

Armed Forces and Democracy

The Armed Forces Day marks the occasion, when twenty years ago, at the height of the liberation war, our three services launched their first major co-ordinated offensive against the enemy forces of the occupying Pakistani military. Thus 21st November commemorates, not the birth — for the birth occurred at the very outset of the struggle — but the coming of age of our armed forces. It was through this offensive that they graduated from a band of idealistic, freedom loving, patriotic dreamers to the nucleus of an organised force which was later to become the proud guardians of the sovereignty and freedom of independent Bangladesh.

By joining hands with the people, by revolting against the oppression, by providing a critical leadership in terms of military training, and by helping to turn the amorphous Mukti Bahini into a disciplined fighting force, this nucleus of our armed forces won the hearts of the people of Bangladesh.

Inseparably linked with the history of the birth of our Armed Forces is the history of the birth of our country. Thus when we celebrate the Armed Forces Day, we cannot help but pose the question as to how far we have been able to go forward in realising the ideals of our liberation war. Does the spirit with which we fought the enemy to gain independence still motivate us? Are we still spurred on to self-sacrificing actions which was our hallmark during that glorious period?

In the years following independence, our political leadership made monumental blunders, resulting in some devastating repercussions within our military establishment. A section of our Armed Forces started the politics of killing and massacre that led to the assassination of two Presidents and the killing of many senior officers. During the nine years of autocratic and corruption-ridden rule of Gen. Ershad the image of the Armed Forces suffered further, redeemed somewhat by their efficient and effective role in disaster relief.

It is to the credit of our Armed Forces that they saw through, even if belatedly, the game of wily Ershad — who wanted to exploit them further to prolong his hold on power — and sided with the people during the anti-autocracy movement. Once again, as in our liberation war, so also in our fight to reintroduce democracy, our Armed Forces sided with the people.

The lesson that must be highlighted today is that the Armed Forces must serve the people and not govern them. However unpalatable it may sound, yet the truth is that if democracy is to survive unfettered, unencumbered and uninterrupted, the Armed Forces will have to believe in it, and give it their full support. They must realise that however bungling and inefficient the political process may appear to be at first, it is ultimately the most efficient process; because it is based on the only criterion that governance can be based on — the consent of the governed. The parliament — that conglomerate of diverse forces, that meeting place of contradictions, that epitome of diversity — is the highest law making body and the people who elect it, the ultimate arbiter. No more should the Armed Forces be exploited by the self-styled saviours and the ambitious.

Through their action in the anti-autocracy movement our defence forces have shown their preference for democracy. Through their unwavering resolve on the Armed Forces Day, their choice stands forever strengthened.

Untenable Police Action

Strange are the twists and turns of history. Last year about this time while winter was settling down, the same expression of people power that were subsequently to liquidate a nine-year autocratic hold of the society, in perhaps an excess of enthusiasm, attacked two business establishments in the Dhanmondi area. Saner sections of the public did not support the action but nevertheless respected the manifestation of the awesome majesty of social sway. Police, so long serving more an autocrat than the state, stood aside, unperturbed and uninvolved as if going into a most opportune nirvana.

On Wednesday police, under a democratic dispensation, used force to stop a procession of demonstrating garment workers, most of them women, marching towards the offices of one of those business establishments. Police was this time as resolute as could be — hurling as many as twenty tear gas shells, charging with baton and perhaps also using rubber bullets. The demonstrators were beaten and they ran helter-skelter but not without a fight.

We are all for protecting the establishments of the business houses. Their more healthful activity holds the lifeline of the economy of the country. Development of any kind that destabilises business activity and engenders a sense of insecurity in the business houses must at all cost be resisted. The need for an uncompromising stand both by government and by society cannot be overemphasised.

At the same time protests and marches and all other demonstrations of collective public action are an integral part of the democratic way of life. Hurt them by as much as a pound of thrust, democracy will be hurt by the ton. Police had no business to stop it at the Science Laboratory intersection, not only reducing one of the busiest and most important road networks into a regular battlefield shrouded with teargas smoke, but also slighting a sacred expression of collective feeling in a very mean and insulting manner, subjecting even women to violations of the human persons. The police could very well throw up an armed human wall around the corporate headquarters of the company.

The police failed to contain the procession that went from the Press club to the place of clash. Why didn't they take care to keep the moving surge peaceful? The police performance takes on a diabolical aspect when supplemented by the fact that near the Kataban intersection bands of hired mastans fell on the girls and gave them quite a beating.

To the government we say, protect the business houses from molestation; protect also the people — in the present context the protesters — and their right to demonstrate. You protect the former in the interest of protecting the latter. A confusion here can make a world of difference in our quest for a just society.

Confidence Building Measures to Promote Peace

THE pre-conference political setting may turn the face to face talks to Camp David style negotiations for separate peace treaties... I quote from my own article published earlier under this column just to emphasise the point that Israel agreed to join the peace talk on the explicit understanding that it will be based on the provisions on the Camp David Accord concluded with Egypt in 1979, which was rejected by all other Arab countries including PLO. However, in the meantime, because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Gulf war political picture of the region changed dramatically. Israel lost its strategic importance and with it the US's blind support. The Arabs also realised Israel's military superiority which they could never match. Therefore, the only alternative for both was to go to the negotiating table.

Before embarking on the peace negotiations in Madrid the Arabs, despite their disunity, tried to forge some common strategies. The temporary Assad-Arafat rapprochement apparently still holds good though the Jordan-Palestine delegation moved ahead of Syrians in the separate talks with Israel in Madrid. Though some form of Arab unity is a must to face the intransigent Israelis, the Palestinians have to aggressively pursue the negotiations for some reasonable success as failure will harm them and

Palestinians' Support for Peace

So far the Arab Governments have been engaged in the peace process. There has hardly been any demonstration of public support except those in the occupied territories for the peace negotiations. The enthusiastic reception of the Palestinian peace negotiators in the occupied territories speak of the Palestinian interest in the peace process. The recent chamber election in the West Bank reflected the genuine support for the peace groups against the fundamentalists. In some places the Palestinians even showed olive branch to the Israeli army personnel indicating their support

for peace. Palestinians' positive support for the peace process will encourage the Peace Now activists in Israel. This is the time to show signs of cooperation for building necessary confidence among the concerned parties. Palestinians' acceptance of demonstrations in the occupied territories and also in Jordan may induce other Arab peace activists to come forward to build up public support for the peace process.

Israelis' 'Peace Now'

In Israel the Peace Now has gathered some strength

attitude. The world now appears in favour of 'land for peace' and Shamir and Likud party must understand this. Indeed, this is the time for the Israeli Labour party to gear up movements for 'land for peace'. This might give them ultimate political advantage.

Once the public reactions are largely in favour of peace and particularly in favour of 'land for peace' without which there could be no peace, all the governments involved in the peace process must take concrete steps towards confi-

dence building measures which should include, stoppage of Intifada and lifting of Arab economic embargo against Israel if it goes for permanent freezing of settlements in the occupied territories. This would mean major Arab concession against something that Israel has been doing illegally against UN resolutions. Once some concrete confidence building measures can be achieved, negotiating process will get necessary impetus. Today's unwilling handshake without looking at each other's face may later turn into even embrace. Everything depends on Israeli intentions as the Arabs have already shown genuine desire for peace by responding positively and

falling which international sanctions may be considered but certainly not military actions as this will jeopardise the present peace process in the M-East. The US should also show some positive gesture towards PLO in terms of contacts with a view to giving it the necessary boost that would enable it to muster support of the various Palestinian factions. The US role in the peace process remains crucial. President Bush's commitment for peace in the M-East and Baker's strenuous and sustained diplomacy have achieved good results. They must be supported by the congress and entire Administration. They don't have to abandon Israel at all. Only firm stand by all for peace will make Israel less intransigent and lead it to negotiate seriously. Shamir and his government are not important. What is important is Arabs' acceptance of Israel as their neighbour and this can be done only through Israeli withdrawal from all Arab land and acceptance of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Nothing short of it will work. Garbage-collection-self-rule will not bring peace. Genuine self-rule under UN control with the definite programme of Israeli withdrawal to a mutually accepted security zone could form the first part of the peace package. This supported by the confidence building measures may successfully lead to the next stage of the peace process.

The US and Libya

The US should not, at this stage of the peace process, do anything that will strengthen the hands of the radicals in the region. The latest moves by the US to muster international support against Libya must proceed with utmost caution. All must cooperate and act to stop terrorism but in doing so nothing should be done to create a situation that would eventually lead to increased terrorism. Intense diplomatic efforts must be made to force Libya to comply with the provisions of the international law on the question of turning over of the suspected terrorists if they are in Libya, for justice

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

Muslehuddin Ahmad

despite movement by settlers in opposite direction. Peace Now must continue its effort. If necessary finances should be available from sources engaged in the peace process for building up wide public support for peace. This is necessary to counter the headline attitude of the Israeli government and the ultra-rightist elements. Leaflets, ads, seminars projecting peace dividends should be organised by the Peace Now. Only strong Peace Now movement in Israel can change the headline position of Shamir and his Likud party. Indeed, the US should promote the doves in the Likud party so that Shamir loses his grip on power if he does not change his headline

stance. The world now appears in favour of 'land for peace' and Shamir and Likud party must understand this. Indeed, this is the time for the Israeli Labour party to gear up movements for 'land for peace'. This might give them ultimate political advantage.

The Nice, Not-so-grey Major is Running Out of Time

by Derek Ingram

THE puppet in the British satirical television show Spitting Image depicting John Major is in a single colour — grey. From the day one year ago when he unexpectedly became Prime Minister in succession to Margaret Thatcher — November 22 — that is the adjective he has been given.

It is misleading, but seems to have done him no harm. John Major is the most surprising politician to pop up of the political trapdoor in Britain for decades. And as the world now knows him as the son of a circus acrobat he almost literally did just that.

On the face of it he has two qualities not usually features of top politicians. Ordinateness and niceness. Plainly he is no ordinary man, though if he is not nice then nobody seems to have any evidence to prove that. After a year he still appears to be a rarity: a politician without any real enemies.

It is hardly possible to imagine anyone personally less like his predecessor Margaret Thatcher. He is the beleaguered Conservative Party's greatest asset and almost from the outset he has stood high in the opinion poll ratings, leaving opposition Labour Party leader Neil Kinnock way behind. While Major is much more popular than the other leaders, the parties are neck and neck in the polls.

Eight months at the most from a general election — polling must take place by next July — Britain stands poised of the most interesting political battle for decades. It is a toss-up who will win and it looks like staying that way right up to election day.

Britain is not in good economic shape and after nearly 13 years of Tory rule people want change. They are not sure, however, what exactly they want.

History is trying to repeat

John Major has been Prime Minister of Britain for a year Today, Nov 22, is his first anniversary as Prime Minister. When he emerged as the successor to Margaret Thatcher he was little known outside Britain. In a year that has seen Communism collapse and the Gulf War he has emerged as a major international player. But can he last? He must have an election by next July and the British economy is in far from good shape. He will have a tough fight to secure even a small majority.



Moving out of the shadow

itself. Between 1951 and 1964 Britain also had 13 years of Tory rule. Then Harold Wilson's Labour Party clawed back power with a majority of five seats. It went out of office again in 1970 for four years, ruled again for five more, then

came Margaret Thatcher. If Labour wins next year it is unlikely to be by more than a handful of seats. Just as likely a tiny Tory win or a hung parliament with the increasingly popular Liberal Democrats led by the charis-

matic Paddy Ashdown holding the balance of power.

Recent by-elections have given the Tories little comfort. A particular problem is arising in Scotland where they now hold only nine of the 67 seats.

Tory chances of victory largely hang on one man — the so-called grey Major. His party is in quite a lot of trouble, his team tired and in need of a good shuffle — now quite difficult to carry out so near a general election. Above all, it is tormented by the old, old problem: relations with mainland Europe.

On December 9, the 12 members of the European Community are due to sign a treaty for political union in Maastricht, Holland, aimed at pulling them closer to each other. Drafts and redrafts and rumours of drafts and redrafts are reported daily, and the final contents will be argued right up to the signing.

For Britain the immediate gut issue is whether Europe is to adopt a single currency. Even more contentious is the idea that Maastricht should commit the 12 to eventual federation.

For Major the signing at Maastricht could not have come at a worse time. The Tories hoped to have held an election by now and won. Thatcher's plan had been for a 1990 election, but then recession struck and she was toppled. Major decided, rightly it

seems, against a poll this October. Now his options have run out.

The single currency issue deeply divides the Tory party, with all the usual noises from its right about the loss of sovereignty it would involve. While the Labour Party, once wholly against even the concept of the European Community, sits quietly and sucks its thumbs. It is also still divided over Europe, but is managing to appear united — now more strongly in favour of greater European unity than many Tories.

Domestically, Labour is managing to keep the Tories on the run, particularly in long battle for the health service, which it accuses the Tories of running down and trying to privatise by the back door. This is a highly emotive issue, since Labour founded the health service in 1945 and is proud of having created what was once seen internationally as a model of its kind.

It is one product of socialism that the people have al-

ways admired. Many believe from their own personal experiences that Labour is right when it says the Tories are harming it.

Even more seriously, Major is having to face the fact that the recession is taking far too long to ease up. Inflation at well down at last, but unemployment is rising. He has reversed many of Thatcher's economic policies, but it is now the eleventh hour. He is running out of time.

Internationally, Major has been doing much better. Until a year ago he was barely known outside Britain. Since then he has managed, with his easy charm and conciliatory style, to establish himself as a world figure, rarely putting foot wrong as he moves from Washington to Moscow, from Bonn to Harare in an almost continuous round of intensive diplomacy.

He has emerged everywhere as a calmer and steadier. Everybody seem to like him, with his American presidential-type smile and his passion for cricket, he seems grey no longer. He has had a good year.

Whether his personality alone is enough to carry him to victory at the polls is quite another story. — GEMINI NEWS

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OPINION

ICB Dividend and Deductions

For 1990-91 ICB declared dividend on ICB Unit Certificates @ Tk 18 per unit. From this dividend ICB deducted (i) tax @ 10% (ii) Jamuna levy @ 4% and (iii) development levy @ 6% (total 20%), before paying out the same to the unit holders.

In 1989-90, ICB declared dividend on ICB Unit Certificates @ Tk 25 per unit and deducted therefrom Jamuna levy @ 4% and development surcharge @ 6% (total 10%). No tax was deducted.

Compared to 1989-90, the net dividend income of the Unit holders in 1990-91 dropped drastically by Tk 8.10 (from Tk 22.50 to Tk 14.40) per unit.

On what grounds income tax @ 10% and development levy @ 6% on the dividend income have been deducted is best known to ICB. In my view, these deductions have been made arbitrarily and unjustifiably, because:

i) ICB Unit Certificate is a security approved by Income Tax Ordinance for the purpose of availing investment allowance by an Income Tax assessee up to the ceiling prescribed. It, therefore, enjoys the same status as that of Defence Saving Certificates, and 5-year term Sanchayapatra, income from these securities is tax exempt. Excepting for 4% Jamuna levy, no other deduction is made from the income of these securities. In my view, so should be case with the income from ICB Units.

ii) Deduction by ICB of tax @ 10% from the dividend income of the units probably stemmed from the misinterpretation of the revised section 54 of Income Tax Ordinance 1984 (xxxvi of 1984) which reads as follows:

"Deduction of tax from dividends — (1) The principal officer of a company registered in Bangladesh, or any other Company shall, subject to the provisions of sub-section (2), at the time of paying any dividend to a shareholder, deduct tax on the amount of such dividend....." vide page 7258 of the Bangladesh Gazette, extra, June 30, 1991.

It is clear from the above quoted section 54 that dividend means dividend declared by a company to its shareholders.

ers. ICB is not a company as such: it is a 100% govt. owned corporation — nor are the Unit holders shareholders of any company or ICB itself. Deduction of tax on the dividend income of the ICB Units is, therefore, simply out of questions.

iii) It is presumed that the companies which paid dividend to ICB, deducted 10% tax and the levies in question (10%) therefrom. ICB again deducted the same tax and levies before paying out the dividend to the Unit holders. In other words, the same income has been taxed and levies charged twice.

The arbitrary manner in which the dividend income on ICB Units has been treated this year, has shaken the confidence of the Unit holders — and many of them now want to sell off their holding of ICB Units.

In order to restore the confidence of the Unit holders, ICB should make immediate arrangement for refund of 10% tax and 6% development levy to the Unit holders; otherwise, I am afraid, most of them will be compelled to think of other investment options.

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To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

The campus — an impartial look

Sir, It is ironical that even after a popular government has been democratically elected, little has been done to appease the student fronts. During the Ershad era, incidents of violence at the universities meant that the government could not control the students and it offered some hope to those who opposed dictatorship. But what now, what excuse are the political parties using now that a government has been elected by the masses and the goal of bringing down the autocratic government has been achieved? Why is violence still prevalent on the campuses?

This is a legitimate question being asked by university students whose futures have been plunged into uncertainty due to the recent eruption of violence. It seems obvious that the politicians do not care less if all the students were massacred by rival groups. May be they would even sigh with relief and say "good riddance" and use this as a subject at the numerous and meaningless meetings and seminars.

The fact that a few members of the government were almost abused at, when they had visited the bodies of the students recently killed, is surely not a very healthy sign. So both the ruling party and the opposition should start taking serious measures to stop campus violence — because they surely would not want the students, who were the main cause for the success of the parties and the introduction of democracy, to go against their respective fronts.

The role of the large contingent of police posted around the campus is the focus of many jokes and taunts. It is noticed that at the first sign of trouble there is competition between the general students and the police to reach safety. Obviously, they do not have the courage to take action against the students. Very often it is reported that the police have raided the halls and recovered some pigeons and if they are lucky, some bullets. The next day the general attitude of the residents is of mirth and they report that the law enforcers enter a few rooms and leave the halls quickly for fear of

some of the students. I fail to understand why they have to be posted at all the entry points. It is quite irritating to pass through the roads lined with police vans giving the impression that they are very much in control when actually they are not.

The ruling power as well as the opposition power seem unable to control their own fronts. The atmosphere at the university is one of supremacy as the students are well aware of the government's inability to control them. The declaration of the leader of the opposition that all its student activities on campus is suspended has also fallen on deaf ears. There may be more bloodshed to avenge the deaths of the three students who were friends and classmates of many. The government cannot call the defence forces because then the general public along with the students will take to the streets.

Just as the rulers should try and control their student wing the opposition should also try to persuade their activists to improve the campus atmosphere by constructive deeds. The blatant show of arms on campus is damaging to the image of their political fronts. The students must realise and by their deeds never allow any one feel the saying "monsters once created cannot be controlled".

It is time that the politicians rise above their petty differences for the welfare of

those who are the future of this country. Otherwise, the long struggle for the restoration of democracy for which the students played a very vital role, will prove to have been meaningless.

An onlooker

Export Earnings

Sir, At least a dozen doctors (Ph.D), engineers and scientists have expressed hope in a press conference that the country can easily earn a sum of Tk 10,000 crore in foreign exchange through export of software as computer data entry. All those doctors have indicated that the job was not difficult as it would take a few weeks training for our educated youth. Only the other day the Youth Minister had indicated that arrangements have been made for employment of 15 million youths.

Our total earnings through exports of all traditional and non-traditional items do not exceed 6,000 crore Taka. Under the above backdrop it is time to engage all those engineers and scientists to realise those export earnings through setting up corporations or authorities. Let our scientists do something concrete along with engineers and computer experts, and not befool us through press conference alone.

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