

## CROSS TALK

# All between police and people

## Three varsities with unelected VCs

*Anomalous situation should be redressed*

THE laid down procedure for appointment of Vice Chancellor (VC) to public universities is for the senate to elect a panel of candidates from which the chancellor of universities would appoint an incumbent. The universities of Chittagong, Dhaka and Rajshahi do not have VCs elected in such a way.

Of fundamental importance is that elections to the senates themselves have been long overdue. Consequently, government appointed unelected VCs have continued to hold their positions.

It is worthwhile to note that the present incumbents are averse to holding elections either for VC panels or the senate bodies for fear of losing their positions. Seeds of trouble are sown and a rift develops and continues among the teaching and student communities.

The Chittagong and Rajshahi universities were in particular victims of such maladministration and resulting chaos. The last VC election for Chittagong University was held in 1998. And in both the universities, elections for the senate bodies were not held for the last 20 and 12 years. In the Dhaka University, on the other hand, the last elected VC held office between 2002 and 2009.

After a long period of unrest and protests by teachers as well as students during the tenure of the previous VC at the JU, some semblance of democratic ambience has finally returned there after an election to the senate body and appointment of the new VC. But the situation has not changed in the case of the Chittagong, Rajshahi and Dhaka universities. They are still vulnerable to uncertainties and remain a potent source of trouble. In the absence of regular elections for senate and continuation of unelected VCs such universities are wanting in prospects for fresh leadership.

The only way to rid them of the possibility of continued mismanagement and anarchy is to hold elections to their senates and thereby have elected panels for the appointment of VCs.

## Bangladesh at extreme risk

*Disaster preparedness needs beefing up*

THE news that Bangladesh tops the list among 197 nations surveyed under "Natural Hazards Risk Atlas 2011", a report by respected British risk consultancy firm Maplecroft is disturbing to say the least. The report states that we fall in the "extreme risk" category as Bangladesh suffers from weak infrastructure and poor governance, the combination of the two makes Bangladesh's economy especially vulnerable and adversely affects the economy's capacity to rebound in the aftermath of a major disaster.

Although Bangladesh has been lauded for its disaster preparedness plans, the country still lags behind in tackling flash flooding. The best example of such unpreparedness was driven home when cyclone Aila struck and even after three years, the affected communities dislodged from homes are yet to be rehabilitated. With the case of earthquake preparedness, Bangladesh's capacity to deal with a major quake, when it comes, is sorely lacking. Although contingency plans for earthquake preparedness were drafted in 2010, these remain unimplemented. For instance, the government's plan to raise a volunteer corps of 62,000 cadres and equip the fire service and civil defence department with search and rescue training activities remain unfulfilled. If one is to take at face value a survey conducted by the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP), some 250,000 buildings in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet are extremely vulnerable to earthquakes. Furthermore, in the absence of proper enforcement of the Bangladesh National Building Code, most buildings in the country are designed and constructed without taking into account potential seismic activity.

It has become imperative that Bangladesh starts work on a better forecasting system involving communities to mitigate natural disasters like flash flooding. On the seismic front, the government must take into cognizance the fact that the building code needs to be adhered to not only for all new infrastructure being built, but that older structures need to be identified and vulnerable buildings



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE police commissioner of Dhaka gave a prognosis of growing crime rate in the city, when last week he told us on a television

show it was nothing but a matter of perception. This is exactly what painkillers do when we take them to reduce our pains. This is what anesthesia does when patients are cut up on operation tables. This is also what addicts do when they drink or smoke intoxicants to overcome their frustrations in life. At times the best way to forget pain is to numb your feelings. What you don't feel doesn't exist.

The commissioner used the same line of reasoning to refute claims made by the talk show host, who was grilling him with statistics. The host argued that crime rate has been up in the city during this Eid season, but the commissioner contested him blow by blow. He questioned the authenticity of the data. And he persisted saying that the perception of people was that this city is safe. The host couldn't defend his data. He couldn't even ask for the source of his guest's knowledge of that perception. The show looked like two blind men oddly shuffling to lead each other.

This is where you need a movie break. In Frank Capra's 1946 film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the decision of a man named George Bailey to commit suicide brings about the intervention of his guardian angel. The angel walks Bailey through his hometown to see that it would have been an evil place if George's works were rescinded. One can't deny that Dhaka would have been lot more dangerous without its police. The commissioner rightly said

there is no country in the world which doesn't have crime. He talked about certain "no go" neighbourhoods in New York, such as Bronx, which are so crime infested that people don't dare visiting them. The point he made was as clear as a whistle. Dhaka doesn't have any such neighbourhoods, which is proof police have been doing their job.

This is what is known in logic as illicit negative, a fallacy that arrives at

protect this city. Every time the host threw him a question, he behaved like a tennis player eager as ever to return a serve. He was more interested to score points; he didn't come to answer questions.

But that doesn't change the fact that people are more scared of this city than before. More crimes are being committed here. There are neighbourhoods which are considered less safe than others. Certain

grown manifold. The city is bursting at seams. People have become reckless and ruthless. Moral values have dissipated. Dishonesty and deceit are rampant. The entire nation is floating on rage.

Under the circumstances, one must have a reasonable expectation of what police can do. They cannot cover every neighbourhood, every street corner and every blind alley. They do not have enough logistic support and manpower to mop every inch of the city looking for criminals before and after a crime.

But then consideration is a mutual thing. If people need to understand the limitations of police, police need to understand what people expect of them. Police need to realise that it bothers people when drug dealers walk free, but addicts are thrown in jail. It also bothers them when innocent people like Limon and Kadar fall victim to police brutality. People want to know what happened to Ilyas Ali, Chowdhury Alam or scores of others who have disappeared from this city.

These are most recent of a long string of facts that have shaped public perception of police. The media may be guilty of tweaking that perception at its will. What about the police? Last week the police commissioner got us really worried. He sounded like he was more interested to protect the perception than the people of this city.

He also convinced us that we are becoming a fragmented nation. Police live in their world. We live in ours. Crimes fester in the cracks and crevices between two worlds. Both police and criminals come from people. The commissioner should know they are different not because how they see people, but because how people see them.

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STAR ARCHIVE

*Consideration is a mutual thing. If people need to understand the limitations of police, police need to understand what people expect of them. Police need to realise that it bothers people when drug dealers walk free, but addicts are thrown in jail.*

an affirmative conclusion from a negative premise. We don't have any "no go" neighbourhood in this city. We don't live in any such neighbourhood. Therefore, we are living in a safe city.

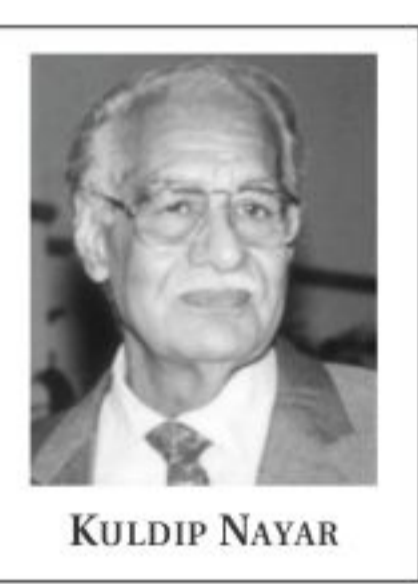
The commissioner was loaded with facts and he fired them all, more in self-defense than telling how he will

parts of the city are risky after certain hours. Rest of the city is no better day or night. People are not safe even in their bedrooms. Rapes are common. Murders are frequent. Mugging is a routine thing like traffic jam.

It's not fair to blame everything on police. The population of this city has

## BETWEEN THE LINES

# The battle has just begun



KULDEEP NAYAR

MOVEMENTS against corruption have been, of late, successful in India. They have brought the scourge of dishonesty before the public. That both

movements, one led by Gandhian Anna Hazare and the other by yoga guru Baba Ramdev were non-violent is a tribute to those who guided the movements and the thousands of people who participated in them. But both have failed to move the government. In fact, the Manmohan Singh government has become more adamant, more intractable and involved in corruption which is seething the system.

The government's attitude remains a mystery for me. It appears that the party has already come to infer that it is not going to return to power in the 2014 elections and, therefore, it is better for it not to react either way. This mulish stance may, however, cost the party dearly. The word has gone around that the Congress has much to hide. In fact, people have begun to link corruption with the party, like the Bofors gun scandal with late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the 1989 elections.

By disclosing the list of names the government has received from some foreign countries, it could have retrieved some ground. But if the allegation of some top Congress leaders figure in the lists is true, it is understandable why the government is hiding the names and dragging its feet on ever move to bring back the black money stashed abroad.

It could have initiated action against bureaucrats, if not political leaders, to dispel the impression that the Congress was hand in glove with bureaucrats to get bribes on the pur-

chases made abroad. But then the party probably fears that they might spill the beans.

It must be said to the credit of the opposition that it did articulate black money issue before parliament. In the Rajya Sabha one member quoted CBI director A.P. Singh, alleging that Rs.25 lakh crore worth Indian money was kept abroad. A serving CBI director making such a statement is an indication of the seriousness of the issue. Still, the government preferred uproar in parliament to the disclosure of black money stashed abroad.

It is more than a year now that the BJP members said in individual affidavits submitted to the Speaker in the Lok Sabha and the Chairman in the Rajya Sabha that they did not

snap. All political parties should see how the institutions can be strengthened because they have been messed up since Ms. Indira Gandhi came to power.

The still more disturbing part is the presence of General V.K. Singh, who was chief of the army staff till a few weeks ago, first at Anna's rally and then at Baba Ramdev's. How could the retired army chief take part in politics and say at the rallies that they would tell the people how to cast their vote? It means that he had political ambitions when he commanded the armed forces, which are apolitical, for two years.

His has been the first endeavour since independence to politicise the army. Thank god, his term did not get

*President Pranab Mukherjee has rightly warned that institutions should not be weakened or bypassed. Indeed, a democratic system can be stretched up to a point, but not beyond the limit because the string that has bound the institutions together can snap.*

have any foreign account. Although pressed, the Congress members have not done so. It only confirms suspicion against its members that they do have something to hide. In fact, there should be a law for all the legislators, whether at the centre or in the states, to declare foreign accounts as they do in the case of assets in India.

However, a disturbing part of rallies, particularly of Baba Ramdev's, is that they convert themselves into a mob, gathered at a particular place. The mob can be misused or it can run amuck on its own. President Pranab Mukherjee has rightly warned that institutions should not be weakened or bypassed. Indeed, a democratic system can be stretched up to a point, but not beyond the limit because the string that has bound the institutions together can

extended although he used the pretext of wrong birth date to stay on for one more year.

The reaction can be what the government seems to have adopted is to ignore him. Yet this does not convey the nation's concern which was that of bewilderment and confusion. The other reaction can be to see that no Bonapartism takes birth in India. The latter would be the correct reaction. The officials from all the three services should be barred from taking part in politics for five years after retirement. By that time the halo would be around them because the weapons they carry would fade away. This type of restrictions should also cover government servants on the civil side.

Yet the sad part of V.K. Singh's episode is that he has not realised the

wrong which he has done to the institution he has served. He does not seem to possess the sensitivity which would guide him to differentiate between wrong and right, moral and immoral. An army chief occupies a big position in India or, for that matter, any country. The Manmohan Singh government did not realise that such persons, although appointed on the basis of seniority, should not be given a position which, if misused, can wreck the entire polity.

President Truman is remembered for his bold decision to dismiss General McArthur after he won the Second World War against Japan. Truman saw in McArthur the signs of Bonapartism which no democratic state could tolerate. V.K. Singh is, no doubt, a history now. But imagine what he could have done with his eyes fixed on politics.

Both Anna and Baba Ramdev cannot be absolved of the blame of parading a former chief of army staff from their platform. Again, their move had no thinking behind, nor any regard for the norms of democracy. What kind of setup did they propose to place before a nation, already groaning for democratic space, if an army chief is called upon to tell the people to which candidate they should vote?

Baba Ramdev was wrong in singling out the Congress. In this bath all are naked. There are serious allegations against the political parties like the the BJP, Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party and Mayawati's Bahujan Samajwadi Party. Even the Baba himself is said to not above board. True, some of his trusts under the scanner. Yet there is no mention of the property which a pickle dealer had purchased and given to the Baba. All those who want equity should ensure that their own house is in order. The battle has just begun.

The writer is an eminent Indian Journalist.

## CORRECTION

In our 2nd editorial titled "Corruption in CAG office," which appeared on August 16, CAG (Comptroller and Auditor General's Office) was mistakenly printed instead of CGA (Controller General of Accounts). We regret the error.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

August 17

1943

World War II: The U.S. Seventh Army under General George S. Patton arrives in Messina, Italy, followed several hours later by the British 8th Army under Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery, thus completing the Allied conquest of Sicily.

1988

Pakistani President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and U.S. Ambassador Arnold Raphel are killed in a plane crash.