

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

However, in between these two monumental tasks, the UN mission must ensure that the political process does not get derailed or bogged down in a series of futile counter-productive moves.

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.

No Alternative to Healthy Democratic Practices

by Tafazzal Hussain

THE 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.

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 forward 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.

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.

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.

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 government.

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?

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.

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.

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 Saigood 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.

save democracy from the evil forces. 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 Haasul Huiq Inu of JSD (Inu) recently. In her public address in Nature 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 writer is a former Secretary of the Government of Bangladesh.

Switzerland—700 Years after

Neutrality: A Precious Gift or an Outdated Principle?

IN the final analysis, neutrality is linked to war. Yet in Western Europe, conflict is becoming an increasingly unlikely prospect. The old rivalries have given way to solidarity and a deeply-felt desire for integration.

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.

UN in Cambodia

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.

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.

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.

Economically too, Switzerland is not neutral. It can take sides, for example by linking itself with the other western industrialised countries believing in capitalism and a market economy. This does not conflict with a neutral policy unless there is excessive dependence on one trading partner.

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.

trality 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.

This "discriminatory" neutrality placed the Swiss in a 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.

Neutrality Does not Rule Out Commitment

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.

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.

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?

— SDA/Swiss News Agency

OPINION

'Mis-translation'

Bashir Al Helal

Sorry, earlier I could not thank Mr Anwar Firoz from Khulna and the Traveller for their appreciation of my contribution 'J versus Z' (Sept. 3).

While commenting on my topic of transliteration Mr Firoz on Sept. 25 raised anxiously some points about inappropriate translations also. Translation is a big subject with its many gross to intricate aspects to be dealt on. It has no set rules or standard. And, want should we call it, the methodology of translation, if any at all? — the art or the science? Besides, the world of translation is as wide as that of knowledge and literature.

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 than 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 conning 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 timid 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 Shakespaeire or for that matter a James Joyce in their over-marty or oversimplified translations into even the very alive 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.

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.

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 following.

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 scyphants 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-pervading decadence. It may not be far fetched to

say that just as the late 16th century witnessed the decadence 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 bureaucrats and above all our politicians would rise once for all to guide this nation to a fairly inhabitable society.

Mahmood Hasan Montpurpara, Dhaka.

Encroachment on roads in Uttara

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 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 20 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 portions. 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 fenceings 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

Sir, Congratulations for the Round Table deliberations. It is a great innovative 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.

My compliments to The Daily Star, Mohammad Mohsen Rashid President, ADCAB, Dhaka