

Grameen Ordinance changed Bank's unique character lost

WITH the President's approval of Grameen Bank (Amendment) Ordinance 2012, the board's powers stand considerably curtailed. Henceforth, it is the Chairman who in consultation with members of the board will form a 3 to 5 member selection committee for the search of a new Managing Director (MD). What is of import here is that under the original Grameen Bank (GB) Ordinance, 1983, the authority for appointment of MD lay squarely with the Board. No longer is this the case.

For over a year, the tussle between the Chairman and board members has gone on with the board's recommendations for probable candidates rejected repeatedly. What is found to be extremely disconcerting is that the new amendment effectively paves the way for government control of the bank and opens the door for partisan appointment to the topmost executive position of the institution. We have all witnessed the dire consequences of such appointment of directors in state owned banks and it is feared, not without justification that GB, a bank owned by some 8.3million women, 95 per cent of who are destitute rural women will have little say in how it is governed in the future. It is with dismay that we watch the clipping of wings of the board that is reduced to mere consultation, for it is no longer the board but the selection committee which, in consultation with the Chairman will select the new MD. It will be difficult to cite an example where a shareholder having stake of a mere 3 per cent takes over the running of the bank by effectively marginalising the remaining 97 per shareholders into submission.

The outpouring of sympathy and support for Professor Yunus from professionals, members of civil society, women leaders and the general public domestically says much about the man's integrity and reputation. With the government deliberately turning a deaf ear to protestations both domestically and internationally and effectively disempowering the vast majority of shareholders of GB, it is in breach of trust with the true owners of the bank. Only time will reveal how a resounding success story has been put off track by denying the bank's real owners their right to decision making.

Road crashes claim lives during holidays

Take stock of the situation and act accordingly

THAT 42 people died in road crashes in different parts of the country during the Eid holidays comes as shocking news. This is more so because the tally may well increase since the rush for returning to working places is not yet over. It speaks volumes about the yet-to-be-repaired as well as perilous stretches of roads and highways across the country despite continued uproar from media and public.

While we highly appreciate the incumbent communications minister for his efforts to improve the conditions of our roads, and also for his surprise visits to cleanse Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and Bangladesh Roads and Transport Authority (BRTA) of all unscrupulous elements; we think a lot more needs to be done. We believe the minister is taking stock of what has been done and what still needs to be done.

Having said that, we'd like to draw attention to the mad rush that people were caught up in during the days preceding Eid. While the rush had mounted fairly a week before Eid, the highways became comparatively free and unclogged just one or two days before the Eid day. It proves that the rush could well be avoided if only the holidaymakers thought differently.

We think life is more important than time. One should not risk it by boarding an overcrowded bus, train, launch in a way that may jeopardize his/her life. Therefore, we think this hellish scramble to get home must be tempered with judicious planning.

The transporters are often seen to encourage the rush and then bank on it to make some quick money. They should also be held responsible and made to ease the rush

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

August 25

- 450**
Pulcheria becomes empress of the Byzantine Empire after her brother Theodosius II is killed during an hunting accident. She marries the Illyrian (or Thracian) senator Marcian who is crowned as emperor.
- 1609**
Galileo Galilei demonstrates his first telescope to Venetian law-makers.
- 1758**
Seven Years' War: Frederick II of Prussia defeats the Russian army at the Battle of Zorndorf.
- 1768**
James Cook begins his first voyage.
- 1912**
The Kuomintang, the Chinese nationalist party, is founded.
- 1944**
World War II: Paris is liberated by the Allies.
- 1991**
Belarus gains its independence from the Soviet Union.

STRAIGHT LINE



Commissioner's prognosis for crime situation in Dhaka city. Reportedly, the commissioner said that the growing crime rate was a matter of perception and Dhaka, comparatively speaking, was a safe city. The column concludes by saying that "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."

There is no doubt that a long string of facts have adversely affected public perception of police. The question is what the facts behind those facts are. One could ask if as a society we have really ventured to create a caring and responsive police organisation. Have we seriously pondered to know why an inherited colonial system has been expanded and strengthened to only continue to perform its repressive role and political surveillance functions at the cost of its proper role?

One has to look at the historical perspective and the objective conditions. The reality is that Bangladesh attained independence after a bloody freedom struggle: it adopted a written, liberal democratic constitution but retained the colonial administrative, police and judicial structures without recasting them to meet the changed situation. So how does one

A popular column of *The Daily Star* (Cross Talk-August 17) takes issue with the Dhaka Metropolitan Police

promote liberalism with a colonial mindset, one could quip?

To illustrate, the colonial police system operated in the light of the imperial ruler's need to establish a relationship of control, coercion and surveillance over a subject population. The question is how such a system would fulfill the aspiration of an independent democratic polity

Nearer home in India, where democratic system appears to be firmly entrenched, the situation is grim. Mr. K.S. Subramanian a former officer of the Indian Police Service in Political violence and the police in India says:

Bangladesh attained independence after a bloody freedom struggle: it adopted a written, liberal democratic constitution but retained the colonial administrative, police and judicial structures without recasting them to meet the changed situation. So how does one promote liberalism with a colonial mindset, one could quip?

"Politicisation, criminalisation, corruption, brutality and human rights violations are eating into its vitals. Public order maintenance and political intelligence collection take up most of the time of Indian police with little left for crime prevention, crime detection and service provision. The police leadership has remained a prisoner of the political party in power at all levels and has failed to contribute to organisational renewal and revitalisation, research and training, and the nurturing of professional skills."

The above reference has been cited to highlight the systemic deficit and to understand what happens when the institution is afflicted by organisational, managerial and policy crises.

Crime management could not be seen in isolation. The reason is simply that the first purpose of the paramilitary police force is to support the state; and their primary role is a political one. The state rather than the law is supreme; and the major enemy of the police is the political subversive rather than the ordinary criminal.

The organisational objective is important because in the colonial

effort to monitor police power carefully and harness it for the good of all? It needs to be remembered that to place police and their power under the sole direction of executive government is to give that arm of government power to enforce its will on society and overrule opposition.

Is it likely that our leaders who came to occupy positions of power after the departure of the British and Pakistanis were enamoured by the administrative and police system left behind by the colonial powers and enjoyed exercising power and authority, oblivious of their own demand of yesteryears for far-reaching administrative reforms?

Do we witness the public caught in an increasingly norm-free, unpredictable and unjust environment? Who is responsible for transforming policing from the professional imposition of a coherent moral consensus on society into unethical activities?

While the prevalent wisdom of a section of our society to lay all the blame at the door of the politicians is untenable, it is also not in broader public interest to make sweeping observations like "people are not safe even in their bedrooms, rape is common, murders are frequent, mugging is routine like a traffic jam," without the benefit of appropriate analysis and statistics and cognisance of the broader perspective. It is time for substantive police reforms to plug the systemic holes, and control the deviants and where necessary to weed out the bad hats.

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Memories of a mad August



partition of India, for all the association you bring to it of freedom, of a tryst with destiny (in Nehru's oft-quoted phrase) remains a metaphor for horror brought about through sheer fratricide. In August 1947, as Jawaharlal Nehru took charge of a free India and Mohammad Ali Jinnah assumed power in Pakistan, as many as a million Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs died in a frenzy they had no hand in the making of. No fewer than fourteen and a half million people left their ancient homes, on both sides of the border decreed by Cyril Radcliffe, to find refuge and a future in unfamiliar new homelands. Radcliffe did the job in a bare thirty six days.

Too many things went wrong in that terrible summer --- and before it. Here was Radcliffe, with precious little understanding of Indian history, carving up the land in line with murderous specifications. A living room went to Pakistan, the kitchen found space in India. The Chakmas in Chittagong hoisted the Indian flag on August 14, little knowing that they had been thrown into Pakistan's lap. They were soon put down. But not so easily put down were the riots which kept Calcutta in their grip for four days in August 1946, killing anywhere between five thousand and ten thousand Hindus and Muslims. It was a disaster that ought not to have happened. To this day, you wonder why the Muslim League needed to call a Direct Action Day on August 16, why the administration, headed by a Muslim League leader, so zealously declared the day a holiday in Bengal. It ended in carnage. Who do you hold guilty? And can you forgive the men who caused it all?

Guilt and forgiveness are ideas you raise when you go back to a reappraisal of the politics Jawaharlal Nehru pursued in the aftermath of the

Cabinet Mission Plan of July 1946. Jinnah, for all his doubts, had gone along with the plan, which fundamentally meant to keep India intact. Yet Jinnah had also come under fire for what was perceived to be his deviation from the Lahore Resolution of 1940. Nehru gave him the perfect opportunity to wriggle out of his predicament. Observe Nehru at his news conference of July 10, 1946:

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Did Nehru deliberately torpedo the Cabinet Mission Plan? What he most certainly did was give Jinnah a good excuse to repudiate his earlier acceptance of the plan and revert to the Pakistan question. That happened on July 27. Barely a month later, the Calcutta killings commenced.

Historians, hordes of them, will tell you that after those killings, the vivisection of India turned into a fait accompli. And supposing those killings had not happened? The expatriate Indian historian Neeti Nair gives you new food for thought in her new work, Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India. She speaks of the Punjabi Hindu leader Gokul Chand Narang, who tells an audience twenty years after partition: 'I was chairman of a public meeting. I said I would agree to Pakistan, but

young at age fifty one in 1925; and Bose disappeared a full two years before the bloodletting of August 1947. Gandhi, the remaining man of stature, shrank into redundancy as freedom came closer, resigned to the barbaric workings of destiny. Jinnah, having started off on the false premise that religious communities were actually nations, had little idea of what Pakistan meant. His whimsicality made a mockery of the Lahore Resolution, when he suddenly remembered that it spoke of not two states but one in the Muslim-majority regions of the country. As for Nehru, he did not appear to mind Pakistan taking shape as long as it left an India for the Congress to govern.

There is the quixotic you recall as you revisit August 1947. In the earlier part of the year, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy came forth with his plan for a sovereign, undivided Bengal. You ask: having been with the Muslim League, having had a hand in the making of the Calcutta riots in 1946, did he really expect people to take him seriously? On a more elevated scale, Sarat Chandra Bose called for a sovereign socialist republic of Bengal. That fell through, though. The current of history had by then overtaken both Suhrawardy and Bose. And history, again, was what Mountbatten thought he was forging anew when essentially he was driving a knife through it. He came up with the June 3 Plan and put it into macabre implementation, imagining all the while that he could be governor-general of both India and Pakistan. Jinnah's brusque dismissal of the idea was only natural.

In the end, partition left Bengal and the Punjab wounded beyond measure. Sixty five years after that summer of madness, descendants of the partition generation remember lost homes in the Punjab, in Bengal, indeed in other parts of the old India. The wounds, transferred generationally, have not quite healed.

That summer of madness, noted the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, was a 'night-bitten' morning, a 'pock-marked' dawn.

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