

Tackling public agitation

Shun this brutal approach

THE attitude of the government in tackling public agitation leaves much to be desired; and the handling of the Demra incident, which was contemptible to say the least, exposes the lack of police sensitivity. Two issues emerge from the unfortunate incident in Demra on Friday.

One, the means and methods the agencies and the administration use to tackle public agitation. Secondly, the issue of the deprivation of the people from the basic civic amenities that they pay for.

Apparently, what started off as a peaceful demonstration by the inhabitants of Shanir Akhara demanding water and electricity, turned violent due to the extremely ham-handed way the police and other elements of the ruling party went about tackling the situation. The predilection of the police to precipitate action stemming unfortunately from their violent state of mind that predisposes them to aggressiveness is worrisome. It is unfortunate that they consider all demonstrations of public resentments worthy of being put down with a heavy hand.

The action has demonstrated a very arrogant and repulsive behaviour of the police; and the most reprehensible aspect of the entire episode was the fascist attitude of the local MP who, instead of standing by the cause of those very people who had elected him to the exalted position to see to their welfare, instigated the police into violent action, further complicating the situation. It was he who should in the first place have assuaged the public and ensured that they did not turn violent. Even more disingenuous on his part was to blame the incident as the handiwork of the opposition.

As for the civic amenities, that the people were suffering for the last three months from lack of water and electricity and nothing was done about it, speaks volumes about the complete lack of interest in peoples' woes and total antipathy to their needs, on the part of the administration and local representatives. The local MP has been spurred into action, but only after destruction and damages were wreaked on private and public property and injuries to many? Why did the mayor fail to visit the spot, and why were the assurances by him that resulted in the withdrawal of the agitation given only after a major highway had remained blocked for the greater part of the day?

We urge upon all concerned, particularly the mayor to take a stock of the areas that are suffering from shortfall of water and power, and take measures to mitigate, if not completely remove the problem before it is too late.

Business awardees do us proud

Create better environment for investment

WE are delighted to have honoured four business leaders for their brilliant entrepreneurial performances.

The Business Awards 2005 have been given to Kihak Sung, chairman and CEO of Youngone Corporation, Hasina Newaz, owner of Orchid Printers, Fazlur Rahman, chairman of City Group of Industries and Mozibar Rahman, chairman of BRB Cables Ltd. Introduced jointly by the DHL Worldwide Express and The Daily Star six years ago, the awards for excellence may have played a quiet role in stimulating new ventures without our knowing it.

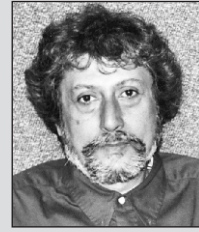
The story of the four entrepreneurs is one of self-belief, hard work, commitment and undeterred dedication. All of them had a humble beginning but lofty goals that they have relentlessly striven for. Their determination and resilience have enabled them to overcome the impediments and obstacles at various phases of implementing their business plans. They are creating jobs and adding value to the national economy by earning valuable foreign exchange and expanding their businesses.

Society need more people like them. They are the trail-blazers in their respective fields and role models for new generation entrepreneurs. Their splendid performance should encourage young entrepreneurs to come forward with ambitious and highly challenging projects that would help us move along the path of economic prosperity. We need business leaders with great vision and the readiness to serve the country.

They are the key players in the arena of economic activities whose role must now be assessed in the global context. And it is absolutely essential that they get the support they need to excel in an intensely competitive world.

We congratulate the winners and hope that they will perform in future with the same degree of excellence and commitment to industrial advancement of the country. The whole exercise of award giving and receiving has been an inspiring experience overall for the sake of higher levels of productivity in the industrial sector both in terms of quantity and quality.

Minister for KUPI hints at dark future



SHAHNOOR WAHID

EVERYTHING is happening all at a time in the Land of Hope.

At the moment, people there are queuing up to buy kupi (indigenous kerosene lamp) to fight the "dark future" that awaits them. Why, you ask? Because, their very own Minister for Kupi has declared in the country's parliament that no matter how many power plants become operative, load-shedding will not go away.

After this prophetic statement the Messiah-like Minister told the people to buy kupi to fight the impending "curse of darkness" about to be cast upon them for their sins. The only problem is those who are used to sleeping in an air-

cooled room will be totally kupokat (floored) in the heat.

And since the RMG sector is going to lose 50 per cent output because of power shortage, many factory owners have decided to sew kanthas (hand-sewn quilt) during load-shedding to sell in foreign markets. A large delegation of RMG factory owners has already left the country to visit overseas markets with this new product.

Then there is news from the foreign affairs area of Land of Hope. The long-reigning Foreign Minister of that country has received divine enlightenment after a recent visit to some foreign lands. He came back to the country and told the people that the foreign governments want the two political parties to end their Kuru-Pandava

quarrel and work together for the good of the country. He even said that they should actually do that.

The Foreign Minister reminded me of Lord Buddha who also talked like that after returning amongst his people in Kapilabhastu from months of meditation. He told them to love one another, even animals, and work for the good of mankind.

The people of Land of Hope thanked their lucky stars that their Foreign Minister has finally come to comprehend what they have been saying all along, since the two parties locked horns in a mortal battle. So it seems, like Lord Buddha's leaving home to be enlightened, one has to go abroad frequently to become insightful about one's own country's politics.

We mentioned earlier about the

hectic work schedule of the Ministry of Letter Writing in that country. True to our report the chithi chalachali (sending letters back and forth) is going on nonstop since our last report. Special messengers are running to and fro with letters from one party general secretary to another.

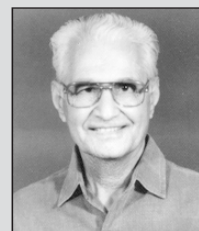
When the electronic media reporters ask the two general secretaries about the outcome of the letters they smile sheepishly, almost like teenagers caught red-handed with love letters, and give answers that make no meaning whatsoever.

The people of the world, and even the Martians, I heard, are watching this innovative chithi chalachali game with lots of interest. There is every likelihood that

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

Maybe their names aren't there, but there are names of some ghosts, as reported in the media, in the list. Doesn't it sound fantastic? Imagine semi-transparent beings standing in the queue with you to cast their votes during election! It would seem like a scene taken from an Edgar Allan Poe story or a Hitchcock film! Definitely that would be an experience of a lifetime. So, do not miss it. Do go to vote during the next election and shake hands with some ghost voters.

Slips between the cup and the lip



M B NAQVI
writes from Karachi

JUST as one was about to salute the people of Nepal for their victory over a dictatorial King, a few confusing developments occurred. It split the opposition seven party alliance with Maoists: traditional or mainstream parties accepted the King's haughty formulation while Maoists, the new element in Nepalese politics, rejected it and threatened re-imposing the blockade on Kathmandu Valley. But nimble-footed Indian diplomacy soon restored it.

The main issues were: the future of King Gyanendra along with the institution of Kingship was to be put to popular vote by electing a Constituent Assembly which would draft a new Constitution to finally decide all issues. It is a fact that the multi-party democracy, abolished by Gyanendra on February 1, 2005, had failed to deliver.

Meantime, the Maoist revolt against the King, Parliament (as it was), and the system was succeeding. Since 1996 Maoists have acquired control over half to two thirds of the country and their revolt against the Royal Army was so effective that it could enforce a blockade even on Kathmandu. People of the capital have voted for Maoists with their feet. Maoist sympathizers had made all the difference to popular protests since February last.

What the King has conceded is:

(a) restoration of the Parliament he had suppressed; and (b) readiness to transfer executive power to a nominee of the seven party alliance for Prime Minister's office. The Parliament met on April 28. But new PM, veteran Girja Prasad Koirala, could not attend or take oath of office due to illness. Would this formula work?

India's third successive emissary, CPM's Secretary Sitaram Yechury, succeeded in making the Maoists reverse their boycott of the parliamentary road for now; Maoists have given three months to the Parliament to implement the program they insist on after which they will resume Khatmandu's blockade (and bring down the whole government). How will the Parliament implement the crucial program remains to be seen.

Earlier the Indian Prime Minister had chosen two "royals" - Kashmiri "Maharaja" Karan Singh and later "Raja" Jaswant Singh of the BJP party -- to go and persuade King Gyanendra to bend. (Choice of emissaries made by Dr. Manmohan Singh shows how well-adjusted America and India's Congress and BJP are who appear to think alike in trying to save King Gyanendra; wouldn't they cooperate in fighting India's own Maoists?)

The net result of the Indian diplomacy and the action of King Gyanendra can still come unstuck if the seven parties fail to implement the Maoist demands: a newly elected Constituent

PLAIN WORDS

Assembly for a new constitution. Maoists have promised to give up the "gun" in favour of democratic politics on the basis of the old assembly doing what they demand: transfer of effective power immediately to the seven parties to implement their demands. The way mainstream Nepalese parties, comprising the more or less discredited politicians, have accepted the King's offer with alacrity might mean their reverting to old games.

A break in opposition unity would please the King no end. So far India and America had wanted the King to survive. For them, it did not matter if virtually the entire population of Nepal was restive and had demonstrated against the King's continuance. The people want him out and insist on a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution, obviously a republican one, and power to be taken from the King in the here and now. That has been denied the people on the promise that restored Parliament can do all that. But the mainstream parties controlled Parliament, having three months to play power games, they might collude with Indo-American designs, including saving the kingship. The bottom line would be to keep Maoists out. That will be QED for the US and probably India.

But will that solve Nepal's problems? What that means is that parliamentary parties will betray their own people. Popular struggle

was not for retention of King Gyanendra or keeping out the Maoists. The King might again stage yet another coup later, and assume total power, if he can get enough foreign support and aid for his Army. The Nepalese army's loyalty being to the King, the revolutionary situation would resume.

No section of the Nepalese, including individual bureaucrats, was on the King's side. Recent demonstrations had shown that there was no significant popular support left for the King. The writ of the King ran only where the troops were present at any given time. At other times, the writ of the Maoists ran. No great sagacity is required to foresee what the Maoists would do then.

They will resume the war against the King and make life even more difficult for the King plus the politicians who may govern with, if not under, the King. The chances of that government plus the King do not amount to much unless, of course, foreign troops can be inducted or foreign aid is truly massive to create new killing fields in Nepal. Would or can India go on siding with Gyanendra?

What the Maoists can do is known. Even more importantly, the people of Nepal have also shown that they no longer accept the King and that they will willingly obey the Maoists. The recent new enthusiasm in the opposition movement came largely from the Maoists, it bears repetition.

this letter-writing game will get the first place in Guinness Book of World Records.

It has been reported that the sugarwallahs in Land of Hope are taking preparations to accord a huge reception to the former Minister for Shakkur in a remote island located in the southern part of the country. (Remote island to avoid people coming in with Bengal's famous basher lathi).

You see, the sugarwallahs are not an ungrateful lot and that's why they haven't forgotten what the former minister has done for them, and undone for the country. They remember vividly how because of his blessedly inept handling of the market price of commodities, especially sugar, they are millionaires today. That's why they want to weigh him against sugar and present him that much sugar as gift.

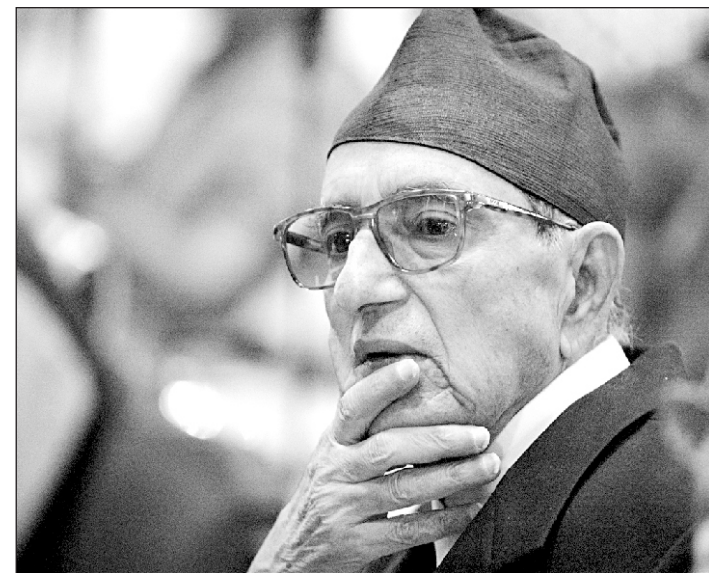
Then from my sources in Land of Hope I have come to know that the people are all excited about the draft voters' list that has been made public recently. The Selection Commission has done a fantastic job of selecting over one crore voters extra so that all goes

well in the next general election. The mute Chief Selection Commissioner was not around to comment on this. He only likes to speak in front of foreigners.

Now that the list is out, my friends in that country, Rahim, Karim, Jadu, and Madhu are frantically looking up and down the list to find their names. But they are nowhere to be found. But why should they be so upset about it?

Maybe their names aren't there, but there are names of some ghosts, as reported in the media, in the list. Doesn't it sound fantastic? Imagine semi-transparent beings standing in the queue with you to cast their votes during election! It would seem like a scene taken from an Edgar Allan Poe story or a Hitchcock film! Definitely that would be an experience of a lifetime. So, do not miss it. Do go to vote during the next election and shake hands with some ghost voters.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.



Girija Prasad Koirala, Nepal's new prime minister.

It was Maoists' contribution that had made all the difference to the political struggle against the King and his army. Trying to take the people back to square one is a perilous course. It is no longer practical politics to ask the Maoists and the country to go back to ancien regime. Something will then have to give way.

The issue is not strictly local to Nepal. India has its own Maoists and the two are in contact. In the US perception, India's own future is involved. The US can be expected to lean on India to go on supporting Gyanendra and to help him. Much depends on the Congress (UPA) government in New Delhi. If it continues to move into America's corner internationally and decides to crackdown on its Nexalites, good and proper, it will try and enable Gyanendra to wipe out his Maoists. That is the worst case scenario.

There is another and more optimistic scenario: Indian government has to do more damage limitation and to avoid alienating the Left altogether by being per-

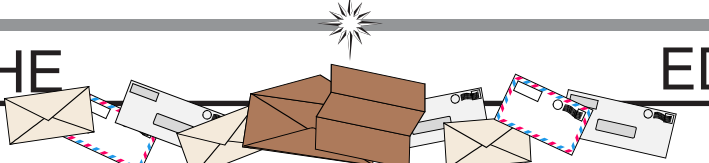
ceived as supporting the tyrannical Gyanendra. It was this consideration that made it send CPM's Yechury to mediate between the seven parties and Maoists so as to arrive at the modus operandi he helped arrange.

Whether his formula for the unity of parties with Maoists will work is an open question. What is certain, however, is that the Maoists will not settle for anything less than an elected Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution.

Will the King and the hyper-power let a new constitution, obviously a republican one, come into being? Also, have second thoughts in New Delhi gone far enough to accept the Maoists demands? Only time will tell. What may be more likely is renewal of the long war in which the victorious side is likely to be the Maoists. The parliamentary lot will have very largely discredited itself conclusively.

MB Naqvi is a leading columnist in Pakistan.

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.

Political alliance

The political understanding between the BNP and Jamaat is very dangerous for the people. The united strength of people can uproot the anti-people forces. The people of Bangladesh have proved it several times.

University students
On e-mail

Agitated people

We saw the agitated youths throwing stones at police and burning tires. How did they get those stones or tires? Did police supply those? Probably they broke some sidewalks or medians to get the stones and put some vehicles on fire before getting the tires out. Why do we have to destroy state property in the name of establishing people's rights?

I am just curious. When I was in Bangladesh, I used to participate in "Anti-Ershad" movement. I used to do the same that these young people are doing. There was no representative parliament or government back then. When there are elected representatives in the parliament and in the government, why are they destroying our own properties in the name of democratic movement?

I have a request to make to these youths fighting to establish the fundamental rights of the peo-

ple. You have the power, you have the energy. Do not spoil it by throwing stones at police and, for that matter, by being the weapons of some political party. Changing a government is not going to help you any way (you have seen that in the last fifteen years) unless you want to be a corrupt leader or a corrupt businessman. Spend your energy for fighting for yourself. Fight for work. Fight for education. If every one of you, who participated in the agitation, could be provided with the decent education and work, we would have solved the most important problem of our country. Do you think a reform to the electoral process or a change in government will help solve this problem?

Abdus S. Wahed, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Pittsburgh

Fact, not fiction

I belong to the generation that is going to lead Bangladesh into the next two decades. And then it will be the turn of the post-independence bloomers. I am writing to put down in black and white my fleeting thoughts as I try to reminisce the past and at the same time look into the future.

I was in my school when Bangladesh became independent at the clarion call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. There

was tremendous expectation in the minds of people to transform Bangladesh. People were ready to sacrifice their personal interests for nation building.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh has never governed before. Politicians failed to understand that politics and administration couldn't be blended together. The judiciary, the legislative and the executive branches of a government must function on their own without any influence of the other. Bangabandhu deserves credit for assembling key academicians, notables and intellectuals to head important policy making institutions like the Planning Commission. It was very foresighted for a man who had no administrative experience to think in that direction. His deputy Tajuddin Ahmed also deserves special mention for his contribution. But it soon became apparent that there were too many political undercurrents and counter-currents that created an eddy for the ruling Awami League.

Sycophancy, nepotism and partisanship ruined everything in spite of the most progressive constitution a newly independent underdeveloped country could have imagined. Then Bangladesh went through a turbulent era when two presidents were assassinated and military dictatorship continued till

the late nineties.

After restoration of democracy it was hoped that the spirit of 1971 could be revived. But actually what we have seen is the rise of dynasty, total disregard of democratic practices, shameless politicisation of the judiciary and administration including law enforcing agencies, generation of heaps of wealth by the ruling parties through illegal means, absolute unaccountability to the people on whose votes they had occupied the parliamentary seats, rise of muscle power, brawn over brain, fundamentalism, black money in electioneering and indulgence of family members in power peddling.

The last five years under BNP and their war criminal fundamentalist allies Jamaat-e-Islami have seen the total ruin of nationhood and moral decadence at its zenith never seen before. Police barbarism by partisan recruits of the ruling party has exposed the ugly face of the BNP-Jamaat alliance. They began their tenure by committing atrocities against the minorities and then resorting to wiping out the opposition through al-Qaeda operatives nurtured openly by Jamaat, and hopefully, finally bringing their misrule to an end by being forced to capture government sponsored terrorists under international duress. The last act should be

a free and fair election under international pressure.

In Bangladesh's history no other government has faltered like the present one. If this government stays in power the world will see the rise of Islamic terrorism in its most violent form. Remember, truckloads of tons of modern weapons have vanished within Bangladesh after offloading in Chittagong. No crime is pursued or revealed to the public. This government has not only failed but will carry the blame for turning Bangladesh into a failed state.

M. J. Zaman
Washington, DC, USA

If you mean business!

Definitely, politics in our country is a dirty game that no dignified person unless otherwise motivated feels like indulging in. But in democracy peoples' representatives after being elected through general elections run the country. They manage the life and livelihood of the entire population that also includes the members of the civil society and their kith and kin.

Thus everything is at stake with the administrative rein of the country going to the right or wrong hands. When the country is run badly by the politicians we obtain a Bangladesh of the present day

mould. As citizens every one of us receives his due share of woes and miseries and bounties as well.

It is in this context that our collective conscience has cried out through the voices of our civil society. "Why don't we do it ourselves when the politicians have failed to deliver?" When the sons get the family business into turmoil the father intervenes and takes over. Surely, the BNP led 4-party coalition govt has wasted the huge mandate it got in the last general election for no good reason. It has not led the country anywhere. Never were politics and politicians such a big burden resting on the nation.

The civil society has cried out. The outcry though audible and heartening did not generate a clear message. It lacks direction and purpose. Prof. Yunus' formula forwarded from an individual viewpoint is at best a desperate approach. It does not recognise the gravity of the problem.

Incompetent or corrupt people must not find way to the parliament. There is no alternative to this position. A casual or impromptu approach will not help. Whatever is needed to achieve that must be done. To achieve that, civil society must assume more responsibility before things go beyond repair.

In a brilliant piece the other day (24.04.06) Zafar Sobhan articu-

lated what possibly plays on in every other citizen's mind. If Fazle Hasan Abed of BRAC had been the CEO of the country, Prof. Yunus its planner and someone of equal stature to fill up the post of finance minister then we would have a dream team of our natural leaders to lead us from the front. One that every country in the world would be proud of having.

If the civil society wants to deliver, then it must mean real business. It is naive to believe that the politicians can be persuaded to do the dirty job and compelled to perform well. It must also be understood that the problems of our country are increasingly assuming a technical nature. Be it, heavy siltation of the major rivers or alarming environmental degradation or massive soil fertility loss. Successive political governments have done very little to address them.

Even arsenic problem now plaguing 90% of the population could not be aptly handled by the present government though handy remedial measures were around. When these problems need to be analysed, researched and liquidated at the earliest, political governments have slept on them. Solution of these problems seems to be no more their cup of tea.

In the present circumstances, I am afraid, there is no alternative to

forming a new political party by the civil society and its participation in the general elections if it means business. As a prelude to that, a large platform of civil society needs to be formed with formal memberships.

I believe "the vision paper" now being prepared by the 24-member core civil society is just doing that. If a member cannot make himself available for the new role, he can deputee someone on his behalf who will have equal acceptability. However, there can be no half steps in such serious matters.

True, these endeavours on the part of the civil society will not be received well by our politicians. True, our political parties are known to be ruthless when it comes to meeting their adversaries. But if you mean real business you should be battle ready. Also, if you believe that, it is the life and death question of 147 million souls, and then it is definitely worth taking all the trouble in the world. Real men just won't miss this point.

Engr. Sajjad Ahmed
On e-mail