

The cost of negative politics

Business taking a tumble

BUSINESS leaders at a BGMEA-sponsored seminar yesterday implored the government and the opposition to shun the politics of negativity for the good of the nation's economy. The use of negative politics has many dire consequences for the nation, none more serious than the fact that they hurt the investment climate and dramatically raise the cost of doing business.

The destructive impact of hartals on the nation's economy has been self-evident, but none of the political parties seemingly put the nation's interest ahead of their own and forsake their use. Hartals devastate businesses and the harm is compounded by the fact that they act as a serious disincentive for both foreign and domestic investors to invest their capital in much-needed enterprises.

The opposition's stated reason for resorting to such measures is that the government allows no other space for the voicing of dissent. Not to legitimise the calling of hartals, but a good first step would be for the government to permit true parliamentary debate and not abuse the power of being in the majority by effectively silencing the opposition.

Indeed, parliament appears to exist for the purpose of character assassination and the trading of accusations and insults. As a result of these negative politics, parliament does not come near to fulfilling its intended function, which is to be a forum where important matters that need to be addressed for the good of the country are debated and resolution reached.

Finally, extortion runs rampant and can be considered an additional tax on the cost of doing business in this country that has a negative impact on the economy. This too is a political problem, rooted in the political culture of nourishing criminals and colluding in criminality.

The ultimate result of the debasement of the political process is that it is the nation that suffers. These negative politics diminish us in the eyes of the world and, more to the point, have a destructive impact on the investment climate and the business environment. Both the government and the opposition must forsake the use of negative politics if the nation is to ever advance economically.

Road Safety Day

Let it not be reduced to routine observance

STATISTICS show that at least 5,000 people die in road accidents in the country every year. So it is not without reason that a day has been devoted to road safety.

The Road Safety Day was observed yesterday with the advocacy groups making a fresh pledge to eliminate the risk factors; some of which are very potent in our context. Highway accidents account for the bulk of the victims, though road safety is still a far cry even in the cities.

There is the perennial problem of traffic rules violation. A huge number of vehicles operating on long routes lack fitness, which is a grave risk factor. Again, the vehicles are driven in many instances by inexperienced drivers or even helpers. The problems that such vehicles can cause to others and to themselves need no elaboration. The tendency to deploy raw drivers seems to increase before major festivals when people rush back to their village homes and the transport companies have to raise the frequency of bus trips.

The ramshackle vehicles coupled with the inexperienced drivers can indeed pose a serious danger to passengers. Regrettably, the point has been made in countless seminars and meetings, but the situation remains more or less unchanged.

Apart from human errors and trouble caused by utter disregard for rules, there are certain structural limitations which need to be addressed. The highways have been smoothened and widened across places, but they are not even two-lane, properly speaking. The condition of roads is also a source of worry. For example, the city roads have cracks and potholes in many places and water-logging is a regular sight. Bridges and culverts in parts of highways are also in bad shape, on particularly the roads connecting small towns.

Apart from the fatalities, road accidents cripple a large number of people who ultimately become a social burden. So, it is a crying need of the hour that efforts are made to enhance road safety. The organisers of the day should concentrate on creating the conditions in which nobody would be able to get away with violation of traffic rules in any form. It must also be ensured that the victims of road accidents, or their families, get due compensation -- an issue which hasn't yet received the attention it deserves.

Why Mahathir echoes the cry for justice?

M. SHAHIDUL ISLAM

WORDS gushed out of Mahathir Mohamad's mouth during the 10th OIC summit rippled through Western capitals and sparked a controversy that might reverberate further. The West and Israel are mad on him for saying 'Jews rule the world by proxy.' Soon after the speech, Western media scooped out of context a selective portion of his speech, which seems to have rubbed a dose of salt on the West's neurotic conscience.

Then the obvious began to follow. Media in the West went berserk with his comments while the EU postponed a condemnation resolution amid French insistence. The mendacity and the slackness of a section of the Western media have been too obvious in this instance as were in umpteen other occasions.

Western leaders and the media feel they have a right to insult Muslims and their religion without being shot back at. By pouncing hard with bitter truths, Mahathir earned a loud applause from Muslims, however distasteful his comments might have been to the West and the world Jewry.

Mahathir's 'platitude' flows from the pool of collective Muslim anger after half a century of bloodletting between Arabs and Jews. If Israel's incessant war waging, or the US' diplomatic obligation, did produce any resolution of the Mid-East conflict, Mahathir would have had little justification to talk in this manner. The articulate Malaysian leader thought the dissemination of plain truths might do the trick in convincing the West, particularly the US, that they're backing the wrong party in the Mid-East imbroglio.

The OIC platform, the first one since 9/11, echoed a concern that the UN Charter should have taken care of by clipping Israel's wings to forestall major threats to global peace and security. Mahathir just

fired a shot across Israel's bow to make that point clear.

Muslims have enough reasons to be angry. They've suffered 92 acquisitions of their territory by non-Muslim governments between 1757-1919. And, of all the armed conflicts between 1820-1929, 50 per cent involved Muslim nations as defenders. Although Colonialism came to an end after the Second World War, the West (particularly the US) still sacrifices men, money and honour for the Jewish state that roosts on the land of Palestine and seeks to expand further its geographic sway with Western backing.

In the last half a century, Palestine conflict created a reservoir of Muslim grievances against the Jews, and the West, by extension. The OIC itself came into being in September 1969 during an emergency summit in Rabat of Muslim nations following the desecration of the Al Aqsa Mosque by extremist Jews weeks earlier. The US made things worse by recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

As if that was not enough, Israeli had deliberately flouted successive UNSC Resolutions with respect to its withdrawal from occupied Arab lands. How many Muslim nations

Dhaka's election as a member of the Jerusalem Committee during the Dakar summit (1978) was in recognition of our diligence and sincerity in this regard. The Fez gathering (1979) further upgraded the Jerusalem Committee's status by involving ministers from member nations while the Casablanca gathering of August 1980 set up a 3 member Head-of-State-group to craft a strategy to liberate *Al-Quds Al-Sharif*.

The trio of leaders included the President of Bangladesh along with King of Morocco and President of Guinea. In the early 1980s, President Zia exerted his good

geographically contiguous beyond the Arab heartland, has been a dream in the conduit ever since.

But the time proved to be a vexing one, and so was politics. The Muslim-West relations soured following Arab countries' decision to slam an oil embargo on the West after the 1973 Arab-Israel war. The embargo devastated many Western economies, and the US, which never bothered to recognise the PLO as a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people until recently, hurried in 1978 to get a peace deal signed between Israel and Egypt. This left the Arab world strategically imbalanced vis a vis

Human Development Index (HDI) of the UNDP showed in its reports (of 1990, 1993 and 1996) that, excepting Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria and Indonesia, all other OIC countries registered low human development. IMF prescriptions simply aggravated their economic afflictions. Like many developing nations, Muslims view the SAP as a tool of economic imperialism.

In the 1980s, the UN did nothing to stop the US from freezing \$11 billion of Iran's assets after the Iranian students' seizure of the US embassy in Tehran. The confiscated Iranian money pushed the value of the greenback up, further increasing the value of OIC imports and disrupting the hoped for equilibrium in their balance of trade. The move was illegal. Israel meanwhile received nearly \$4 billion annually in economic aid from the US alone and US armed Israel with nuclear deterrence in the late 1970s. This carved the backdrop to Iraq's quest for nuclearisation.

Two decades on, a generation of Muslims holds the US accountable for blocking all moves against Israel in the UN. The legal recourse slammed shut, it was only natural that the dawn of a new century would witness the growth of various non-state actors to fight out the US' excesses. The pent-up anger thus initiated suicide bombings, a strategy adopted by Muslim youths - many educated in the West -- to fight an enemy touting invincibility.

Can Israel answer why Muslims must pay reparation for the European Christian's persecution of Jews during the holocaust? Muslims aside, billions around the world ask the same question along with Mahathir. His might be a rare voice, but it mingles well into a global tumult, transcending national and religious boundaries. It also echoes the humanity's cry for justice.

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Globally, two Muslim countries are under US-led occupation while another 14 have the presence of US soldiers in their soil or territorial waters. Besides, Syria and Iran face constant threats while the war against terror has virtually degenerated into a Crusade against interests of Muslims everywhere. If this is not oppression, what is?

Add to this the capacity of the Jews to keep the West glued to their side. Muslims know that the West could, and did, go to any length to scoff at established norms of international laws and human rights for the Western-Jewish collective interests. If such stands are unjust, so is the rationale that one discovers in the 'reactive' outburst of non-state actors like Osama Bin Laden. The West should thank Mahathir for not condoning suicide bombers and non-state actors waging Jihad against them. Quite to the contrary, he advised Muslims to disassociate from such self-abnegation and excel in science and enlightenment to revive their lost glory.

did the US and Israel attack so far under varied pretexts? And, curiously, did anyone ever hear of US condemning Israel's routine slaughter of unarmed Palestinians and its spider-webbing of settlements in territories that the UNSC ordered to vacate?

Due to such Western biases against Muslims, a permanent committee on Jerusalem was created by OIC foreign ministers during the Jeddah gathering in 1975. They pledged to coordinate efforts of Islamic nations to restore Jerusalem's Islamic sovereignty. Bangladesh, since birth, stubbornly refused to maintain diplomatic ties with Israel due to the nation's binding commitment to uphold Islamic solidarity pursuant to Article 25(2) of the constitution that necessitated the 'maintenance of close fraternity with other Islamic countries to increase solidarity among Muslim nations.'

This is what lay behind our moral attachment with the Palestinian cause of self-determination.

offices to negotiate a cease-fire between Iran and Iraq under OIC auspices.

The talks of economic collaborations among OIC members are not new either. The third OIC summit (Mecca-Taif, 1981) went to a great extent to spawn such cooperation, creating three standing committees, including one for economic and trade cooperation. An Islamic development fund was created with \$2.3 billion contributions from Saudi Arabia (\$1 billion), Kuwait (\$500 million), UAE (\$500 million), and Qatar (\$300 million).

This spurred inter-OIC trade (excepting petroleum products). The total flow of export to member states rose from 6.4 per cent in 1978 to 10.3 per cent by 1983. Import too rose from 8.3 per cent to 11.2 per cent during the same period. At the same time, Islamic Development Bank augmented its funding for development projects to \$3.89 billion. Creation of an Islamic Common Market, despite the member nations not being

Israel, particularly the Shah of Iran being a US stooge. Islam-West relations plunged further after the 1979 Iranian revolution that spanned overt anti-Americanism.

And, at a time when the end of post-1973 oil boom curtailed OIC exports and pulverised their economies, the West espoused that the doldrums in the global economy were linked with mismanagement in developing nations. The IMF and the World Bank were led to mend the situation by instituting a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that later earned its deserved nick-name as 'Sorrow And Pains' for its devastating effects on the poorest people of the OIC and of other developing nations.

Between the early 1980s through the 1990s, a group of 29 OIC countries adopted and implemented a set of 174 IMF packages relating structural adjustment. These programs affected drastic cuts in public expenditure on basic social services like health and education. Millions lost their jobs. Yet, the

On the occasion of the 2nd death anniversary of Azimur Rahman, Founder-Chairman of Mediaworld, the owning company of The Daily Star, we reproduce below the tribute paid by the Editor-Publisher of this paper, published on 26 October 2001:

Tribute to a man committed to free media

MAHFUZ ANAM

AZIMUR Rahman, Harun Bhai to us all, passed away late Tuesday night at the Combined Military Hospital. He was only 66. We all must die one day and so he did. But his was so completely unexpected that most of us who loved him dearly are still in a state of denial. We are hoping that all of this is a nightmare from which we will soon awake and our 'friend' will be back to give us his familiar smile, utter that caring word of comfort for which he was so well known, extend his warm hand of friendship that he so often did to those who needed it, stand by us in our times of need, and help us in the numerous ways that he always did. But tragically the nightmare is the truth, and his departure is eternal, and it is our denial which we will have to overcome. With him we lose a man of rare ethical standard, exceptional sophistication of manners, high moral values and admirable sensitivities of fellow feeling, friendship and human welfare.

He was a most unlikely person to head the board of directors of a media organisation, and he would never tire of saying it. He was shy, never seeking limelight and always maintaining a very low profile. He never felt comfortable with the public attention that being the chairman of The Daily Star's Board of Directors brought him. As we got to know each other better I recall him saying over and over again that he never expected to ever be involved with a newspaper. In fact, he did not have too high an impression of journalists. "Journalists were people I always stayed away from," he used to say. "But meeting S M Ali (founder-editor and publisher of this

paper) changed everything. In our first meeting I was so impressed by him that I decided to respond to the invitation to join The Daily Star's Board of Directors. He was so knowledgeable, sophisticated and dignified that I at once felt that I could trust him to give us a quality newspaper. It was meeting him that changed my mind about being involved in a media organisation." That meeting, held in the residence of AS Mahmud, the founder managing director of Mediaworld in late 1990, was crucial for Star's future. Just as it changed Harun Bhai's mind about joining us, it also changed Star's fortune insofar as it gave us a man of his moral courage, professional ethics and personal dignity as the chairman of our board.

In retrospect, it was almost providential that he became one of us. From the very first board meeting where he was elected its chairman till his last day in this world he was a quintessential Star man. Over the years he truly fell in love with his new involvement and was very proud of the newspaper that he helped to establish. He knew nothing about a newspaper but started to familiarise himself with every facet of its work. His most sincere interest was in providing modern and good working conditions for the staff, a management philosophy that was spontaneously and actively shared by all other directors. Under his leadership the Star Board always put the interest of the staff above other considerations and was always willing to invest resources so that the staff would be provided the most conducive working environment. One indication of how seriously he took his responsibilities pertaining to the Star was that he never missed a single board meet-

ing during nearly eleven years that he presided over it. He would always arrive several minutes before schedule and would linger on after the meeting making personal inquiries about staff members' families. He was so meticulous about meeting timings that he would sometimes arrive before we were ready to receive him. Seeing our embarrassment he would try to put us at ease by saying, "Don't worry about me. You carry on. I came a bit early to avoid being late due to traffic." Days before he was scheduled to travel he would call us to say if there was any pending matter he needed to attend to before he left so that the paper would not suffer due to his absence.

Of all the staff of The Daily Star, I have a special debt of gratitude to pay to Harun Bhai. I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that a paper like The Daily Star would not have been possible without the role played by its board of directors under the leadership of its chairman Azimur Rahman. It is a whole philosophy of media management that Harun Bhai personified. All the directors sincerely believed in the complete independence of the institution of the editor and in his total freedom to act in the best interest of the paper. They all knew that without this the paper would never gain the credibility and stature that it, in all humility, attained. But it was the chairman who was mainly responsible for translating this policy into a daily affair. It was his ardent, constant and unwavering adherence to this principle that made the Star what it is today.

Never in the last nearly eleven years, not even on a single occasion, did the chairman or any other member of the board try to influence

the editor to write or report on any matter or suggest any tilt or angle to be taken on any issue. This is the greatest asset any newspaper editor can have, and we in the Star had it from day one. If all directors believed in the freedom of the editor, Harun Bhai made sure that it was implemented on a day to day basis. As the chairman of the board, he had immense power, which he could have wielded over the editor. He never did. On the contrary, he was always encouraging me to take bolder positions on social and political issues. Every time I would write something he would be one of the first to read and share his thought with me. He knew the pressure I would face for writing what I did, but would say, "Mahfuz, as long as you are clear in your conscience that you have done nothing out of malice or for profit, don't worry about anything else." What more can an editor wish for?

Everyone knows how difficult it is to run a newspaper. It is more difficult if a paper wants to follow a truly independent course. It gets more difficult in a country like ours where everyone knows everybody else, especially in the circle that an English daily circulates. I have no doubt that on the numerous occasions when the Star had taken very strong positions on political, social or business issues, or on reporting some corruption or political incidents, Harun Bhai as chairman must have received many phone calls protesting the rule of the Star. As a businessman such calls are more difficult to resist than perhaps for us journalists. But never were such calls passed on to me or its contents made known. In fact, Harun Bhai protected me from such callers. He would defend the Star and its editor with such vigour and belief that after some time such calls



Late Azimur Rahman

started to lessen and subsequently disappeared, though not completely. Imagine the editor's position and that of the Star if Harun Bhai did not play the role that he did.

As a journalist, and as an editor, publisher, the tribute that I would like to pay on this occasion to the respectful memory of Azimur Rahman, our founder-chairman, is that he was a true believer in the freedom of the media, and he made immense contribution to that concept by helping to make The Daily Star a truly independent newspaper. Yes Mr S M Ali gave it a great start and, I as his fortunate successor, have tried to follow the trend set by Ali Bhai. But the Star could not have come where it has today without the vision, the commitment and cour-

age to stand up for a free press as was done by Harun Bhai. He was a man totally unconnected with the media, and yet by the time God took him away from us, he had made a significant contribution to media development in Bangladesh by fighting for its core value of FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE.

We will miss you Harun Bhai. We will serve your memory by making the Star a newspaper that will be more professional, courageous, ethical and relevant to the needs, dreams and aspirations of our people. You will live among us in the Star and through us in all its readers.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Bangladesh -- third time lucky?

It is in response to the letter by Z Ahmed on 10 October.

What an idea! It is a shame that you didn't put forward this idea before the publication of the recent Transparency International (TI) report, otherwise we could have removed our name from the top spot this year. Anyway, we still have a lot of time before the next report, and make no mistake, we will be on top next year as well. So to go ahead with your idea, I would like to make two suggestions:

a) Whatever you are doing in US, pack your bags and head home. We need quick-thinking people like you who can find simple and quick solutions. I must admit, I thought for

long time about this corruption thing and I couldn't find any solution. But you seem to have a superb solution. And when you get home, the first thing you should do is form a political party and stand in the General Election. You have my vote! In fact, I already have a name for your future party: The Multilateral Corruption Party (MCP)! How is that?

b) To implement the idea of bribing TI, I think we will need a lot of money to convince those guys. So we need to create a "Bribe Fund" and hopefully get some donation for this fund from our readers. And to get things in motion, may I have the pleasure of being the first honorary member to donate Taka one thousand for this noble cause! Finally, may I remind our readers not

to worry too much about bribing being an "illegal" act. Take it from me, everything is fair in love and politics! So, who is next?

Azad Miah
Oldham, UK

ME in peril

Believe it or not, Mr Bush, the US president is playing a political football game in the Middle East. Lately, Israel hit Syria and that was simply barbaric and it violates the international laws and the Charter of UN. We condemn Israeli strike in Syria and urge the Arab League to be united to teach Israel a good lesson. I hope Israel will be penalised soon for its misdeeds in ME.
Molla Mohammad Shaheen

Dept of English, DU

Education with moral values

Education with no moral values and ethics can be termed as merely a powerful tool for earning a living in society. In fact, this sort of education is incomplete. And such an educated person (an educated person without moral values that harmonise with general welfare of people) is dangerous and harmful to society and humanity. This is true for all over the world.

For our country, the urgency for imparting moral education should be given first priority. Already our society has started to collapse. The report of Transparency International published recently is a shame for

the whole nation. We believe the pervasive corruption in our country is due to lack of moral education. Our job-oriented education system totally fails to explore the conscience of the youngsters. In fact, in our education system, there is no scope to learn how to differentiate right and wrong (ethical and non-ethical). In the classroom environment (from primary to university levels), the teachers do not feel moral obligation to teach our children the essence of ethics that to be reflected in them in their real life. There is a loophole in this context. As most of the teachers at present time are not following ethical approaches in their real life, how they can ask their children to follow that? To breakthrough this loophole (not only in teaching profession, this

implies to other professions as well), I believe, this is the high time to formulate a policy that will eliminate all sorts of evils those are active in us. Especially, we need to show the golden path to our future generation. For this, the teacher community should come forward immediately.

No, doubt, among teachers, some are really concern about the moral relegation of the society. The section of this teacher community is really very keen to see the society to be changed in a positive way with full of virtues and morality. So, I appeal to all teachers (teaching at different levels) let us come forward and at first let us try to purify ourselves so that we could be ideal in front of our future generation. And only then we can persuade our

students to come to the domain of truth. Mind it, there is no time! We should start this now! Otherwise society will be fully collapsed very soon.

Md. Anwarul Kabir
Assistant Professor, Department of Computer Science, AIUB

Third time champion in three consecutive years!

Congratulations indeed for the government of Bangladesh for this remarkable feat. Remarkable indeed, third time at the top of the list as the most corrupt nation. Management and organisational performance in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meet in Dhaka also qualifies Bangladesh

government for another such trophy.

There is a total managerial collapse in the government machinery. Most of the lawmakers and their cronies are absorbed in only fulfilling their personal agenda. Cause of nation has become secondary.

Our nation must find some other methods of choosing their representative. This method of election has proved beyond doubt that every time we would end up with same sort of corrupt individuals as winners.

Jiban Chowdhury
Hatfield Cres, Summerville, Melbourne, Australia