the needs of the people and build administrative capability to cope with the challenges of the 21st century, public service and training should be integrated. As mere commonsense and guesswork do not help in solving complex administrative problems and in implementing national goals, continual training is an unavoidable necessity.

Training and retraining are an integral part of the administrative system and strategic planning of the government. Retraining is needed because technology everywhere is changing constantly, and old work habits that impede administrative efficiency need to be discontinued.

Among the Asean nations, Malaysia has earned global acclamation for enhancing productivity in the public service. It is proud of its efficient public service that is often considered a replicable model for the developing nations of Asia.

The government acts as a facilitator and pace-setter for the private sector in all spheres, including training. To attain the goals of *Malaysia Incorporated*, the need for public-private sector collaboration is persistent. The deficiencies of the public sector training are supplemented by the private sector.

Because public sector training agencies lack adequate resources and are unable to cope with the increasing training load, private sector agencies come forward as partners to share responsibility and resources. Moreover, the cross-fertilisation of ideas resulting from intimate collaboration between the two sectors helps in evolving innovative technology to make training useful and attractive.

With the introduction of the *Malaysia Incorporated* concept, the

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civil service in Malaysia has experienced a shift in the paradigm of administration. It has become customer-oriented and is playing a key role in facilitating the growth of the private sector, which is considered the engine of growth. Attempts are being made to inject doable private sector-related concepts in the public sector. Customer service, results, performance have become the daily mantra for civil servants.

The role of the civil service in fulfilling the vision to make Malaysia a developed nation by 2020 is considered critical. Civil servants are required to be knowledgeable, capable, courteous and responsive so that they can contribute to the implementation of the set goal.

The policy-makers of Malaysia perceive training as an investment for increasing productivity and for adopting changes in the organisations in response to the rapidly changing tech-

nology, both in the regional and the global market.

Training is used to build a skilled workforce, both in the public and the private sector, and also to reorient the public service so that it can cope with the challenges of "Electronic Government" and play a facilitative role for the private sector.

The Public Service Department (PSD) provides general guidelines to the government-led training institutes on training and higher education/

training abroad. PSD also organises training programmes with local and foreign universities to sponsor post-graduate studies for government officials.

The Training Division of PSD is a major contributor to the national labour market, and organises education and training programmes. It conducts two programmes (i) Skill Creation Programmes and employment (ii) Skills Upgrading Programmes. In 1996, it sponsored 1,286 overseas graduates and 8,941 local graduates.

The Training Division is spearheading a new programme -- Total Quality Management (TQM) -- in all the government agencies, aimed at delivering high quality services. It has also introduced Quality Control Circle (QCC) to involve the support staff in improving quality services. The Quality Inspectorate Team of MAMPU conducts inspections to monitor the degree of improvement of the service quality.

Training institutes in the public

sector, particularly INTAN (which is the national seat of public service training), and those in the private sector collaborate to modernise the training system. INTAN is trying to introduce the concept of distance learning to forge linkage with counterpart training institutes. To make training cost-effective, INTAN is attempting to link regional countries with its headquarters as well through the computer. Group presentations are conducted with the aid of the computer network and teleconferencing.

INTAN has taken up the onerous task of massive reorientation of the civil service towards customer service and quality management. It has also realigned its strategic direction and adopted the principle "Training for Quality" as the core mission. The focal generic areas of training identified by INTAN are:

- Leadership and creativity;
- Accountability, moral values and attitude development;
- Quality and productivity;
- Internalising Vision 2020;
- Information technology;
- Induction courses for various levels;
- Communication and language;
- Training and media development;
- Financial and asset management.

Most of the government officials have acquired capability to act as trainers and as administrators. The art of presenting a particular subject is a common quality with almost all the officials of the public sector. Use of multimedia is widespread in government offices as well as training institutes.

Training is the basic tool by which these standards are achieved, and a quality culture developed in the government offices. The question is: Can we replicate, with needed modifications, the Malaysian civil service training system in our country?

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 13

**1204** Constantinople falls to the Crusaders of the Fourth Crusade, temporarily ending the Byzantine Empire.

**1250** The Seventh Crusade is defeated in Egypt, Louis IX of France is captured.

**1909** The Turkish military reverses the Ottoman counter coup of 1909 to force the deposal of Sultan Abdul Hamid II.

**1919** Jallianwala Bagh massacre: British troops massacre at least 379 unarmed demonstrators in Amritsar, India. At least 1200 wounded.

**1939** In India, the Hindustani Lal Sena (Indian Red Army) is formed and vows to engage in armed struggle against the British.

**1941** Pact of neutrality between the USSR and Japan is signed.