

Give Parliament a Chance

Yesterday the 12th session of our Jatiya Sangsad (Parliament) opened with a ceremonial, and short session. The relative calmness of yesterday's session is the proverbial 'calm before the storm', and by all accounts, it is going to be quite a storm.

What started the season on the wrong foot was the Prime Minister's speech on 7th November. In her eagerness to castigate the opposition, especially, the MPs of one single party, she used to put it kindly, unparliamentary expressions. What she said, amounted to questioning the integrity and veracity of the honourable members.

Having realised the gravity of what can be generously termed as her 'misspeaking', the PM, in a very unusual move gave an hour-long interview to the state-run, Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS).

On the other hand, Sheikh Hasina, in her speech on Saturday, within a day of her return from China, has further embittered the already tense political situation, by a personal and blatantly unparliamentary attack on the Prime Minister herself.

It is in such a season of no-holds-barred attack and counter attack, that the Parliament opened yesterday. The question that we would like to raise is, what purpose is all this attack and bitterness serving?

We are totally opposed to the politics of bitterness and acrimony that both the PM and the Leader of the Opposition appear to be leading the nation towards. We urge upon both of them not to further dirty the already muddy waters of our politics.

Clearly, the defence forces of the country have come a long way and are keeping with the glorious tradition and ideals that the army are expected to follow. Their courage and sacrifice, dedication to duty and patriotism have matched their respect for democracy.

Army's Glorious Tradition

The armed forces, which observed their anniversary yesterday, have come through the most turbulent years since its historic beginning 22 years ago. Now in a democratic system of governance, the defenders of the country's territorial integrity should find their rightful place.

The men in the armed services have also left a mark in their service for the distressed humanity, particularly in times of emergency. Whether it is in the aftermath of cyclonic storms, or during devastating floods or any other natural calamities of outsize proportion, the highly trained and efficient service of the soldiers proves to be a boon for the victims.

Similarly, there being so many sugar mills in the country for so long, it is a shame to look for outside help. The sugar making technology is comparatively more basic than fertilizer.

Integration Does not Point to a Fortress Europe Yet

My wife has a beautiful China clay bowl with elaborate floral designs all over it. Nearly a century-old, it had belonged to her grandmother originally. My wife brings the bowl out on very special occasions.

So the Maastricht Treaty takes its name from the place where the leaders of the 12-nation European Community (EC) sat in December 1991 and agreed on a programme for unification of Europe.

At their October summit launching the Maastricht Treaty, EC leaders could not even agree on a new name for the Union. To signal a change in the state of integration, some summit leaders sought to be known as members of the European Union.

In 1915 the United States invaded Haiti to re-establish order and democracy and remained in the Caribbean country until 1934. Now, 59 years later, US troops returned to Haiti as part of a United Nations mission but the ruling military elite impeded their landing.

The US ship Harlan County carried an advance party of military engineers and instructors of the 1,600-strong UN force designed to supervise the restoration of democracy in Haiti.

The significance of the ship's ignominious retreat from Port du Prince goes far beyond the incident itself for three reasons: Firstly, it questions once again the effectiveness of the UN in trying to resolve international crises.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Salesian priest and theologian, was elected in December 1990 as the first democratic president in Haiti's history. With 70 per cent of the popular vote, he incarnated the dreams and hopes of millions of poor Haitians striving for a better life.

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Americas with 80 per cent of its people living below the poverty line. Most earn a meagre living out of the country's subsistence economy.

Unemployment stands at 70 per cent and so does the national illiteracy rate. It was the poor who supported Aristide's efforts to carry out structural changes, put an end to endemic state corruption and bring to justice those responsible for decades of violations of human rights.

This was too much for the mere one per cent of the population that takes away over 45 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product. Only seven months after his election, Aristide was overthrown in a bloody coup d'etat led by army general Raoul Cedras.

It signalled the end of democracy in the island and the beginning of Aristide's attempts to obtain the support of the international community for his eventual return. Not a single nation recognised the de facto government except, paradoxically, the Vatican.

The Organisation of American States imposed a trade embargo that proved utterly ineffective. Not until July this year, after the UN had imposed an oil, military and financial embargo on Haiti, did UN special mediator Dante Caputo's efforts finally pay off.

The BCIC has several urea/ammonia plants and there are more than a hundred engineers/technologists who have intimate knowledge of this technology.

The urea/ammonia project (under proper professional management) will be profitable, if the project cost is free from add-ups, which are unavoidable when foreign fund is obtained with the help of middlemen.

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Meanwhile, the EC Commission at Brussels is drawing up plans for stimulating economies of the member countries. The Commission in its latest estimated say that the EC economy contracted by 0.4 per cent in 1992. The recovery plan being debated now, postulates an economic growth rate of three per cent a year in the medium-term.

ALONG MY WAY

central bank and, attain European Monetary Union (EMU) latest by 1999. What might seem like a rather faltering start for the treaty, Britain and Denmark have opted out of the single currency provision at the very outset.

possibility appears dim. For instance, few, if any, will probably be able to bring down budget deficits to three per cent of GDP by 1997 from over six per cent now and keep it at that level, as required by the treaty.

Dangerous Precedent Set Over Aristide

Two years after being overthrown by the army, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide has failed to return to Haiti. The UN imposed an economic embargo on the Caribbean country and forced the military to negotiate.

signed an accord paving the way for the restoration of democracy in the country and the return of Aristide on October 30.

UN sanctions were "suspended" in late August after the spurious Haitian parliament had ratified Robert Malval — appointed by Aristide — as provisional prime minister.

The Haitian government is not a danger to anyone but its own inhabitants. For decades, different US administrations supported and financed dictatorial regimes in Haiti, including the bloody years of the Duvalier dynasty.

The Haitian military has always been a close ally of the US, so the Americans, rather than "eliminating" the military, are trying to eliminate the danger of social upheaval.

The army has made it clear that "the time when the civilian authority could impose its will on the military is gone."

Aristide did not want to sign the Governors' Island accord unless Cedras stepped down from his post as commander-in-chief of the army, otherwise, he stated "whoever I may appoint

authority. The other day it took me over 20 minutes to cross the New Elephant Road of around 7 pm. The chaos near Gullistan is still worse.

Would the concerned authority please try to live up to the realities of modern time?

Prof. Abdullah A. Haroon SSMC, Dhaka.

Audit objections

Sir, We understand that audit objections of serious magnitude involving misappropriation, defalcation and misuse of public funds in crores of Taka have been lying outstanding for years due to brief longevity of democratic institutions like the Committees of Public Accounts and Undertakings.

As the audit objections deal with public funds, it is logical that these should be brought to public notice through newspapers, so that the people could be aware of the delinquents, for whose misdeeds the country has been facing financial disaster.

It is, therefore, suggested that all audit reports placed before Public Accounts and Public Undertaking committees be published in newspapers for information of the deceived people and serious irregularities should be brought to the notice of the Prime Minister as and when they come to the notice of audit or anti-corruption people.

S Ahmed North Shajahanpur Dhaka-1000

The next Paris Aid Consortium meeting is knocking at the door. We should fix up the quantum of aid on the basis of present available reserve and balance of payment position.



JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE Exile extended

To the Editor...

Enterprise for wage earner

Sir, The above captioned letter, written by Motius Samad Chowdhury, (12th Nov) shows a potential for our independence from economic slavery. Allow me to refer to a recent advertisement by the BCIC (tender for the Shah Jalal fertilizer project) and a news about a sugar mill project from Pakistan.

The BCIC has several urea/ammonia plants and there are more than a hundred engineers/technologists who have intimate knowledge of this technology.

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doing it. Some would prefer to pare down labour costs, ease burdensome rules on employers and deregulate the labour market. Others would rather have a four-day week to save jobs.

SUCH talks as a four-day week, made happenings in Europe appear all the more remote to us. Yet events taking shape there do hold implications for us. The EC market provides the main outlet for our exports. We also look upon the EC as a donor agency.

Meanwhile, the EC-Bangladesh Sub-Commission held its 16th session earlier this month in Dhaka. The ongoing programme for cooperation between the two sides, particularly the progress in the implementation of EC-funded projects, comes to be reviewed in such meetings.

Progress has said that "US troops will find another Somalia in Haiti." No wonder President Bill Clinton ordered the withdrawal of the Harlan County from Port du Prince at the first signs of trouble.

Most Latin Americans want Aristide back in power, but the UN-US intervention sets a dangerous precedent. Also, it institutionalists double standards in international politics.

Nearly 70,000 Haitians have left the country as refugees since the coup two years ago. Aristide was one of them. When and if he comes back the Haiti he left will be completely different from the one he returns to.

LUIS TRICOT is a freelance Chilean journalist who writes and broadcasts on Latin American affairs.

OPINION

"Foreign Policy..."

This is in reference to the article written by Mr Shah A M S Kibria and published in your esteemed newspaper on 10th October last, under the caption "Foreign Policy: Are we Drifting in Uncharted Seas?"

In view of the previous agreements between the two countries and the assurances given by India, one should be slow to impute any mala fide intention to India, which played a vital role in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Both Bangladesh and India must remember that their common 54 rivers are the gifts of nature and the natural flow of their waters should not be intercepted by unnatural/artificial barrages to the prejudice of the people for whom the Divine dispensation provided the rivers in question.

Md Moksudor Rahman Senior Advocate and former Justice of the High Court Division