

## The Dilemma for Hosokawa

With the yen maintaining its unprecedented strength against the dollar and Japan retaining its ever-rising trade surplus with the United States, it is unrealistic to expect the new prime minister, Morihiro Hosokawa to find speedy solutions to two sets of problems: To let the yen fall to a level that helps Japanese export trade and investments abroad; and to find a formula that works to reduce the trade surplus, a move that, in turn, would add to the efforts of President Bill Clinton to bring down his country's budget deficit.

The difficulty of the Hosokawa government to find answers to these — and other relevant — issues is not necessarily due to its lack of experience. It has much more on account of its dwindling options, some arising out of opposite forces and pressures. For the coalition administration whose power base is anything but strong, if not definitely shaky, it must monitor the public opinion at home just as closely as it follows the trends in Washington-Tokyo economic relations.

For Washington, the pledge by Hosokawa made on Monday that his country should make "stronger efforts" to reduce Japan's yawning trade surpluses makes a welcome beginning of what is bound to be long complicated process. This pledge should be seen as a forthright statement and is meant to be taken seriously, demonstrating the same kind of boldness that the Japanese leader showed recently — and repeated on Monday — in apologising for what he frankly described as a "war of aggression" waged by his country, against China, several Asian nations and the United States, some five decades ago.

To add to the strength to his pledge about reducing the trade surpluses, the Japanese Prime Minister went to the extent of criticising his country's "narrow-minded pursuit of economic gain and collusive institutions that excluded outsiders and worked against the interests of Japanese consumers."

For the moment, Clinton can certainly rely on the sincerity of the Japanese leader. There undoubtedly exists considerable common ground for both Washington and Tokyo to work on.

However, there are several obstacles. To start with, the vested interests in Japan, close to the previous Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government, which were responsible, in the words of the Prime Minister, for Japan's "narrow-minded pursuit of economic gains" have not disappeared from the scene. Under pressure from these interests, many badly hit by recession-related losses, the new government is unlikely to agree "to any sort of trade agreement setting quantities of imports from the United States," as an expert puts it. It is said that if both Washington and Tokyo agree that imports into Japan cannot be linked to a quota, the tacit agreement between the two could well be to push the yen higher. For the Japanese industry, it could well turn out to be a deadly situation, in the total export-import trade.

This is the time for the Clinton administration to show maximum understanding of the dilemma facing the new government in Japan. It cannot let the yen to fall to a level where the economy of one of the most affluent nations of the world would reach a crisis stage, threatening the stability of the coalition government and strengthening the LDP at the grassroots level or, what would be worse, among the giant business houses. The United States has serious — very serious indeed — problems in many different areas of its economy. But it is still capable of giving the new government in Tokyo time to formulate its economic agenda that suits all concerned, including the country's interests at home and the allies abroad.

## Saving the Taj

Our most sincere and hearty congratulations to the Indian Supreme Court for ordering the closure of 212 factories because pollutants emanating from them were damaging the 17th century wonder of the world, the most magnificent monument to love — the Taj Mahal. This bold and drastic measure will finally lead to some real progress in saving the Taj from losing its lustre.

The sulphur pollutants have been there for quite a while, and may have already taken its toll of the 'wonder-in-marble' Indian archaeologists and lovers of the Taj have been raising their voices of protest against these industries for quite some time now. At one stage Unesco expert opinion was sought to determine the extent of the damage. Both the Indian experts and those from Unesco urged the government to drastically reduce the sulphur content of the factory pollutants that was being carried by the wind, and eroding the surface of the marbles of the Taj. As the court ruling clearly points out, the factories took no notice of the expert findings and kept up their activities that put the monument to mortal risk.

Now that the Indian Supreme Court has shown the way, we hope that no administrative efforts will be spared to implement this order. Not only the risk from pollution, the Taj Mahal has been facing the danger of subsidence due to the lowering of water table caused by increasing domestic and industrial demands for ground water.

The experts will now have to turn their attention to this question, and devise a plan as to how to prevent subsidence. With rising population of Agra, and the need for industrial advancement, the further lowering of the ground water table is a real possibility. Then there is also the question of pollution from car exhausts, which is on the rise as Agra becomes a big urban centre. With this will come the question of effects of noise pollution, which will also have to be faced.

The bold move by the Indian Supreme Court should mark a new beginning in the efforts to save and protect the Taj for posterity. For there is nothing to match it in beauty, craftsmanship, design and intricacy of work. Taj Mahal belongs to the world, and it is our obligation to the world, to our civilization, that we do everything to maintain this epitome of human excellence.

We have been informed that roads are now available for rent. Is Sugandha too? In the eagerness of organising its council session, and perhaps in the over-enthusiasm of making it a grand affair, the ruling party is setting up some wrong examples? It is running the risk of being accused, if not of breaking the law, but of bending it grossly and blatantly, to suit its own, partisan end? The precedents it is setting up, raises serious questions of propriety and ethics, if not of honesty and respect for law.

The distinction between the State and the Government may at times be blurred, but that between the government and the ruling party is well laid down and familiar to our people. How far can the ruling party go in using State and public property for its own ends, is a question that has been raised in the public mind after seeing the press reports of what is being done for the BNP council session.

For the last several days, a large segment of a very important road, serving as a vital link between Airport and the Mirpur Road (by far the two most important arteries of Metropolitan road network) have virtually been taken over by the ruling party to set up its inaugural session pandal. A 8 to 10 lane picturesque road has been reduced to a two lane street. Hundreds of holes have been dug and a huge bamboo structure put into place to be used for the inaugural session of BNP's council session.

The point has not been lost on anybody, that a hurried attempt has been made by the City Mayor to smear a paint of legitimacy to stem public outrage against what virtually amounts to taking over a major road by a political party for days together. Legal questions as to whether the city corporation at all has the right to 'rent' out public property, especially public streets, is one that the Mayor has not yet answered. Can Mayor Abbas decide tomorrow to rent out Nawabpur Road, or Islampur Road if the price is right? Under what law, and by whose authority, can he do so?

What about our rights as tax payers. We pay all sorts of tax, including municipal tax — and it is quite steep, to say the least. These taxes we pay, to

## Council Session

# Roads for Rent: What Else?

Is there no difference between the Prime Minister, who belongs to the nation, and the BNP chief who belongs to a party? If today we fail to distinguish between the office of the Prime Minister and office of the BNP chief, then tomorrow may be, we will fail to distinguish between government functionary and party functionary.

ensure a minimum level of civic amenities, a very important one among which is our free and unhindered access to public roads. When a road is rented out, is not our right to free access denied?

Shapla Chattar, (the very important roundabout in front of the Bangladesh Bank) in Motijheel, is reportedly out for rent at Tk 15,000. My first question is, have the hundreds of owners of buildings and thousands of rent payers of offices, banks, insurance companies, etc. been consulted? Do these people, who pay crores of takas of tax, want an occasional, if not permanent, source of traffic jam, political violence or any other source of disturbance in the area where they earn their livelihood? Many business houses have already moved, or are planning to leave Motijheel because of traffic problems and occasional political violence. Now that it is being regularised and legitimised, how will it impact on their decisions?

The hurried nature of the Mayor's decision is aptly revealed by the fact that his announcement says nothing about the days or the hour when such places will be available on rent. Does he want to rent out the Shapla Chattar on week day mornings. Or was he thinking of Friday afternoons? Did he forget to specify the days and time because September 1 and 2 happens to be week days? Even on Fridays, can the Mayor guarantee the security against political violence leading to damage of property of those who have offices in Motijheel? We are not used to recognising the rights of tax payers. It is high time that we start.

The parliamentary committee, along with the Works Ministry have done some thinking on how to change the present practice of holding public meetings on busy

streets. This newspaper, along with many others, have welcomed the initiative. We understand some progress have already been made. In the midst of all this comes the Mayor's move, that makes a bad situation worse. What we had uptill now, were people breaking the law and holding public meetings. However, they were only for a few hours, and mostly on Friday afternoons. People were already fed up of even that. They want designated open-spaces for meetings. Not what the Mayor has suggested. Did the Mayor consult any relevant ministry or even the parliamentary committee before announce-

functionary; between government property — like transport, office equipment — and party property; and God forbid, between government fund and party fund. It may have not happened yet, but when blurring of vision starts, funds is where it deteriorates fastest. Are we not falling into the same trap that now defunct communist parties fell into, when they confused the party with the government? We are all painfully aware of the result of this sort of thinking.

I can understand when the PM holds meetings in her parliamentary party in Sugandha, because parliamentarians are

BNP, regardless of the fact that it is the ruling party, under the parliamentary system, no public facility is available to her. The confusion arises because Begum Zia holds three key posts simultaneously. If today, for argument's sake, the PM and BNP chief were two different persons, the distinction between the office of the PM, and that of BNP chief would have been far more clearer, and the party leaders and workers would have had a better sense of what should and should not be done. Then perhaps Sugandha would not have been put to the use that is being suggested.

Sheikh Hasina on her part, wears two caps — Leader of the Opposition and the chief of the Awami League. The official facilities available to her is due her former office. When she uses that for her party work, she is necessarily letting down all the other opposition parties, whom she is supposed to represent. Welcoming thousands of new recruits to AL, in her official residence as Leader of the Opposition, is an abuse of official facilities. Parliamentary offices are used for party work, also amounts to abuse of official facilities.

When I raised these issues with my BNP friends, I got three types of replies. First, is that "Shobal korey, Awami League agey korechey, abong abar khamatai ashley aro bashi korey" (Everybody does it. AL did so in the past, and if they come to power, they will do it even more). The second type of reply was "Eta Bangladesh, ekhaney erokom hobet" (This is Bangladesh. Things like this will happen here). Third reply was, that I was nit-picking.

Let me address these points in a reverse order. As to whether I am nit-picking or not, I leave it to my readers to judge. Personally, I consider the separation of the notion of the gov-

## The Third View by Mahfuz Anam

ing his plan? Or was it designed just to accommodate his party's move?

A far more serious question is associated with the announced programme of holding the BNP council session in Sugandha, the office of the Prime Minister. Has the BNP taken the PM's office on rent?

Making inquiries about the status of Sugandha, I was told that it is Prime Minister's political office. The question is, was it the political office of the Chairperson of BNP? According to the announced programme, all the BNP council meetings and business sessions of the party will be held in Sugandha, which is a tax payer financed office of the Prime Minister. Is there no difference between the Prime Minister, who belongs to the nation, and the BNP chief who belongs to a party? If today we fail to distinguish between the office of the Prime Minister and office of the BNP chief, then tomorrow may be, we will fail to distinguish between government functionary and party

public representatives, and the PM as their head, can use public property, and state facilities. But that is, how far it should go.

We often see photographs of Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina welcoming new recruits to their parties in Sugandha, and the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition. Both these practices are not proper. Begum Zia wears three caps, that of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the House, and Chairperson of BNP. As the Prime Minister, she represents the whole nation, even those who opposed her in the election. She becomes the representative of every citizen of our country, regardless of their political affiliation. It is the 'government of the people, by the people and for the people' that she runs from all her offices. All state facilities, allowed by law, is at her beck and call.

As the Leader of the House, again all facilities allowed by the parliament, is available to her.

But as the Chairperson of

THE world order that we know today is based on the nation states. This was, however, not the case in earlier periods of history. Most of the great empires, for example, were multi-national in character where either the monarch or the dynasty, supported by a variety of other institutions, was the cementing bond: The Mughal Empire or the Abbasid Empire or the Ottoman Empire did not have a clear national identity.

The Mughal adventurers who came from Central Asia with Babur were doubtless the dominant elements in the empire but others, including the local Rajputs, were deeply involved in the expansion and administration of the empire. The Persians played a dominant role in the Abbasid Empire through the Caliph was Arab. Kamal Ataturk abolished the Caliphate because it was, in his view, not consistent with modern Turkish nationalism which was the basis of the state that he founded on the ruins of the old empire. The Europeans, led by France, introduced the concept of nation states. A number of common factors such as language, culture, history and a compact geographical area are the usual bonds which characterize a nation state.

By the end of the 19th century, this concept had come to be accepted as the norm, the ideal, though there were still many instances of multinational states. The Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled by the Hapsburg dynasty from Vienna, and the Ottoman Empire were, among the important surviving examples of multinational states at the turn of the century. The growth of nationalist forces made it increasingly difficult to hold these empires together, and the First World War swept away these relics of the past. The next great impetus for the creation of nation states came after the Second World War, which weakened the remaining European colonial empires and left the US and the Soviet Union

# Micronationalism: A New Threat to International Peace and Stability

the dominant powers on the world stage. Both these powers openly espoused the rights of colonial peoples to self-determination. The experience of the United States in the Philippines had given policy makers there a first hand experience of the difficulties of colonial rule and the impossibility of reconciling such rule with their democratic principles.

The Asian and African peoples, emerging from centuries of colonial bondage, embraced the national state system along the European pattern. Thus the UN was established as the association of sovereign nation states. It is the nation states which keep the international community in a state of balance and stability in their own enlightened self-interest. The UN has provided a conceptual as well as organizational structure for smooth inter-state relations by harmonizing and where possible, mediating the conflicting interests of the nation states.

The fragile (and often interrupted) peace that we have enjoyed during the last four decades is now threatened by the emergence of a new phenomenon in the world stage, namely, micronationalism. The collapse of the Soviet Union (which was, in the true sense of the term, a multi-national state) has given a strong impetus to the centrifugal process. The UN held back the process for some time. Article 7 of the UN Charter was aimed at keeping all domestic matters of member states, including sub-national aspirations, beyond the scope of external intervention. The Africans were fearful that their states, containing diverse tribal elements, would disintegrate if the tribal, linguistic, ethnic or

sub-national aspirations were given the opportunity to seek and obtain foreign help for achieving their goal. As a result, until recently, few secessionist efforts succeeded. The Bangladesh case, it should be noted, was really not a case of secession; it was essentially the reification of a grave error committed by the leaders of the region in 1947. The size of the Bengali nation as well as our geography puts our struggle for independence in a category by itself. However, the failed

world, can never remain confined only in that area. Almost simultaneously, we witnessed the break up of Yugoslavia. One wonders if the process of fragmentation in the Balkans has come to an end. Not only do we hear about the creation of three mini states in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but other ethnic groups such as the Macedonians are also stirring up to join the race for setting up a sovereign state. Such states will be so small and politically and militarily and perhaps also

sub-national groups have been squabbling ever since that time. King Baudouin, who died a few weeks ago, held the kingdom together through a combination of consummate diplomacy and force of personality. His absence from the scene may hasten the process of disintegration of the kingdom. Where will the process end? UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, in a recent article in the New York Times highlighted the inherent dangers of both ultra nationalism and micronationalism. We are, I believe, familiar with ultra nationalism. We have seen how it can lead to aggression, war and instability. Micronationalism, on the other hand, often surfaces as a human rights issue and attracts sympathy as a struggle of the weak against the strong but it can also be a source of war and instability. According to Mr Ghali, "subnational, ethnic or tribal factions cannot expect to undermine the political unit in which they exist while claiming the privileges of a sovereign nation-state. The quest to establish one ethnicity on one territory is being revealed for what it is, a generator of ethnic cleansing, racism, and crimes against humanity."

In Asia, too, the wind of micronationalism has been blowing with increasing force. The Tamil aspiration for independence is a manifestation of the same micronationalist urge to have a nation state of their own regardless of the viability or otherwise of such mini states. What is happening in the Punjab in India is a similar subnational desire based on religious affinity. Kashmir and, farther afield, Tibet are also getting sucked into the vortex of conflict for similar reasons. It is difficult to place all these strug-

gles for self-determination or independence into one category. However, there is no doubt that the supporters of the micronationalist movements for separate existence are often impelled by deep emotional and historical urges to do so. But where will this take us? Will Britain get split into four sovereign states? Or, Canada into two? Or, even Switzerland into German, Italian and French-speaking states? What about China or India? Is there a limit to the possibilities? Once we have divided up an existing state on the basis of race, we may want to again divide it on the basis of either language or religion. There will be no end to this process. Mr Ghali rightly said that, "Ethnic and micronationalist groups need to realize that justice and prosperity cannot be attained in a world made unworkable by endlessly splintering factions." Even an extremely homogeneous state such as Bangladesh is not free from the virus of micronationalist aspirations. The tribal people of Chittagong, for example, may have legitimate grievances but separatists are clearly motivated by unrealistic goals. While their desire for protecting land rights or economic interests or the preservation of their distinctive cultural identity is legitimate, they ought to realize that their fundamental and long term interest lies in joining hands with the rest of the nation.

The path of separatism is fraught with suffering and danger while the path of cooperation will open up the possibility of economic prosperity and cultural enrichment. Perhaps the leaders of such movements should reflect on the long term implications of the benefits of separatism. The parallel trend towards cooperation and integration should be given full support because that is the only path to prosperity and stability. Indeed the trend towards fragmentation of the existing states must be arrested if we are to have peace, progress and stability in the world.

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

Biafran effort to secede provides an illustrative example of micronationalism. One may recall the tragic civil war in Nigeria in the sixties when the rest of the world refused to support the Biafrans. No one wanted to upset the delicate balance that existed in the African state system by establishing a precedent of successful secession. But today there are no such inhibitions or even a firm resistance to the principle of secession. Eritrea, for example, has become independent recently after more than thirty years of secessionist struggle against Ethiopia.

Though generally opposed to the fragmentation of the existing member states of the UN, the Western powers welcomed the break up of the Soviet Union for political reasons. The Muslim world also greeted these new republics as it marked the liberation of the Muslims of the region from Russian and Marxist control. But a process, once set in motion in part of the

economically so weak that the fiction of independence and sovereignty can be maintained only if the UN or some great power provides them a protective umbrella. Czechoslovakia, a country with a proud history and a developed economy, has recently succumbed to the splintering process. The divorce between the Czechs and the Slovaks was, mercifully, peaceful but it certainly marks the ascendancy of micronationalism as a respectable and acceptable phenomenon.

The next candidate in Europe for break up seems to be Belgium. The death of King Baudouin has set off these centrifugal forces. The conflict, both linguistic and economic, between the Dutch-speaking Flemings and the French-speaking Walloons is a long one. It was in 1830 that Flanders and Wallonia seceded from the Netherlands and picked a German, Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, as their first king but the two

insist that sponsors provide a variety of commercials of their products. After all commercials are meant to create an appeal among consumers, not to irritate them.

Finally, announcements frequently made either to give messages to the community or to serve as fillers between programmes are very boring to watch in their existing mode. Instead of displaying lines and lines of bad handwriting and lethargic audio accompaniment, they should be presented in a more attractive and appealing manner. Moving pictures with light music in the background should serve the purpose.

It was time the BTV people learned from the way programmes of foreign television networks are presented.

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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.

### On primary education

Sir, Dr Azizur Rahman Khan and Dr Mahbub Hussain, two of the leading economists of our country, in their book "The Strategy of Development in Bangladesh (1989)" have given us some information, and also made some observations, which I would like to share with our elite readers.

(a) Government expenditure and the subsidy per student at the primary level, have been

less than two per cent of the corresponding amounts at the University level.

(b) One of the redeeming features of the expansion of higher education is that, higher technical education has also expanded very fast. Present technically educated person meets our requirement.

(c) The quality and efficiency of general university education have declined disastrously. An overwhelming majority of graduates of general university faculties (as well as

the colleges) acquire no usable or employable skill, and they constitute a strong pressure group favouring the expansion of unproductive public sector employment, which adds nothing to society's welfare.

If we really mean what we say, the message, is very clear. If we really believe in human and social welfare, of which we are making declarations at every public meetings, a sizable portion of our revenue budget, and the ADP, must go to the education and health sectors (at least 20 per cent).

But there are many ifs and buts even after that. Each paisa has to be 'transparently' expended. If we indulge in wasteful and grandiose schemes, which would be siphoning the major part of the expenditure for the benefit of the highly privileged few, at the

cost of 80% of the people of Bangladesh, we shall then revert back to square one. We will be standing at the same place, when even the countries of the Sahel region pass us by.

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### BTV: Commercials and other flaws

Sir, Those of us who regularly watch Bangladesh Television, will have observed the carelessness in the transmission of programmes. One example is the insertion of commercials in English programmes (movies, serials, etc.). Understandably, during post-production of such programmes, blank spaces after a number of completed sequences are deliberately left for placing commercials by TV sta-

tions. Apparently, those in charge of controlling the transmission of these programmes in BTV do not follow the rule, otherwise they wouldn't insert advertisements right in the middle of a sequence.

Producers of BTV's own programmes should consider leaving similar blank spaces in dramas, musical shows, etc. for the insertion of commercials without disrupting a sequence. What happens now is that sponsors' advertisements abruptly cut into a sequence, and after the commercials there is a repeat of a few seconds of part of the sequence already shown before the commercial break. This is irritating and should be immediately stopped.

Another thing which annoys us a lot is the repeat of the same commercial before and during a sponsored programme. Couldn't the BTV authorities