

Blockade lifted conditionally

People's suffering knew no bounds

THOUGH we welcome the decision taken by the 14-party alliance to halt the blockade programme till Sunday, we cannot but express our dismay at the decision to impose the programme again from Monday if by then their demands remain unmet. Apparently, the decision was taken in consideration of the immense suffering of the people as it continued for three consecutive days.

The blockade had stopped people's movement as the cities and towns remained cut off from each other and there was nobody to care for the critically ill who had to be shifted to hospitals. People also found it difficult to commute from one place to another as vehicles remained off the streets. School students were also badly affected by the blockade.

The ordeal that people were made to undergo was too great to be overlooked by the political parties. It is not enough to regret the inconveniences that the blockade had created for the public. What is needed is a sympathetic understanding of their problems by all the parties concerned and an immediate resolution of the political impasse.

It is true that the parties have genuine grievances, but then it is also true that they can settle their disputes through showing a little more spirit of accommodation and making some concessions. People can only bemoan the fact that the political parties are refusing to cede any ground to their rivals.

The business leaders had expressed their great disappointment at the total shutdown, which already dealt a fatal blow to trade and commerce. And President/Chief Advisor Iajuddin Ahmed had assured them of an early end to the crisis. Obviously, now that the blockade has been conditionally lifted, nothing is more important at the moment than a quick return to normalcy, and nobody is better placed to address the issue than the president himself.

But in the 18 days since the caretaker government took office it has not succeeded in doing much beyond holding talks with the leaders of the two alliances, the results of which have not been particularly encouraging so far. Regrettably, the two alliances still appear to be poles apart as far as any agreement on the core issues are concerned.

We appeal to the 14-party alliance leadership to think of programmes other than blockade to press home their demands. The adjustment of strategies should be done in the light of the public interest that they always talk about so vociferously.

More attention to adult education

Government should take the lead

AT a recent discussion meeting held in the city, renowned experts on literacy opined that there should be serious policy advocacy programme amongst the government and the stakeholders for a more effective adult literacy campaign.

It is our observation that over the years the government and other related agencies have been rather indifferent and casual to this important aspect of non-formal education, perhaps except for a few NGOs. On the other hand, as pointed out by the experts, the projects currently undertaken by the directorate of non-formal education are faulty.

No nation has ever regretted investing in education, whether formal, non-formal, or other forms. It is all the more important to understand that for a developing country like Bangladesh it is essential to further gear up non-formal adult education.

Most of our people who live in the rural areas, except for a negligible percentage, have been deprived of any kind of education for decades. On the other hand the second-generation of the population are rushing to urban area seeking access to better and higher education. It is thus all the more important that the millions of adults left behind are brought under the umbrella of non-formal adult education. It is only logical to say that this will in turn serve as an inspiration for the younger generations coming from the villages and the rural areas, where the general level of literacy is much lower than that of the urban areas.

It is high time serious attention is given to the adult education programme in real earnest. Admittedly, a limited number of NGOs have made some headway in this regard, but the expanse, scope and the resources needed call for the government to take the lead. Long-term programmes/projects should be undertaken after due consultation with other committed and willing collaborating agencies like the NGOs. In formulating the programmes/projects special attention should be given to the qualitative and professional aspects of it all. The media should also be extensively involved to keep the focus alive on the importance of non-formal education in order to generate heightened interests amongst the target beneficiaries and the nation at large.

Matters confounded, problems compounded



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IT is difficult to fathom what is going on in the country at the moment. Who is running what and ordering whom, if anybody is running anything at all, is a mystery. Although the ten advisors are desperately trying their best to grapple with the situation at a time when decisions are being taken on extremely sensitive issues behind their back. And for them it cannot be very amusing to learn about those decisions from the media.

The country was agog with speculations when the electronic media started flashing the news about the possible deployment of the armed forces in aid of civil power on the basis of a letter sent by the home secretary to all the DCs. To deploy in aid of civil power is a statutory responsibility of the military. And there are set procedures regarding how the military is inducted to assist the civil administration in the maintenance of law and order.

That the home secretary was well aware of the operational procedures when the army is deployed in

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

The procedures for inducting the military work two ways. At the local level the administration may seek the support of the military should it feel that the situation has gone beyond the control of the local agencies. Conversely, if the government feels that the situation in any particular area of the country needs the intervention of the armed forces in support of the law enforcing agencies it can order the military out. So far as one knows, neither of the two mechanisms was invoked. Nor, as was made abundantly clear in the revoking of the home ministry order, was there a situation which warranted such an action.

aid of civil power, or in short in IS duty, as revealed by his instruction regarding keeping magistrates standby, is very clear. And to tackle a violent situation the army needs written orders of the magistrate if there is a need for use of force. Thus the standby orders.

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order of cancellation had not reached down to the district level till November 14)

However, that the home secretary had not followed the laid down procedures in the matter and perhaps showed his unwarranted initiatives came to light only at the advisors meeting the next day, when the decision was taken to rescind the order. Even more perplexing was the fact the advisor in charge of the ministry of home, the president himself, reportedly, was not put up a brief on the matter; not to speak of the other advisors having any knowledge about it.

And one of them was seen brushing aside any suggestion of army deployment when asked by the journalists about it, when in fact the order to that effect had gone several hours before. That it was most ill-advised, the council of advisors have accepted, but that it was done with ill motives has been expressed by at least one, although

it can be presumed that such a view is representative of the other advisors too. Although the matter ought to be put behind, the worrisome aspect is the wrong message this episode has conveyed to the public.

As for the caretaker government, the advisors are holding unenviable positions, having to sort out the mess the political parties have created. The chief advisor's decision to constitute a four member committee was a move in the right direction and people's hopes were raised at the prospect of a solution to the political impasse, and, even more importantly, of what has now come to be an issue of public suffering and distress.

But one feels that undertaking parleys with all the political parties is a waste of time. We all know their basic positions and most people feel that these two days would have been better utilised if the advisors had offered the parties various alternatives, instead of having them restate

their old positions. So far the prognosis is very gloomy, because of the unwillingness of the political parties to deviate from or compromise on their stated positions.

As for the 14-party alliance siege, with reports of hundreds of vehicles destroyed in Chittagong, and the inexplicable incident of a police vehicle running over several AL party activists, killing one and injuring several others, it is hard to say it has passed of peacefully so far. Surprisingly, the police officer being blamed for the incident at Karwan Bazaar has been reportedly "closed" since November 7. This is the time for the police to exercise maximum restraint when the situation is like a tinderbox waiting for a spark to burst into flames.

The EC continues to hold our interest while its chief continues to cause us immense pain. And it is clear that the 14-party alliance will not budge from its demand for the departure of the CEC. But they should also consider what would happen once he goes. What is the guarantee that he would be acceptable to the 14-party alliance or for that matter the 4-party alliance, if and when a new CEC is appointed?

If the main objective is to have a free and fair election, to which the 14-party alliance considers the CEC a stumbling block, it will be possible in a major degree only if there is a flawless voter list, which the current voter list is not. Therefore, the demand should be for redacting the voter list as per the existing rules and procedures. And

this must be addressed as a matter of urgency by the caretaker government as well, considering that the EC has decided to go for printing a voter list that cannot be acceptable in its present form because of the faulty procedures followed in updating it.

Inadequate time cannot be an excuse. Is it better to have an election based on a defective voter list within the fixed time limit or to have an election based on a foolproof list, ensuring which might mean going beyond the fixed time limit? After all, the constitution is for the people and the country. Attempt to hold on to it at the cost of both is utterly ridiculous.

While we do not hesitate to often violate the constitution on flimsy grounds, we sometimes hold on to it as if it were a holy scripture. One could ask whether or not holding of their current posts by Justices Aziz and Mahfuzur Rahman is in violation of the constitution. (See, "Is this Election Commission any more acceptable?" by Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar, The Daily Star, June 8, which explains why.)

Time is the premium and the caretaker government has only 24 hours in a day. While undoubtedly the main onus of resolving the situation is on the chief advisor, it is also on the leaders of the BNP and the AL to ensure that the country does not move any closer to the precipice.

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The "not-so-ugly" Americans



IKRAM SEHGAL
writes from Karachi

THOSE who demonize Americans (in keeping with the personification in Graham Greene's "The Ugly American") for the ills of the entire world, tend to forget that US government policies do not accurately reflect either the character and/or wishes of the American public.

US citizens tend to go along with the policies of their incumbent government even when they do not agree with them, the international perception responds by taking Americans to be either indifferent or insensitive to the problems of the world in pursuing policies which may not be good for the rest of the world.

The disconnect between the average US citizen and international geo-politics is not because the ordinary American does not care, he simply knows very little of the world-at-large, an ignorance tailor-made for vested interest to exploit.

Republicans took control of both the Houses of US Congress in 1994, proceeding to make life difficult for the Democratic incumbent of the White House, President Bill Clinton. A consummate politician, Clinton barely survived the subsequent attempt at impeachment.

In contrast, George W Bush has been dismissive in dealing not only with the Democratic leadership in

AS I SEE IT

Americans are the most generous people in the world, even today their aid and outright grants dwarf that of all the other countries. Their deep concern for the poor and downtrodden is well catalogued, their passion for fair play and democratic traditions is an article of faith. With genuine sympathy for the victims of various disasters, their normal response is to be first with the most when it really matters.

the House but even those legislators of his own party who did not fall in line with his policies. Accommodating the aspirations of the Democrats to ensure he lasts out his remaining two years, his nemesis may well be recalibrating within his own party.

The Democrats struck immediately, Nancy Pelosi, slated to be the first female speaker of the US House of Representatives, asked publicly for Donald Rumsfeld's head on the first day after the elections, to his credit the normally stubborn US president signalled his readiness to compromise by immediately sacking him.

Becoming director of the "Office of Economic Opportunity" in the Nixon administration in 1969, Rumsfeld made Congressman Dick Cheney his special assistant. As head of General Ford's presidential transition team in 1975, Cheney recommended Rumsfeld as his secretary of defence. During the Carter years, both Rumsfeld and Cheney took employment with big business. Cheney returned to serve President George Bush Sr as secretary of defence from 1989 to 1992.

Dick Cheney became Bush Jr's running mate in 2000, bringing in Donald Rumsfeld when elected. Rumsfeld represented all that the world has come to hate about the US in the last 5 years. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger

described him as the most ruthless man he knew: "A skilled full-time politician-bureaucrat in whom ambition, ability and substance fuse seamlessly," quipped.

A small clique of neo-conservatives (neo-cons) in the US establishment took full control of US policy since 2001. In the 80s, a known neo-conservative hawk, Paul Wolfowitz, joined this select upwardly-mobile neo-con group, including Elliot Abrams, Richard Perle, Peter Rodman, and present US ambassador (and czar) in Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad (a profound Pakistan-hater of Afghan origin).

None among them has ever seen war in person, successfully avoiding (except for Khalilzad) Vietnam by getting draft deferment on one pretext or the other, Cheney getting student deferment in 1962 even though Cheney dropped out of Yale in 1961, than re-joined university to qualify for draft deferment in 1963 and 1964. He managed this in 1965 because of his marriage, in 1966, he became too old for the draft.

One needs to study the psyche of those who have never heard a shot being fired in anger. Once they rise in rank and are safely out of harm's way, they become blood-thirsty and send others to their deaths in a vain attempt to show the world what great warriors they were.

Sacrificing Rumsfeld at the

Democrat altar, President Bush is lobbying to save (as US ambassador to the UN) John Bolton, the controversial appointment made over the objections of Congress when it was conveniently not in session. As president of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz, a very close friend of our PM Shaukat Aziz, may survive the cleaning of the stables.

The trend of US policies and the conduct of some of their officials over the past 5 years since 2001 is deeply disturbing, most un-American in character. Certainly not subscribing to the values Sisters Leo and Joan of Arc taught me in my early years. Americans are the most generous people in the world, even today their aid and outright grants dwarf that of all the other countries. Their deep concern for the poor and downtrodden is well catalogued, their passion for fair play and democratic traditions is an article of faith.

With genuine sympathy for the victims of various disasters, their normal response is to be first with the most when it really matters. Can we forget the magnificent performance of the Chinook helicopters in Azad Kashmir and NWFP during the October earthquake disaster? What other country in the world can compete with such large-heartedness? I for one would not be alive if the US Marine Detachment (in particular Sgt Frank Adair) in the US Consulate General

in Calcutta had not given me help and refuge in July 1971. One does not (and should not) easily forget such things.

One of the recurring dangers in a democracy is the dictatorship of a minority, while leaders may be elected for what the public respects them for and expects out of them, a small clique of advisors with vested interest, usually those with commercial ties to big business, pursue the crass objectives of their mentors.

The recent elections notwithstanding, George W Bush remains popular among Americans because of his blunt plain speaking. He recognizes his party has suffered enormously because of the neo-cons. Seeking to humble the Republicans, the Democrats may attempt to impeach Vice-President Dick Cheney, vulnerable because of the alleged unethical and fraudulent practices of Halliburton (of which he was once CEO) in Iraq.

There is no quick exit out of Iraq. The Democratic rhetoric notwithstanding, would they like to be labeled as "cut and run" legislators? The exit strategy probably cannot be as one retired US four-star general famously advised President Lyndon Johnson about Vietnam, "just declare victory and come home." One believes that the "war against terrorism" will not abate, it will become more sophisticated, with greater emphasis on economic carrots instead of the use of the stick only.

The interesting thing to note is that in the wake of the electoral setback Bush Sr's people (anathema to the neo-cons) are back, beginning with Robert Gates, former CIA chief, as replacement for Rumsfeld. More important James Baker III, is heading a bipartisan panel doing a "Study on Iraq." The Bush family historically turns to loyalist Baker when in trouble.

What will this mean for Pakistan? The electoral balancing act in the US is good for Pakistan, and certainly for the US. Even though an unplanned exit from Iraq will usher in chaos, and may have a negative psychological impact about US power in the world. With the situation very complicated and with too many imponderables, future policy has to be carefully crafted. Changes in US tactics on the ground will mean less emphasis on military initiatives.

In Afghanistan, the way to go will be to open a channel of communications with the Taliban and trying to separate them from al-Qaeda, encouraging their entry into the world mainstream. The US should turn to economic initiatives, making businessmen and industrialists out of smugglers and hired guns, after all Islam supports commerce, and that is not a tongue-in-cheek remark!

Earmarking 3-5 days worth of the funds spent in Iraq daily (\$1 billion plus) would make Pakistan's Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into a dynamic Free Trade Zone, accomplishing peace much faster than precision-guided missiles (PGMs) and 500 lbs bomb from MQ-9 Reapers.

The new political compulsions could mean Ms Benazir and the Sharifs may well return to the country, whether to power or not is a toss-up, pragmatic power-sharing could be a dream solution! General Pervez Musharraf could hang on to his uniform post-elections if destiny intervenes, and till now his luck has held.

The world will be a better place if for the foreseeable future with the return of the "not-so-ugly" Americans!

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Why philosophy today?

PROF MD GOLAM DASTAGIR

TODAY is World Philosophy Day. Unfortunately, many of us are not aware of the need and importance of observing the day. The day is observed on the third Thursday of November each year at Unesco headquarters in Paris and in its member states in cooperation with various partners.

Launched in 2002, the maiden Unesco Philosophy Day was celebrated with over three thousand people at Unesco headquarters, where as many as sixty academic philosophers gathered from different regions of the world, while forty-two countries in various regions in the world celebrated the day chalking out elaborate programs.

Unesco's itineraries for the day include colloquia, discussions, roundtables, dialogues, seminars, radio & TV interviews, book fairs, art events, photography exhibitions, publications, café philo, philosophical symphony like jazz, theatrical performance, etc.

Philosophy Day 2006 sees its fifth celebration with Morocco being the host country. Of the

roundtables to be held from November 15-18 in Rabat, some important ones are "Cultural Philosophy, Diversity and Communication," "Philosophy and the Obstacles to a Coalition of Cultures," "Citizenship and Human Rights," "Finding a Basis for a Just and Cooperative World Order," "What Can Philosophy Do in the Arab-Mediterranean World?" etc.

Unesco headquarters will also host several events between November 13-16. One of the conferences on the topic: "Philosophy as Educational and Cultural Practice: A New citizenship" will focus on the questions of new philosophical practices and particularly the teaching of philosophy to children.

Now, why philosophy day? Unesco interprets philosophy as a school for human solidarity which ennobles each individual and fosters the intellectual moral solidarity of mankind. The rationale of celebrating World Philosophy Day, according to Unesco, is to bring philosophy outside of its academic walls and show its relevance to the

daily lives of everyone. For philosophical analysis and reflection are linked to the pathways of peace.

Unesco contends that philosophical analysis has so much to offer in facing the pernicious problems of the present world. The objective of this day, according to Unesco, is: "To encourage the peoples of the world to share between them their philosophical heritage and to open their daily reflections to new ideas, as well as to inspire a public debate between intellectuals and civil society on the challenges to which our societies are confronted today."

Thus, the chief aim at celebrating philosophy day by organizing multiple events and activities is to motivate the common mass to discover more about philosophical reflection, since logical-rational thinking helps people become tolerant to others and provides consistency in life, resolving critical issues arising from our common mistakes.

Unesco underscores the importance of philosophy because philosophical studies develop human

intellectual tools to analyze and understand some key concepts such as justice, peace, dignity, democracy and freedom. Philosophy builds human capacities for independent thought and judgment, as it sharpens our intellect.

Philosophical exercise enhances human critical skills to understand and question the world and address its challenges, fostering reflections on values and principles. The major issues such as education for all, ethics of science and technology, human rights, democracy, cultural diversity, and so on, according to Unesco, have a solid philosophical foundation providing analytical and conceptual rigor.

Philosophical reflection means critical analysis of concepts, views, ideas, or beliefs. Philosophy lays the foundation of critical and creative thinking. Philosophy is an intellectual activity – an attempt to understand the general principles and ideas that lie in the heart of our existence. To philosophise means to act rationally and to think clearly and accurately, as philosophical

reflection aims at clarifying our thoughts, beliefs, doubts and questions arising from various aspects of life and the world. The clearer our thinking, the better able we will be to express our feeling, and the more accurate way of examining our thoughts and ideas.

We are living in what appears to be the age of globalization with new technologies. Despite the amazing advancement of science and technology, our globe is on the verge of collapse due to increased violence, intolerance, tension, alienation and agitation that seem to have no end.

Why? What have we done, or failed to do? We are rational, but not all men act rationally. And if this is the case with our nation-builders, political leaders and policy-makers the disaster is irreparable. In this backdrop, Unesco has touched the right chord by granting philosophy an International Day in a bid to promote and instill philosophical basis in our dialogues that spring from our ideas and views.

Our thoughts reflect in words and deeds which constitute our

character. Philosophical study needs celebration that helps us to critically examine our thoughts. If our mindset is normal in operation, our thought is rational in action. And if thoughts are rational, our acts, beliefs, views and opinions are just. Social justice is established and maintained by the rational activities of the people enlightened by philosophical wisdom. Thus, Socrates rightly says "knowledge is virtue."

It is my staunch conviction that the initiative that Unesco has undertaken is laudable in the sense that it is only through the individual's rational thinking blended with ethical values and scientific knowledge that a balanced development can be attained. Philosophers cannot sit idle while the world is in turmoil. Nor can they focus on such higher degree and research that will not have any practical impact on human life.

The challenge of the 21st century philosophy, therefore, poses: How can philosophy contribute in the present century to the well-being of human beings?

The primary role philosophers

are required to play today is to show a rare forward-looking flare in the process of freeing knowledge from the shackles of blind faith, biased dogmas, and unfounded prejudices. Man is not born noble by virtue of blood but by moral excellence to be achieved through proper moral education in a healthy socio-economic condition. I suggest that moral and logical education courses be introduced at all levels of our educational system like those found in European countries. NCTB of Bangladesh may consider introducing a course like Philosophy for Children at the school level.

Similarly, our public and private institutes may launch minor or general courses in relation to philosophy and policy, rights and duties, practical and professional ethics, etc. In the West, universities run many centres like Centre for Applied Ethics to teach and train up people engaged in different professions. Moral philosophers with proven records of highest academic position and social dignity can conduct, guide and lead work-

shops and trainings for all professionals regardless of their academic background.

For ethico-logical aspects of philosophy positively strengthen the capacities of human intellects and broaden the human minds which help to critically analyse and understand who we are, what we are doing and how we are doing – a soul-searching way of curbing white-collar crime, the most deadly weapon of the powerful in a foremost corrupt country like Bangladesh.

Finally, the present world is in dire need of global peace based on global justice, which again depends upon global ethics. This necessitates a reshuffle of our beliefs, views, ideas and thoughts that will usher what philosophers are required today to redesign and reshape their course of action-plan to confront the challenges of the present century.

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