

BIRDEM slides into chaos

Doctors should spare patients further suffering

AS doctors are on an indefinite strike, a large number of patients at the BIRDEM hospital have been going through an unprecedented ordeal since Tuesday. Reportedly, some angry relatives of a deceased patient had allegedly assaulted on-duty doctors, precipitating the present crisis. Though the dead patient's daughter denied the allegation of assault at a press conference, the situation at the hospital seems to be aggravating rather than improving.

The question is why are the doctors causing hundreds of patients to suffer in consequence of an untoward incident, the actual nature of which is yet to be probed and made clear? And if really some of their colleagues were manhandled by outsiders, what has that to do with the patients who are already at the hospital or those coming to it to receive treatment? It simply defies common sense and logic.

Since there is a world of difference between the calling of a doctor and that of any other professional, people's expectation from them is also different. Their expression of fraternity should desirably be different from people in various other professions. So, their calling of strike at the expense of normal functioning of the hospital does hardly go with the sacred Hippocratic Oath they are bound by.

The authorities should go into the heart of the matter and unravel the truth. The real offender, whoever that may be, must be made to face justice. Besides, if there is any loophole in the doctor-patient relationship that too must be plugged.

But until that time, the doctors should call off their strike and spare the patients further suffering.

Cooperatives swindle funds

Regulatory mechanism needs strengthening

AS per a study done by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), the government department overseeing cooperatives in the country is a den of corruption. Lack of oversight coupled with political patronage has opened up the Pandora's Box as far as getting easy registration goes, which seldom comes under scrutiny and is based mostly on speed money. With such a state of affairs, we are not surprised to find that cooperatives are involved heavily in micro credit, charging up to 45 per cent interest. Taking advantage of loose monitoring, cooperatives lure unsuspecting depositors with promises of higher than market standard rates of return.

Such lax monitoring allowed for high profile scams last year when the Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative case became public knowledge. While the management got rich, hard earned savings of its hundreds of thousands of subscribers went down the drain. That scam involving the swindling of over Tk.20 billion should have been an eye opener for the authorities.

What has been unearthed by the TIB study is that though the Cooperatives Act 2013 has undergone some revision in light of high profile scams in the sector; much more is needed to be done. There is the need for clear cut rules regarding cases of graft by cooperatives' management. Similarly, stronger oversight by way of monthly supervisory visits by department officials to minimise the chances of irregularities should be put in place. With more than Tk.90 billion swindled from investors over the last year, it is high time authorities did something about the endemic corruption plaguing the regulatory body and putting in checks and balances as to how a cooperative should function.

Redefining the spirit of Proclamation of Independence

ARPEETA SHAMS MIZAN

PROCLAMATION of Independence testifies to the birth of a nation and shapes its future contour. In Bangladesh, the Proclamation is taken to be an interim constitution to explain how it filled up the vacuum till we drafted a constitution in 1972. But this document deserves immense importance, for it rationalises the constitutional basis of our Liberation War as well our country.

The Proclamation begins with why it was made: *Whereas free elections were held in Bangladesh from 7th December, 1970 to 17th January, 1971, to elect representatives for the purpose of framing a Constitution. AND Whereas General Yahya Khan summoned the elected representatives of the people to meet on the 3rd March, 1971, for the purpose of framing a Constitution, AND Whereas the Assembly so summoned was arbitrarily and illegally postponed for indefinite period, AND Whereas instead of fulfilling their promise and while still conferring with the representatives of the people of Bangladesh, Pakistan authorities declared an unjust and treacherous war....*

On close perusal, we shall find remarkable similarities between the American Declaration and our Proclamation. Both speak of basic human rights, equality, protection of law, right to vote and right to self determination. The proclamation says: "In order to ensure for the people of Bangladesh equality, human dignity and social justice, declare and constitute Bangladesh to be sovereign Peoples' Republic and thereby confirm the declaration of independence already made by Bangabandhu Sheikh MujiburRahman..."

The Proclamation outlines the system of our government as a democracy where will of the people decides all: We the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh, as hon-our bound by the mandate given to us by the people of Bangladesh whose will is supreme duly constituted ourselves into a Constituent Assembly...

Our Constitution has been amended numerous times since 1972, often ruining its integrity. But the proclamation can never be changed. It shall always stand as it was. It shall testify to our history, the spirit of our Liberation War, and our identity as a democratic nation. No emergency, no referendum, no ordinance can change what the Proclamation has established. So, according to an eminent professor of International Law of Dhaka University, Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Bangladesh shall continue to function even if there is no constitution tomorrow: for the Proclamation will guide us as it did in 1971.

The birth of Bangladesh is the story of how stepping over constitutionality brings dire consequences, and the Proclamation is there to remind us of this very lesson when duty calls. In our current volatile political situation, we should uphold the spirit of the Proclamation of Independence and work for democratic future.

The writer teaches American and British Constitutional Law at the Northern University Bangladesh.

US unbound by history

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



Brig Gen SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN ndc, psc (Retd)

Americans as hostage for 444 days.

Given the way the US has gone about since the beginning of the last century in conducting international relations, which was propelled by brash commercial and economic considerations, gives one the impression that the Americans believe they are unbound by history. It is not my but the perception of many American intellectuals who see in this mind frame, to quote American historian Christopher Lasch, a "reflection of narcissism brought about by the separation of Americans from the rest of the multilingual and intellectual world."

Lasch goes on to suggest that this has "not only bred ignorance but also fear resulting in overestimation of threats, recurrent panics about alien intruders, domestic and foreign radicals and, more recently, Islamic radicals." And the latest reflection of this is the refusal to grant visa to the Iranian Ambassador-designate to the UN.

It is the US' sovereign right to grant or deny visa to anyone it feels but one wonders whether the UN assignments of foreign diplomats fall under that rule. The US Congress in 1947 approved the Headquarters Agreement Act, which obligates the American government to grant visas to UN diplomats. Under that, the United States is generally required to allow access to the United Nations for foreign diplomats. But Washington stands by its right to deny visas for "security, terrorism, and foreign policy" reasons.

While this step may be in keeping with a 1947 Joint Resolution of Congress which said that nothing should be seen as "diminishing, abridging, or weakening the right of the United States to safeguard its own security and completely control the entrance of aliens" into any part of the United States, aside from the UN headquarters (emphasis added). The last part of the sentence the US has conveniently overlooked.

The Congress has recently passed legislation which is under review of the president. The law, if it goes into effect, would bar any UN representative deemed to be behind acts of terrorism or espionage against the United States. In

THE US has refused visa to an Iranian diplomat who was supposed to have taken up assignment for his country at the UN, which is in an international institution that happens to be located on the American soil. The rationale for denying the visa was that the Iranian Ambassador-designate to the UN, Mr. Aboutalebi, was linked to the group that had taken over the US embassy in Tehran in 1979 and held 52

other words, anyone believed by the US to have acted against US interest, or its security, or may do so in future, may have his or her right to land on the soil of US forfeited, even if it was related to the UN.

This is unprecedented. The only time something similar happened was in 1988, when the US had denied a visa to Yasser Arafat, who was to address the UN General Assembly, on the grounds that Arafat "knows of, condones and lends support" to acts of terrorism.

If Americans believe that they are uninhibited by history the US administration seems to have either forgotten history or feels that the rest of the world has. Not only has the US action contravened an international agreement it has also set a dangerous precedent. If the US has the right to deny UN representatives visa on the grounds that the person has acted against the interest of the country or may do so, can other countries not apply the same principle to the US?

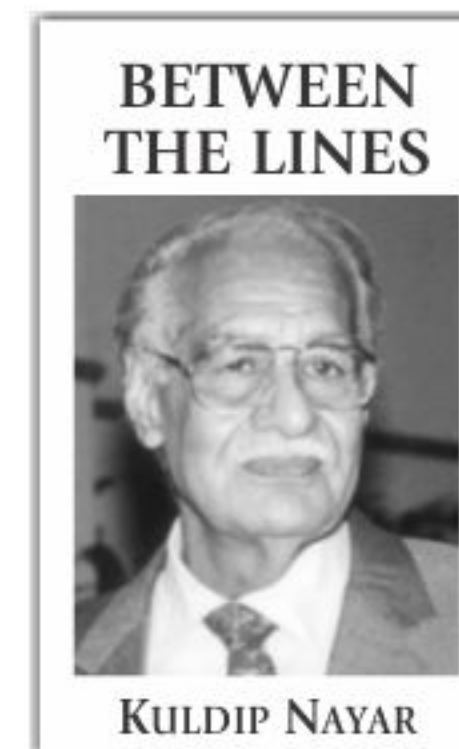
If the US has the right to deny UN representatives visa on the grounds that the person has acted against the interest of the country or may do so, can other countries not apply the same principle to the US?

While no one can condone a dastardly act like that of occupying the embassy of a country, the premises of the embassy is considered a part of that country's territory, the excuse for taking over the US embassy was that it was suspected of conducting anti-Iranian activities. This incident as US justification for denying visa can be extended to the US too in any number of cases where countries, not embassies, were occupied and destroyed on the slightest pretext. If that were done than that would mean a large number of countries that the US would forfeit the right to enter. And some of these countries were victims of US expansionism; and these were not occupied for 444 days but colonised and eventually annexed by the US.

The issue also raises the question whether there is need to consider relocation of international institutions from the American soil to a country where such restrictions do not exist. We recall that in 1988 the UN General Assembly session was moved to Geneva to allow Arafat to address the session.

The writer is Editor, Op-Ed and Defense and Strategic Affairs, The Daily Star.

Jumble of Indian politics



KULDIP NAYAR

INDIA is halfway through the Lok Sabha election process. Two factors have come to the fore so far: caste and money. I am dismayed about the caste. I had imagined that in some 67 years since independence, the nation would have matured enough not to be swayed by baser instincts. Lately, religion has been inducted by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

The appeal in the name of religion in the fifties was under-

standable because the country had been partitioned on the basis of religion in August 1947. The world's biggest holocaust took place, followed by the exodus of 3.5 crore people. The exchange of population was fairly rejected by both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, the arbiters of the country's future.

First, Mahatma Gandhi and then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru saw to it that religion was not mixed with politics. This worked for a few years. In the sixties the defeat at the hands of the Chinese was the topic of elections. Nehru's negligence in not preparing the country's defence had engaged the voters' attention.

The seventies saw the domination of autocrat Indira Gandhi who also suspended the constitution and detained one lakh people without trial. Her Congress party was wiped out in the northern India. Her return in 1980 was due to the squabbles in successor Janata Party. It was not her triumph but the rejection of the Janata. Thus far, caste played a minor role. Some who highlighted it were generally defeated.

Money, of course, has counted from day one. The Election Commission fixed the limit for a candidate's expenditure at Rs. 40 lakh in 1951 when the first general election was held. Now it has been raised to Rs. 70 lakh. Still this is far less than what a candidate splurges -- an average of Rs 3 crore is spent by a Lok Sabha candidate. Many spend at least triple the amount.

Despite the rules the Election Commission has laid down, no candidate has ever been disqualified on the ground of excessive spending. The catch is that political parties are not governed by any law or rule that forces them not to spend more than the ceiling prescribed. In fact, the parties' dishonesty is the real problem. The political parties are under no obligation to have any upper limit on their expenditure. They have unanimously rejected the application of Right to Information (RTI) to their internal working.

If expenses during elections are to be curbed some accountability is necessary. An accountability commission can be appointed since the Election Commission has been too soft to take action. Since MPs are the ones to pass legislation on this, they would never adopt a bill which will curb them. Both the Congress and the BJP spend lavishly. The BJP tops the list because the corporate sector is fully behind the party, believing that Narendra Modi will be the next prime minister and would leave the field open to them.

Religion has, no doubt, taken a back seat. Modi's most virulent speeches skirt around Hindutva but do not mention it specifically because secularism has a general appeal. The fact is that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is openly participating in canvassing although it claims to be a cultural organisation. RSS chief Mohan Bahgwat sat in election committees selecting the BJP candidates. This is ominous for the future.

My fear is that religion will be increasingly mentioned with politics. True, no party is running down secularism, not even the BJP. The party's manifesto does not use the word secularism even once. Yet the BJP talks about the freedom struggle and does not write off the sacrifices of leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Abdul Ghaffar

Khan. But the cat is out of the bag when it does not mention Nehru, the torch-bearer of the independence struggle. What is disconcerting in the manifesto is that India will admit the persecuted Hindus from every clime and country. This is in line with the policy of Israel which says that it is a homeland of every Jew, who can walk in whenever he or she feels like doing so.

Against this stance of the BJP, it is not surprising to find the party supporting Modi's Man Friday, Amit Shah, who said in UP to take "revenge" in the Lok Sabha elections. He did not mention the word 'Muslim,' but everyone could infer what he meant was that they should be punished at the polls.

The Samajwadi Party's Azam Khan, trying to be Muslims' Modi, had felt no shame in his attempt to communalise the armed forces. He has neither withdrawn his words nor is he apologising. His remark that only Indian Muslim soldiers captured the Kargil heights, not the Hindus, indicates his polluted thinking. He even does not know that it is the regiments which fight and they have soldiers of all communities. A regiment wins or loses, not soldiers of a particular community.

Such persons, including Amit Shah, should have been disqualified from contesting the elections. Yet the Election Commission has preferred to impose a ban on them from



making speeches in UP, the state to which the two belong. The punishment should have been more severe.

The caste factor which has affected the electorate, in fact, is the sub-caste. Dalits have many castes and the creamy layer dictates the government. The upper castes have Marathas, Rajputs, Jats and so on. Today, the baradari (community) members of the same caste are negating the fair election in a democratic society. How effectively we fight against the sub-caste menace will indicate whether we are really a democratic and pluralistic society. The manner in which the political parties compromise and conquer such malpractices will prove if democracy is really ingrained in us.

The current Lok Sabha election gives little hope because the candidates are stopping at nothing to increase votes. The use of money, however difficult, can be tracked. Even religious appeals can be curbed. But the caste cannot be. I do not know how long it would take us to rise above all these considerations. Until we do so, we should remain democratic on paper, not in the way the Western democracies are. And what do we do about personal attacks and abuses which leaders of political parties are exchanging? This is another story to tell.

The writer is an eminent Indian journalist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Do politicians care?

Bangladesh has incurred a loss of 1.4 billion US Dollar because of the political unrest, but do the political parties bother? These so-called political parties, in the name of movement, burnt and looted public properties, and did not even hesitate to kill and burn innocent people. All because they wanted to come to power desperately and took out their rage against the ordinary people, many of whom suffered financial losses, injuries and even deaths. They behaved like bandits, not politicians.

Disgusted Bangladeshi
On e-mail

AL owns the country!

We often see digital banners describing the development activities done by the government, bearing the picture of the PM, her son and Bangabandhu as well. The country is flooded with these banners and billboards containing their successes, but the public understanding is totally opposite.

After the January 5 election, democracy has turned into Hasinacracy. It seems to us that the country is only for those who belong to the Awami League. Thanks to Sheikh Hasina!

Sheuly Haque
Sirajonj

Peaceful Dhaka to remain a dream?

Dhaka, a mega city with more than 15 million people, is known for its rich culture, tradition, history, business and other interesting features. Nevertheless, it is also a city of misery, trouble and harassment. Numerous problems such as gas and power shortage, traffic jam, alarming rise in hijacking, etc., are the constant companions of the city dwellers. Dhaka is also in the list of the top five polluted cities of the world. Now the question is, is it possible at all to build a developed Dhaka? Or will it remain a dream?

Khondoker Rezwan Tanvir
Dept. of Business Administration
Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

Comments on news analysis, "2 ECs starkly different," published on April 9, 2014

Deep Purple Blue

Informative and educative article -- thanks! But one can't compare India's independent and credible EC with our subservient and inapt EC. While the Indian EC is widely respected and feared by the political parties including the Congress and BJP, our EC, unfortunately, plays the second fiddle to the ruling party. The Indian EC continuously strives to improve the electoral process.

Saleh Tanveer

The difference is that stooges of the ruling party at the behest of the prime minister get selected for the EC; whereas in the Indian system, the selection made by the president is non-political. Their leaders understand democracy's vital need for creating a strong and independent EC ahead of their own political ambitions. It happened from day one starting from Nehru's time and a tradition has been created since. Our misfortune has been that our people have chosen leaders who have not been able to see beyond their noses -- they are only concerned about short term electoral gain, never mind the damage to democracy.

Taufiq

AL on many occasions points its finger at India's examples when those suit their interest. But our EC is AL's handmaiden, run by handpicked loyalists.

"They've shamed us" (April 9, 2014)

Nds

One thing the AL has been very successful in doing is establishing us as the most shameless people in the world.

Muhammad Sharif Hosen

They not only shamed us but also proved that they could do any fraud regardless of the seriousness of the matter. Their heinous work shattered the image of the country. The culprits should be identified immediately and punished.

Snr Citizen

Absolutely shameful for the whole nation! But we still do not know whose creative mind was behind lowering its material value.

Syed Reza Khalek

Shame!! Take a simple step to kick them out....

"Political unrest ate up \$1.4b" (April 10, 2014)

MH Khan

All that money should be recovered from BNP/Jamaat. The properties of their leaders should be confiscated.

S.M. Iftekhar Ahmed

So who is going to pay this bill? Maybe it's time the politicians, who resorted to such violent and desperate means, paid for their deeds.