Irresponsible Action

This journal would like to express its deep concern at the disrespect for democratic norms and disregard for public property shown by a group of workers to make good their threat of a 48 hours barricade. The rights of mass action definitely entitles any group to organise civic action to generate public support behind their cause. In Monday's instance the general public was forced to abide by the dictates of a handful of workers who literally took over public property and seized public roads and the railways. Not only did they prevent other members of the public from exercising their own democratic rights but they also did not think much of damaging the railway compartments and signalling equipment which will require scarce foreign exchange to replace. The most condemnable action of them all was the fact of uprooting a section of the railway tracks near Tongi and dislodging it in many other places. We would like to categorically state our disapproval of such actions and point out that no amount of grievance can permit such irresponsible action by any body, especially by organised labour.

The government has called the action by the workers of the public sector as politically motivated and aimed at destroying the economy. It has also promised stern action against those who are guilty of causing indiscipline, anarchy and sabotage. Time has come, we think, for the government to take tough action against those who are taking the law in their own hands and damaging public property. If once the mass agitators get the impression that they can get away with barricades—which is an illegal action and is not permitted by labour laws — then in all future instances trade union bodies will be tempted to go for such actions.

As to the fundamental issues behind the workers' actions, there are two. One deals with pay hike and the other, with denationalisation. As for the wages, the government has decided to institute a wage commission with interim allowances being thrown in. It must be mentioned here that during the last decade workers' wages here increased by 33 per cent and their output has actually gone down by 18 per cent. Regarding denationalisation, the question lies at the very heart of the economic reform programmes of the BNP government. Here the government needs to make public some of the fundamental facts behind the rationale for denationalisation. We had earlier suggested the need for a "White Paper" on the whole situation of the nationalised sector and the heavy burden that it has put on the taxpayers. The government needs to take the public into confidence, and by giving out the relevant facts, build the necessary public opinion behind its policy decision.

UN in Cambodia

In the fast-moving and generally positive developments in Cambodia, the move just announced by Prince Norodom Sihanouk to set up a new coalition government with his son Ranariddh, representing the Royalist group, joining the pro-Vietnamese party of Prime Minister Hun Sen in an interim administration should come as a surprise to most observers. On the face of it, the move aims at providing the war-torn country with a stable government, even on a temporary basis. However, it opens up the danger of isolating other guerilla allies of Prince Sihanouk - the Khmer Rouge and the Khmer People's National Liberation Front — who are all supposed to work together in the interim administration and help guide the nation towards the UN-supervised national election scheduled in early 1993. The Khmer Rouge faction may well take the move as a signal by the two factions in the proposed coalition to consolidate their position during the transitional phase. At this stage, it would not serve the interest of Cambodia to revive the divisive politics which, in the past, has done so much harm to the ill-fated country.

In making this and other controversial moves, Prince Sihanouk may well be acting very much on his own. And, of course, he is known to change his mind from time to time. In the present situation, what is particularly important is the presence of the United Nations team inside Cambodia. At this moment, the primary responsibility of the team lies in providing the country with as much humanitarian assistance as possible to help Cambodia to stand on its own feet again. Then comes its task of preparing the country for the election.

However, in between these two monumental tasks, the UN mission must ensure that the political process dies not get derailed or bogged down in a series of futile counter-productive moves. Prince Sihanouk's coalition talk could well belong to such a category.

Yet another responsibility that lies with the UN mission is to provide a watch-dog role on the economic front. It is obvious that there is an urgent need to monitor the receipt and distribution of what may well be a massive aid from abroad. It is also noted that entrepreneurs from Cambodia's neighbouring countries, such as Thailand and Singapore, have started moving in, ready to grab as many business deals, especially in the construction sector, as possible. The Hun Sen administration has already expressed its difficulties in ascertaining the credentials of these new arrivals. However confusing the development may be to the Phnom Penh authorities, its positive aspect underscores the interest of the ASEAN region in the reconstruction of the war-torn country, an exercise in which South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, should certainly be involved. It will be most helpful if the UN mission in Cambodia can play a part in assisting the interim administration in this all-important field. in ensuring that the country entering a new era of economic changes is spared avoidable pitfalls and lapses.

No Alternative to Healthy Democratic Practices

HE glorious memory of ousting the autocratic and corrupt regime is fresh in our mind. The role played by political alliances hand-in-hand with all sections of the people, will ever remain inspiring for future generations. Above all, the unity displayed by the students in achieving the common objective was remarkable.

In the next phase of establishing a parliamentary democratic system fully accountable to parliament, the same spirit of working together for a united national cause prevailed. All these augured very well and everybody looked foreword to the long-cherished political stability and peace, which are pre-conditions for steady economic development in the country.

However, now there is a lurking fear and suspicion that the enemies of democracy are active behind the scene. While all patriotic elements want a fair trial of the hard-earned democratic system, there are signs of evil forces trying to obstruct this process. We have to be constantly alert and vigilant. Let not any freedom-loving person or section of people fall a prey to such evil designs.

In a democratic society,

It is as much the duty of the ruling party as of the opposition to make sure that the new democratic structure works. It would be suicidal to resort to destructive tactics just to discredit the party in power or a political adversary. Opposition there must be, but it should be constructive. This is a truism, but it needs to be emphasized and repeated at this crucial juncture of national life. If there is chaos and disorder beyond proportions, the enemies of democracy will take full advantage of it and exploit the situation to achieve their end. This must be averted.

Students

The disturbances on the University campuses are very much worrying. Our boys and girls studying there are of impressionable age. Any attempt to use these bright, innocent young people for narrow parochial purposes is to stab the future nation on the back. Party loyalty is all right, but loyalty to the nation is of greater value. This is again a truism, but it has to be repeated for larger national interest. Unfortunately, parochial considerations are getting the upper hand, perhaps unwittolerance is an essential virtue. tingly. This is born out of a this soul-searching is be maintaining five offices. I do cratic practices if we want to

by Tafazzal Hussain

wrong - utterly wrong - idea that effective control of the student force will determine the fate of a political party. Some people will even say that unscrupulous political elements are encouraging campus disturbances in an unholy attempt to destabilize the gov-

The student groups with different party affiliations joined hands to forge a national unity of an unprecedented dimension, which ultimately caused the down fall of the autocratic Ershad regime. Why can't they do the miracle again and consolidate the democratic process? It is said that the violent disturbances are the deeds of the 'armed cadres' of the student bodies and not of the students as a whole. I believe that given the will and determination, these 'cadres' who are supposed to be mostly outsiders enjoying 'blessings' of unscrupulous political elements - can be kept at bay. Perhaps, left to themselves, the student organisations could achieve this. But they are not left alone. On this issue, some heartscarching is needed and for the sake of saving democracy.

inescapable, and only then the

solution will be found. Apart from campus violence, law and order situation in the country (particularly in urban areas) is far from satisfactory. The answer is not unbridled criticism of the government. The problem has to be faced jointly by the government and the opposition. This social scourge has been affecting all of us for a pretty long time and so, there should be a collective effort to tackle the problem effectively.

Fault-finding Approach

Simply, a fault-finding approach, pointing the finger at the party in power, saying that they have failed to deliver the goods, is not going to help perhaps. When the Prime Minister goes abroad to attend a Commonwealth meet or a regional summit, it would rather look like cheap criticism if she is accused of squandering (?) public money in taking 54 or similar number of people in her entourage, inclusive of officials, MPs, security men and media people. Then again, it would be worse than hollow accusation if she is alleged to

not remember to have come across similar caustic observations in the news media when the flamboyant ex-President Ershad used to maintain a huge parallel secretariat in the name of President's Secretariat in the Old Sangsad Bhaban, which was nothing but unnecessary duplication of the elaborate personnel of the different ministries of the Government and undoubtedly a big wastage of public funds. In any case, the size of the Prime Minister's entourage on visits abroad or the number of offices maintained by her arc matters of comparatively much less importance than big national issues e.g. external aid utilization, privatisation of industries, creation of domestic monopolies, rural and urban unemployment, etc. The opposition parties will have done a good job if they projected their own party programmes vis-avis government policies and activities in these areas. Needless to say that this is the correct approach for any healthy opposition. Any deviation from a true democratic behaviour will only help the forces hostile to democracy and its consolidation in

Bangladesh soil. There is no

alternative to healthy demo-

save democracy from the evil

Dr Badruddoza Chowdhury, Deputy Leader of Jatiya Sangsad pointed out the other day that there is a well-laid conspiracy working against the success of parliamentary democracy in the country and this suspicion was also highlighted by Mr Hasanul Huq Inu of JSD (Inu) recently. In her public address in Natore on November 16, the Prime Minister re-iterated the same feeling most emphatically, warning her countrymen against the danger of such evil conspiracy.

All patriotic people who want democracy to take deep roots and flourish must remain alert about such potential danger and should not behave in a way that makes them sure victims of conspiracy. At any cost, political stability and a peaceful climate in the country will have to be ensured and an effective national consensus to this direction evolved. The newly-achieved democratic system must succeed; otherwise, the country would be doomed. So save democracy and thereby save Bangladesh.

The writer is a former Secretary of the Government

Switzerland—700 Years after

Neutrality: A Precious Gift or an Outdated Principle?

II IN the final analysis, neutrality is linked to war. Yet in Western Europe, conflict is becoming an increasingly un-likely prospect. The old rivalries have given way to solidarity and a deeply-felt desire for integration. In such a Europe, classic neutrality seems unimportant, even a handicap." This point of view comes

from the European Union, a Swiss movement which advocates the Confederation's entry into the European Community. It is well aware that many Swiss regard such views as provocative. More than any other principle of foreign policy, neutrality is deeply-rooted in the political thinking of the nation. If Swiss membership of the EC is ever officially debated — which has so far not been the case — neutrality will most certainly be one of the most controversial aspects of discussion. Emanuel Diez, a neutrality specialist who was once head of the Swiss foreign ministry's legal department, strongly believes that "with the opening of the single/European market in 1992. Swiss neutrality will be put to an important test."

The conservative group "Action for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland" (ASIN) has given a similar warming: "Our policy of neutrality loses its credibility if we belong to an economic organisation dominated by the EC. Doubt would be cast on our traditional neutrality, at least in the medium term." ASIN regards such a prospect as unacceptable, believing that neutrality is "a duty which cannot be avoided, a duty which has historical roots. It is a humanitarian obligation in

the case of peace." A Freely-chosen Principle : But what is so special about Swiss neutrality? Firstly, it

results from centuries of experience. Secondly, it is a principle that Switzerland chose for itself, without external pressure. Thirdly, it is a principle recognised by the international community. And finally, Swiss neutrality is "perpetual," which means that Switzerland is bound to remain neutral in any armed conflict, not just on a case-to-case basis. It is a combination of these factors which gives Swiss neutrality its special character.

Rights and Obligations of a Neutral Country

The terms of Swiss neutrality are based on the classic definition of this principle in international law, which emerged from the Hague Convention of 1907 on the rights and obligations of a neutral country and its citizens in time of war. Neutrality is defined as the non-participation of a state in a war between other states. The wording is simple and precise. A country wanting to adopt a neutral stance must respect certain laws (on the inviolability of its territory) and obligations (the prohibition of military support for a party to a conflict). These rights and obligations together constitute what is known as the law of neutrality. But any state wishing to remain neutral for any length of time must also implement a policy of neutrality. Even during times of peace, it has to take preventive measures to avoid involvement in conflict. For example, like Switzerland, a neutral county cannot belong to a military alliance, and must maintain an army (hence armed neutrality).

Practical Limitations : One consequence of neutrality is a foreign policy characterised by reserve and caution. Is this compatible with freedom of

thought? To take an example, is the Swiss media able to make uncensored comment on international news? The answer is obvious. In fact the Swiss media devotes much time and space to events abroad, events which are also extensively debated by ordinary citizens. In short, there is no "neutrality of opinion" A neutral country cannot be obliged by a foreign power to limit the freedom of its press. Neutrality is exclusively a matter for state affairs.

Economically too, Switzer land is not neutral. It can take sides, for example by linking itself with the other western industrialised countries believing in capitalism and a mar ket economy. This does not conflict with a neutral policy unless there is excessive dependence on one trading partner. The neutrality specialist, Emanuel Diez, confirms this : "A state intending to respect perpetual neutrality cannot allow its economy to be under any control from another state, because if war breaks out, it would no longer be neutral." Nevertheless, Switzerland depends on the European Community and member-countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organi sation for about 80 per cent of its imports and over 65 per cent of its exports.

Historical Roots Go Deep The origins of Swiss neutrality go back to the time of the Renaissance. In 1515, defeat on the battlefield of Marignano, near Milan, brought a brutal end to the old Confederation's adventurous expansionism. Ever since, Switzerland has abstained from interfering in the affairs of others. However, the evolution towards present-day perpetual neutrality was a process which took hundreds of years. Scrious violations of Swiss neutrality and the occupation of the Confederation's territory by Napoleonic forces led the signatories of the Congress of Vienna to give their formal recognition of Swiss neutrality in 1815. Through consistent observance of neutrality since then, Switzerland has managed to stay outside all the European conflicts of the 19th and 20th centuries.

"No" to the UN: Sacrosanct Neutrality

Since the Second World War, delicate questions relating to neutrality have been raised whenever Swiss membership of an international organisation was proposed. The whole subject can be a political mine-field, as government and parliament have learned to their cost: their 1986 proposal for UN membership was overwhelmingly rejected by the electorate. The campaign leading up to the vote was dominated by the neutrality issue. Opponents of membership were swift to recall the problems which arose from membership of the League of Nations between the two world wars. Although a member, Switzerland managed to avoid involvement in military sanctions, but had to participate in political and economic sanctions approved by the League.

This "discriminatory neutrality" placed the Swiss in dilemma in 1935 when sanctions were imposed on Italy because of its attack on Abyssinia. Switzerland only partially complied, arguing that neutrality made it impossible to impose full sanctions against a neighbour. The federal government concluded that Switzerland had to revert to the policy of complete neutrality. But not until 1938 did the League of Nations release Switzerland from its obligation to conform with decisions on sanctions. When they rejected UN membership, the Swiss people were genuinely afraid of turning their backs on strict neutrality.

Neutrality Does not Rule **Out Commitment: While Swiss** neutrality might sometimes be accused of lacking in courage and of being market by caution, this does not mean that neutrality provides the Swiss with a convenient excuse for avoiding international responsibilities. Since the Second World War, Swiss foreign policy has been guided by three principles other than neutrality: solidarity (giving encouragement to international coopcration), availability (offering good offices to other nations and universality (maintaining relations with all the world's

sovereign states). Switzerland is a member of nearly all of the specialised international organisations, and of many European institutions which do not have a supra-national character.

Has Neutrality a Future?

Neutrality is a major element of Swiss foreign policy. But it is not intangible. Neutrality is also an instrument, a means of foreign policy and not an end in itself. This instrument has enabled a state as small as Switzerland to survive in a Europe scarred by centuries of political and military turmoil. As the main instrument of Swiss foreign policy, neutrality must constantly adapt, to suit not just Swiss interests, but also the international situation.

So what is to become of this policy of neutrality in a Europe where integration has become the key word? What's going to happen to such a policy in a Europe which might no longer need the factor of stability represented by a neutral Switzerland? What future lies ahead for a neutrality which no longer seems justified? These are questions which present challenges to Swiss foreign policy, especially concerning the delicate matter of European integration.

SDA/Swiss News Agency

OPINION

Sorry, earlier I could not

thank Mr Anwar Firoz from

and originality can also be

termed as creative) one faces

real problems because what

among other objects to be

transferred to a text of another

language are generally the typ-

ical patterns of lives, their

temperaments, styles, atti-

tudes, conversations, dreams

and dramas of the 'vast man' so

much known, still unfamiliar

with all his socio-cultural, an-

'Mis-translation'

Bashir Al Helal

Khulna and the Traveller for thropological, metaphysical their appreciation of my conand other associations that tribution 'J versus Z' (Sept. 3). may even if occasionally or While commenting on my otherwise be universal hutopic of transliteration Mr manly, cannot be so linguisti-Firoz on Sept. 25 raised anxcally. Translators of creative iously some points about inapthings while recreating in the propriate translations also. translated tests the association Translation is a big subject and the atmosphere of the with its many gross to intricate originals, tend to make them aspects to be dwelt on. It has congenially natural and familiar no set rules or standard. And, as far as possible to the associwant should we call it, the ation and atmosphere of the methodology of translation, if readers of the translation, any at all? — the art or the which may not of course be so science? Besides, the world of easy a skill for a translator to translation is as wide as that of attain. The problem may be knowledge and literature. The more acute in cases of the word translation has in English original and the translated lana synonym e.g. 'rendering'. guages being too alien to bewhether with or without any long to the different language technical difference of meanfamilies. For example, a Urduing I do not know. But adapta-Bangal translation may not be tion is another form of translathat difficult an exercise as tion, very different from genthat of an English-Bangla and eral translation, which may vice versa in matter of transpossibly be called a translation ferring both the technique and with much adjustments. Some the idea of the text. The celewould in this context say that brated poet Bisnu De in transthe human life itself is crafty lating T S Elliot's poem into adjustment without which Bangla verse once took as nothing is convenient, enjoymuch freedom as to replace able. And, in matter of transla-Christmas, a Christian festival, tion, here arises that intriguby Janmastami, a Hindu festiing question of the fidel and val. Not all critics did approve the infidel. Outlandish critics that much freedom relished by would ask to do that odd job. the poet-translator because in to choose between a wife faithtranslations the readers' exful and a mistress charming. (I pectation would not merely be don't agian know by what misthe right corresponding assochance a woman reader of a ciation but also the charactertranslation work was deprived istic type and peculiarities of of her a bit of an adoring room association embodied in the in this simile so marvellous original. As Mr Anwar Firoz and amorous). Some are for pointed out, oak is oak in the rigid translations faithful to Bangla also. We should not go the original, some for the sofor an oriental equivalent for called free ones. In translating that famous occidental tree. creative things like poetry, But in one of may recent works fiction and specially plays of translation ('Deshe Asa' (essays of extraordinary charm

Bangla translation of the American book 'Coming into the Country' by John McPhee on Alaska) I used 'debdaru' as the Bangla equivalent of the spruce, a coniferous tree of the Alaskan forest wilderness, though I had no idea if both were exactly the same of had a sub-generic difference, Mi Firoz has reservation as to the olive of the Middle-East and

South Europe being translated as 'jalpai' into Bangla. We should not object to this as this has been the set practice, and the difference is not formidable. Similarly, a Chinese friend in course of our informal talk at a banquet had been objecting to the swallow being translated into Bangla as 'chatak'. But I do not consider this to be mis-translation as the bird swallow of the west and the far east and the 'chatak' of the South Asia have much more in common that minor differences in respect of their size and may be some behaviour. Besides, in Bangladesh we do not have both to be confused in any way.

But mere choosing or coining of right equivalents i.e. counter-worked may not be the major point for translation of specially a serious and substantial matter as of the creative ones I have mentioned above as mere words are not the language, rather the syntactical formation and pattern make a language. I for myself would demand and try a simultaneous faithful and creative translation. Bad translators often abuse that tumid freedom. On hearing some praise to the tune that my aforesaid work of translation almost gave the flavour of an original work, I was at once dismayed for the compliment did not inter alia indicate how far my effort did justice to the original also. If we miss the flavour of say, a Shakespeare, a Pushkin, a Baudelaire or for that matter a James Joyce in their oversmartly or oversimplified translations into even the very aline oriental languages, the ventures would surely be adjudged as futile. Ordinary readers favour free translations. They are not generally concerned about missing something vital of the original, not to say about their unawareness of that . In case of a fiction, they are mainly interested in devouring the narrative of the story in translation. But not that I am for a faithful translation with a limping gait or going.

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.

Delight in disorder

Sir, With reference to the letter of Mr. K. S. Nazmul Hasan 'Delight in Disorder', published in your esteemed daily on 14th November, I would like to add the follow-Mr. Nazmul's dilemma of

living in this society expresses of his being scourged by the many-sided malice that is embedded in our society. He has spoken sarcastically of the scheming people, of coercion, of lovers being spurned by their beloved and of the blatant lies and ganging-up of the scoundrel sycophants and so on. The writer appears to be confronted with all these unpleasant situations and has expressed epigrammatically and aphoristically many aspects of our society in his brief letter. He has, so to say, under duress, now become a little aloof from this decadent society and has even spoken mockingly of deriving delight in disorder. Unfortunately, for many of us these are the experiences of every passing day. What I mean to add to Mr. Nazmul's content is that we or our enlightened section should not be at the back-stage of national affairs, nor should they absolve themselves of the

high task of arresting this all-

It may not be far fetched to

pervading decadence.

cians would rise once for all to guide this nation to a fairly inhabitable society. Mahmood Hasan Monipuripara, Dhaka. **Encroachment on**

say that just as the late 16th

century witnessed the deca-

dence of Europe and when

people of Europe saw no hope,

the small segment of culturally

and intellectually enlightened

people were able to show the

beacon. Similarly, I would like

to cherish my pious wish that

our respected intellectuals,

our businessmen, our bureau-

crats and above all our politi-

Sir, Recently, RAJUK has announced a new 'shock treatment' to bulldoze the unauthorised constructions in Dhaka city. I would like to highlight the problem in Uttara Model Town. In sector seven of Uttara

roads in Uttara

Model Town much awaited drains (katcha) are being cut now to allow drainage of waste water **and** rain water. Unfortunately, many house owners in Uttara have fenced off four to five feet public land adjacent to their plots to grow vegetable and other plants. This has narrowed down the original road span of 30 feet to feet at places.

RAJUK/Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) are now making the drain without removing the steel fencing or brick walls hindering its straight passage. The contractors are making the drains by going round the occupied land reducing the road span further at the already narrowed down portiens. The drains are obviously going to be zigzag but no one bothers to know or explain how will the water flow smoothly in this zigzag way. Since many of them have cars, they bother least whether there will be knee deep standing water on the roads during the rain, to the utter public inconvenience.

I would, therefore, urge upon RAJUK and Dhaka City Corporation to remove all these unauthorised fencings and make the drains straight. This practice of occupying public road reduces the width of the road and will also hinder water flow. Alternatively, RAJUK/DCC may officially advise every home owner to occupy five feet of public land adjacent to their plots.

Dr. Nooruddin Ahmed Professor, BUET, Dhaka.

An appreciation

Round Table deliberations. It is a great innovatives effort. It is a national document of great importance. It has made me more knowledgeable. The nation shall greatly benefit from this debate. I shall preserve it as a monograph.

Sir, Congratulations for the

My compliments to The

Daily Star., Mohammad Mohsen Rashid President, ADCAB, Dhaka