

No, Don't Do it

This is absurd and totally uncalled for. Unjust and injurious to the nation in so many ways.

We welcomed in these columns the Prime Minister's appreciation of the value of the glorious native theatre form that has come down to us at the cost of tremendous sacrifice and unmatched love for art by a handful of people.

We frankly do not like this order. We have already stated our reasons for believing that making cultural activity of whatever kind and merit subservient to executive fiat is foolish.

And it indeed would be injurious to our nation as a whole if the ban hurts and harms the Jatra — the only surviving folk theatre of the Bengalee people that still retains much of its merit and power.

Professional Jatra has been forced to compromise its serious form with interludes of titillating dances only in order to survive.

Let the government refrain from tampering with the arts, and dictating to it under whatever pretext. A jatra team is the farthest removed thing from a flesh-trade joint and these hard-working art-workers do not relish wallowing in an atmosphere of gambling and narcotics and mastani and exhibitionism.

Misuse of Laws

Two reports have dealt with two similar criminal cases — one in Gournadi and the other in Hobigonj — in which members of the law enforcing agencies took two civilians to court and got the verdicts against themselves instead of the accused.

The two cases in Barisal and Sylhet bring into focus one fundamental issue: how safe are the human rights of our people at the hands of such men of the law enforcing agencies, specially when anti-democratic and arbitrary laws like the SPA and Anti-terrorism Act are around.

Even if we rule out an ulterior motive, the police officer's biased report could have spelt unmitigated tragedy for the now-elected chairman.

Mirpur By-election: A Victory that Looked Tainted

T O-DAY, a half-day hartal day throughout the country, as I sit before my type-writer, I face a problem: I have to choose among a number of contending themes.

There was a possible fourth, as a likely topic, which I can't leave without mentioning, the bloody battle between student groups on Rajshahi University campus which has left five dead — unofficial figures would put it around ten — and more than forty seriously injured.

I cannot write about the Rajshahi killings now, the latest campaign mounted by Jamaat-Shibir on the rest of the student community, not excluding the JCD followers.

years with the newly-established university. There was an intense feeling of sharing, the joys and the woes and the ecstasies. The happy nest was blown off by the blasts of '71, scattered the group, leaving only a common nostalgia for the place and the days.

As for the bi-election of Mirpur, everyone knew that the battle would be a close one, and any of the two main candidates winning, would do so on a narrow margin.

I hope every one has read, and read carefully, BNP Secretary-General Mr Abdus Salam Talukdar's statement on the disputed election results in his press conference of February 8, reported in detail in The Daily Star of February 9.

the scene, with pressmen listening to the honourable minister and the secretary-general of the ruling party, with a mixture of deference and scepticism, the tongue-in-cheek manner of the speaker, I thought that, as a counsel Mr Talukdar was perhaps defending a case one of the weakest in his career.

Mr Talukdar, as one would have expected, refuted all the charges of irregularity, and violation of electoral rules committed at the latter phase of

results, the BNP Secretary-General found nothing wrong, nor in BTV's telecasting the news in its 10 o'clock bulletin. But the fact is that both the propriety and the legality of the procedure have been questioned.

The Secretary-General's press conference was a fine blend of defence and aggression though the aggression ap-

Raqibul Huda's 'forcing his way' into Mirpur control room, ignoring the EC's request to absent himself from the scene — the EC had reportedly entrusted the responsibility of maintaining law and order to the Additional Police Commissioner — Mr Kamal Siddiqui's unexplained visit, all this proving beyond doubt the government's impatience with the procedure and a certain nervousness about the outcome.

The government should know very well that something has gone awry, and the victory of the Mirpur bi-election has, in fact, brought no credit to the winners, because the method has not been above reproach.

The Election Commission has come out unscathed. It has made a supreme effort though every thing was foiled by the arrogance of the rulers and the impatience of the BNP leadership.

Was it wrong to call the hartal? Hartals have lost their appeal and as far as I can see, the latest recourse to this wasteful method of recording your protest has brought a good deal of blame on Awami League.

and then an eight hours' hartal nationwide. It could do with less, because it is not alone in its effort of protecting the institution of election. Virtually all the opposition parties have expressed their deep dismay at the way the results were announced.

POST SCRIPT FEBRUARY 17 The recounting of Mirpur polls has partly vindicated Awami League's stand, and though AL has gained morally, it has finally lost the seat.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

counting of polls. He put his main emphasis on the fact that ballots were counted in all the 117 centres in the presence of the polling agents of the candidates.

Mr Talukdar ruled out the possibility of repolling in 18 polling centres, quoting rules, under Election Act. While he blamed Awami League for its inability to accept the verdict of the people, hinting as if this was the chronic case with the party, he, almost in the same breath, and quite unnecessarily, gave a certificate of good performance to the Election Commission, a pat on its back, for its 'remarkable fairness and integrity'.

In the premature and unofficial publication of election

appears to have lacked real thrust. It was ludicrous to suggest that the Awami League was out to erode the EC's authority or to cast doubts on its integrity.

One gets the impression that though the Secretary General was ostensibly replying to the 11-point allegation of Awami League, point by point, and had done some homework beforehand, the spokesman had really no answer to some of the most specific charges.

US Policy Still Blind to Asia

The new US administration seems to be leaving out Asia in its foreign policy plans even as experts worry about the need to strike a power balance in the region.



Given the many problems that the United States is facing at home today, and in the absence of a concrete threat as the Russian threat during the Cold War, priorities will be given to domestic affairs.

But South Asian experts say the Clinton administration will also be looking for stability in South Asia and in the Gulf.

The West is worried renewed civil war in Afghanistan and growing instability in Central Asia fuelled by the spirit of resurgent Islam may spill into the region.

An Islamabad-based political analyst points out, however, that Washington's preference for stability and the status quo in South and Central Asia does not spring from love for the regimes in power, but fear of the unknown.

WHEN Warren Christopher testified in early January before the US Senate on the foreign policy priorities of the incoming Clinton Administration, the US Secretary of State designate almost skipped South-east Asia altogether.

He did not discuss ASEAN (the Association of the South-east Asian Nations), only Cambodia," says John Bresnan of Columbia University's East Asian Institute.

For Asian governments and analysts, that near-omission was yet another sign that Washington's neglect of Asia is likely to continue if not worsen under the newly sworn government of US President Bill Clinton.

Their worry is Asia will continue to be a blind spot in US foreign policy at a time when a new delicate balance between the major powers in the region will have to be found.

"The Bush administration did not have an Asian policy," Bresnan told reporters after a conference on ASEAN security and economic cooperation.

According to Christopher, the United States needs to "revamp its military force structure" — a phrase that Asians take to mean more cuts in US military presence in the region.

He also speaks of the need to promote democracy on a worldwide basis and to press for "fairer trade" in Asia — policies that could exacerbate US ties with China and Japan.

But security experts who gathered here a week before Clinton was sworn in January 20 say Washington is unclear about what concerns Asian governments the most: how to build a new balance of power as the United States reduces its military presence in Asia.

Especially after the US withdrawal from bases in the Philippines, many analysts take it for granted that US presence in the Asia-Pacific region was on the decline.

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.

Education Boards Sir, It is learnt from newspaper columns that the present government is contemplating to set up a Central Education Board in Dhaka by remodelling the present four Education Boards into regional Boards.

In the past, there was only one Board in the country to conduct the Secondary and Higher Secondary examinations of the country. But with the increase in number of students, three more Boards have been set up to fulfil the demands of the time.

Mosquito menace Sir, Mosquitoes are no more for jokes and humorous sketches. Whatever measures to control mosquitoes have so far been taken by the relevant departments proved to be inadequate and ineffective.

dreadful malaria attacks the entire population. Mosquitoes are increasingly making the lives of the people miserable, and need to be controlled at any cost.

Disinvestment : Ctg Cement Co Sir, It is quite sometime that the management of Chittagong Cement Clinker Grinding Co declared a dividend of 40% for the year ending June, 1992 but has not so far taken any action to convene the AGM of the shareholders to approve the same.

Undemocratic Sir, I have gone through the interview of Mr Kamal Ahmed Majumder, candidate of Awami League for Mirpur by-election, in 'The Daily Star' on February 2, where Mr Majumder demanded unparliamentarily that Mr S A Khaleque (feather of Mr Syed Mohammad Mohsin, MP) be declared unwanted in Mirpur during voting hours and also accused 'Mr Khaleque is the root of all acts of terrorism in Mirpur' without establishing legally any charges against him.

hends that they will face the same fate as in the cases of Dhaka Vegetables and Kohinor Chemical Co whose shares are being quoted much below par values.

minority; what does he mean by 'the minority'? To the best of my knowledge, there is no such indication or term in our Constitution as 'minority'; we all are bonafide citizens of Bangladesh.

Fees on TV, VCP and VCR Sir, My attention has been drawn to the letters published recently in the national dailies on licence fees for TV, VCR, and VCP. Really it is sad that the year 1993 has started with violence and increased fees on TV, VCP and VCR to the bewilderment of the common people.

Hold a newspapers' annual exhibition Sir, It is said that over 400 Bangla and English dailies are published from Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna and from different district and thana headquarters of our country.

It is our pride to think that the present government claims to have great success in waiving taxes on 25-bighas of agri land and exempting agri-loan up to Tk 5000/- Is it a compensatory or token recovery of revenues so exempted? Wrong taxation at the growth period should have been carefully dealt with before announcing and, to my opinion, totally avoided considering the financial sufferings of the common people who are embittered with the day-to-day price hike of the essentials.