

Who Gains if JS is Left Incapacitated?

As the stalemate over the acceptance of privilege motion against the Leader of the Opposition by the Speaker of Parliament continues, the people of the country are keeping their fingers crossed. Leader of the Opposition, Sheikh Hasina has threatened to resign if the Speaker did not withdraw his decision. So far there is no sign of softening. Reportedly, the ruling BNP has made some moves which have not been found acceptable by the Opposition yet.

The ruling party, after the Prime Minister's blunder, did not do anything to ease the tension. Instead it went on the offensive to justify the position the Premier had taken. By doing so, it only ended up further complicating the situation. The Opposition also demonstrated an attitude guided more by defiance than by reason. In short what the ruling party and the Opposition are doing is amateurish, at best. They have combined their forces not only to undermine the status of Parliament but also their own. As parliamentarians, they not only represent the people, they are also the repository of people's confidence.

Amidst the political bickering and jealous protection of partisan interests, the parliamentarians seem to have lost sight of the country which must be above every other consideration. They should not forget that what they are now resorting to is a great disservice to the long struggle for democracy in which both played their historic role. If all they have achieved through so much sacrifice and painstaking commitment to democratic cause comes to naught simply because of their indiscretion and lack of flexibility, it is a tragic development for the country.

Evidently, there are not many options now. Either the ruling party and the Opposition must come to a broad understanding for the smooth functioning of the Jatiya Sangsad or preside over the stalemate of a democratic process. Sure enough, the resignation by the Opposition parliamentarians en masse is also a democratically recognised way but will it lead to a better parliament next time? What guarantee is there that resignation by the Opposition will lead to desired results as they see it? We believe that such a step by the Opposition will lead to erosion of public confidence in the parliamentary process.

What however is left as a lesson is most unpalatable. It is because of the erosion of public confidence in the capacity of the politicians to deliver the goods.

Now almost on the point of no return, what messages the members of the House will have for the country? If they fail to mend their fences, and lead the country to the worst that is feared, what they can expect to gain from this impasse? Certainly, they will have to pay a heavy price for playing with the people's hope and aspirations reposed in them. After all these are the faces who will once again be seen asking for votes. We have seen enough of political blunders and this Parliament elected through a free and fair election cannot afford any such wrong move.

We appeal to both the ruling party and the Opposition to talk in the language of reason and sink the present difference in the interest of the nation. In politics there are always negotiations and compromises. The current crisis can be solved only by the leaders of BNP and the AL. We appeal to both to put the interest of democracy above anything else.

Leave Birds Alone

If a picture sometimes tells a story more eloquently than words can do, then yesterday's Star Photo of a bird-seller carried on the front page did the trick quite effectively. A number of migratory birds dangling upside down in two bunches from his hands — all this for open sale on the city street — are a proof of how laws are flouted with impunity. Those who sell the guest birds may or may not know about the legal ban on such sale. This is a point only important when the level of dissemination of the information or the public response to it is taken into account. But more important, so far as the sale is concerned, is the fact that a mechanism for implementing the law is non-existent.

The problem with most of our laws is that the government enacts them without developing the logistic support or imparting necessary training for the law enforcers to do the job with any degree of efficiency and conviction. In case of the sale of birds, the law enforcers either turn a blind eye or simply do not know if it is illegal or feel it is none of their business or have a sort of arrangement with the violators of the law. Otherwise it is very difficult to explain their non-action, when they have been witnessing almost daily this breach of law, at this time of the year.

It takes little knowledge to understand that if the bird-sellers could not get a market here, the bird catchers would automatically found their efforts unfruitful. They could still catch some of the birds for their own consumption, but at least the commercial catching and killing of the winged guests could be averted. Perhaps we are too ill-equipped to enforce the law at the field level where they are enmeshed and shot. In that case, the environmentalists in league with the Private Voluntary Development Organisation (PVDO) could be of immense help. In fact, their activities at the grass-roots level include creation of pressure groups opposed to vandalism against nature. Once they have been made convinced of the environmental perils caused by the indiscriminate killing of these precious species, it will be pretty easier to ensure security of the birds' lives.

Apart from these two sides of the story, there is a third party which is no less blamable for the birds falling victim to the unnatural death. It is the human appetite for exotic meat. Unless we can rein in this appetite, there is little chance of saving the birds from illegal killing.

China Today: A Fleeting Glimpse of a Nation at Work

I have had the privilege of visiting China on several occasions — seven times to be exact — and each time it was a fascinating and rewarding experience. My latest visit was as a member of the five-member Awami League delegation led by the party president Sheikh Hasina. The ten-day visit took us to Beijing, Shanghai, Kwangchow and Shenzhen. We spent four days in Beijing but only a couple of days in each of the other cities. On such a tight schedule one can get only a fleeting glimpse of the breathtaking pace of the remarkable changes taking place in that vast country. However, against the background of my earlier visits the recent one did give me the opportunity to compare notes about what I had seen in the past.

Let me say at the very outset that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made most meticulous arrangements to ensure the success of the visit. Accommodation in a luxurious and spacious villa, transport by limousines, presence of interpreters and senior officials at every step reminded me of state visits though this was arranged at the party level. The programme was heavy but given the importance attached to the visit by the International Liaison Department of the Central Committee, it was not unexpected. Meetings were held at very senior level but the subtle distinction between the government and the party was maintained. Mr Hu Jintao, a member of the seven-member standing committee of the Central Committee, while welcoming Sheikh Hasina, expressed his satisfaction at the establishment of formal relations between the Bangladesh Awami League and the Communist Party of China. The past was not discussed except on a positive

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note. Both sides seemed to recognize the need for realistic approach to the future relation between them. Reference to the visit to China by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in 1953 and 1957, was warmly recalled. They noted that it was during an Awami League government headed by Mr Suhrawardy that formal relations between China and Pakistan was established. The leaders reminisced about the welcome accorded to Mr Chou En Lai by the people of Dhaka. The spiritual contribution of the great Bengali Buddhist scholar Atish Dipankar provided a historical footnote to the current relation between the two countries. I should add here that Mr Hu Jintao is not only a member of the Politbureau of the CPC but, I was told, the top man in charge of party affairs. Our meeting with senior leader, Mr Wu Zueqian, was a matter of particular pleasure for me. He recalled our meeting in Bangkok when he was the foreign minister of China. I had the privilege of receiving him at the annual session of the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific to which he led the Chinese delegation. Currently he is, among the many posts that he holds, the Vice-Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). The warmth of his personality was especially evident during the sumptuous dinner that he hosted in the exquisitely furnished Diaoyutai state guest house. This is the place, we were told, where president Nixon and other dignitaries are often entertained.

The substantive talks with Mr Li Chengren, Deputy Head

(Vice Minister) in the International Liaison Department of the CPC Central Committee on Sunday, 7th November marked the beginning of the formal party to party relations. Four basic principles will govern the party-to-party relations. These are: independence, mutual respect, equality and non-interference in each other's internal affairs. Forms of cooperation between the two parties will be: exchange of visits by leaders and by other members at different levels, special study tours, exchange of published party

documents, attendance at party congresses and cooperation in mutually agreed fields. The Chinese side concentrated on explaining their own economic policies. Indeed they were all tireless in describing the different features of the Socialist Market Economy of China which has already transformed the country's economic scene. It was pointed out, with legitimate pride, that China was expected to achieve a GDP growth rate of 13.3 per cent this year. Last year it was 12.6 per cent. These are very high rates by any standard and only in East and South East Asia comparable growth rates have been attained. But mere statistical data do not reflect the vitality and the explosive energy of the people and the breath-taking pace of the changes in the physical appearance of the country. The ancient and somewhat

somnolent look of the country has already been replaced by sky scrapers and modern buildings, wide roads full of sleek and shiny cars, bright lights, and well-fed and healthy citizens attired in all kinds of clothes. Gone are the days of drab and dull blue unisex jackets and trousers. People seem to take pride in dressing well and fashionably.

It was explained to us that after the victory of the Communist Party in 1949 China adopted the Soviet model for the reconstruction and development

initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 addressed the problem of food production as the highest priority. Over a billion people had to be fed. China has 22 per cent of the world population but only 7 per cent of the arable land. The farmers received their land back, not as owners because ownership remained vested in the state, but as 'users' of land. Upon our query, we were told that the farmers not only had the use of the land during their life time but their heirs could inherit the land. Despite the point made about 'ownership' it was clear that the farmers were given a free hand to get the best out of land for maximizing production and profit. They seemed to have succeeded so well that today China cannot only feed its vast population but even export some food commodities. They do import some food but that is done to increase the variety in the people's diet.

Unlike the erstwhile Soviet Union, which could not produce enough food for its people, China solved the food problem by the middle eighties and turned its attention to small and medium scale rural industries. These agro-based and highly decentralized industries absorbed the surplus farm hands and made use of local raw materials for processing. We were told that fully one third of the nation's output value is produced by these township enterprises. Next, the authorities focused attention on the 'special economic zones' in the coastal areas of the country. The growth rate in these areas is perhaps a world record. For example, we were told that the growth rate of Shenzhen special economic zone this year is ex-

ceeded to the 46 per cent. Unless one saw the skyscrapers of Shenzhen and its huge number of factories humming with activity, one would have found it difficult to believe such figures. The pace of growth in these areas is truly astonishing.

Following the policy laid down by Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese are now 'seeking truth from facts.' This really means that objective conditions and not theoretical or ideological doctrines should determine policy. Economic development has been accepted as the central task for the nation. In the process, they are 'building socialism with Chinese characteristics.' The phrase frequently used by the leaders and also by the news media is 'socialist market economy.' In practice, there are a number of corollaries of these directives from the paramount leader. Private enterprise has been given a free hand in the development of the economy. Public sector or, as they say, state owned industries and enterprises co-exist with privately owned industries. Most of the large and basic industries are still state owned. But the technique of management has been adjusted to conform with the current philosophy of socialist market economy. The other most important feature of the new policy is the 'opening up' of China or the 'open door' policy. These are so far-reaching and fundamental policy initiatives that not only the economy of China but, as a result, even the character of the state is undergoing profound change.

During our visit we not only had an opportunity to get very high level briefing on these policies but also the chance to observe the situation on the ground. I intend to write another article about these fascinating changes now under way in this great nation.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

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Arafat is Obsessed with Proving that Peace Means Prosperity

Mounir B Abboud writes from Beirut

Chairman Arafat's argument to wealthy Palestinians in diaspora: You were generous in time of war, now is the time to reap the fruit of your generosity.

DREAMS, dreams, dreams. That's what everyone seems to have in the sleepy town of Jericho in the occupied West Bank.

They all hope their dreams will materialise when PLO leader Yasser Arafat arrives in town late in December or early January, and when thousands of Palestinian exiles begin to return to their homes under the peace agreement the Palestinian Liberation Organisation signed with Israel last September.

In advance of all that, property prices have soared, shops are getting fresh merchandise, the only hotel, Hashem Palace, is being renovated and expatriate businessmen are offering their funds and expertise to help in reconstruction and development.

Chairman Arafat is obsessed with proving to his downtrodden people that peace means prosperity. Failure to achieve this could mark not only an end to the peace process but also the end of Mr Arafat's career.

Palestinian prosperity constitutes the key to the removal of poverty as a regional breeding ground for militant Islam, Arafat's numerous supporters in Jericho argue. But there are many in the Gaza Strip who disagree.

We will never sell our land,

our dignity, our right to self-determination, our independence and our Palestinian cause for all the money in the world, said a member of the Islamic resistance movement Hamas. The armed struggle will continue even after the establishment of Palestinian administration in Jericho and Gaza.

Watching the euphoria of people in Jericho and the militancy of people in Gaza, one cannot but wonder which trend will ultimately prevail. This uncertainty is one main reason why some prospective Palestinian and Arab investors believe it's still too early to make any serious investment move in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel is due to withdraw its forces from the two areas in December.

Palestinian investors, who have greater means than local businessmen in the occupied areas, are aware that their taking over huge construction projects, particularly in the Gaza Strip, over a brief period could create sensitivities among the locals. But they point out that they had come to offer their experience, and they should have priority over Western investors.

Chairman Arafat has been pressing wealthy Palestinians in diaspora to invest their resources in the development of

the fledgling Palestinian entity. His argument, as reported by one Palestinian businessman, you were generous in time of war. Now is the time for you to reap the fruit of your generosity.

Few of these businessmen did come from nearby Jordan to explore. One group thought it could help in building the harbour in Gaza. The French government has indicated it might be interested in funding the Gaza Port project and a road linking Gaza with Jericho.

Other projects on Mr Arafat's shopping list include nearly all attributes of an independent state — airports, roads, telecommunications, broadcasting facilities, water works, power stations, an educational system, adequate security, and other projects that can create jobs and turn the refugee camps into urban centres with decent housing.

Many of the Palestinian emigrants have not visited the occupied territories since 1967, while some have gone there over long intervals. But they were

not showing unusual interest in the latest developments and what would follow the implementation of the PLO-Israeli agreement.

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not showing unusual interest in the latest developments and what would follow the implementation of the PLO-Israeli agreement. In seeking funding for his budding Palestinian state, Mr Arafat is taking a leaf out of Israeli history. For over 40 years,

Israeli leaders have capitalised on European feelings of guilt for failing to rescue European Jews from Hitler's gas chambers. They skillfully used the Holocaust to secure funding to their Jewish state.

Mr Arafat, on the other hand, holds European countries responsible for the plight of the Palestinian people, and hopes that they, too, will come forth with sufficient funding to help resolve one of the most intractable problems in the world.

Mr Arafat estimates he needs over US\$10 billion in the next

seven years to put the embryonic state on its feet. We are starting from zero. All our infrastructure has been destroyed, he often tells reporters.

An international conference of donor countries recently raised around US\$2 billion, which Mr Arafat considers 'peanuts.' Until he is able to improve his relations with the oil-rich Arab states, strained since the Gulf War of 1990-1991, the PLO leader will have to depend on the Western industrialised world for support.

— Depthnews Asia

OPINION

Eradication of Poverty ... a Sine Qua Non for Bangladesh

We have witnessed the rebuilding from rubble, after the last world war, of Germany, Japan and South Korea; each in their own entity today recognised giants in the fields of science, technology and finance.

We have witnessed the emergence of many industrial giants, including the above countries, where economic stability is of enviable proportions.

Bangladeshis are no less nationalists, no less capable yet 80% of its people live in below subsistence, or very low poverty level, why? because the social, economic and political powers have, and still, remain in the hands of a privileged few. The need to evolve a policy to do optimum welfare to the maximum possible population is not their cup of tea. These decision makers and planners are of the rich, for the rich and by the rich. Unless we can break off the suffocating hold of these few, Bangladesh is destined to keep watching the glorious march of socio-political instability trampling unhindered upon the hopes and aspirations of the common man.

Some pundits (whom I had the unfortunate experience of discussing this issue with) pompously stated that eradication of poverty in Bangladesh will never be allowed to happen by some 'greater powers' so that they continue to 'dominate'. Distastefully enough, these so-called great minds seem to take this view for granted thus purporting, supporting and establishing that it is true that when rape is inevitable relax and enjoy. I am of the firm opinion now that this country has no pundits. These are 'escapists' in the self-tailored garbs of pundits. It is high time now for us, the commoners with limited knowledge, to not only speak out but take it upon ourselves the religious duty to uphold the sanctity of the war of liberation and liberate this beautiful country from the stranglehold of dependence and dominance. We could do it, albeit with much sacrifice, with the thin west Pakistan, hence there is no reason now why we cannot clean up our own house.

Those who have proved to us for all these years that making the rich richer and the poor poorer is the basis for remaining in power must be given a different message: 'Get off your high horse, learn from and follow those great selfless Bangladeshis like late Maulana

Bhashani, Dr Yunus and the late Dr Ibrahim. Even if you can show a little of their total selfless dedication the picture of Bangladesh is bound to change for the better!'

In addition to the power-holders, bureaucrats and otherwise, it is also necessary for our politicians to change their philosophies (mostly redundant) and get down to serious and matured politics instead of petty politics.

Bangladesh, for the first time has the fantastic combination of a democratically elected government and an equally powerful opposition. Let it be known to all those who sit in our Jatiya Sangsad that you are there because we put you there not to waste time on matters that concern your endless demands of privileges, endless arguments on who has said what, continuous mutual mud slinging and everything else except doing what you are there for. This winter session has also started off on a wrong note and we fear that once again nothing concrete to eradicate the miseries of the people is going to take place.

So, I as a commoner, appeal that everyone involved in the proceedings of this winter session of our respected Jatiya Sangsad spend 100% of the time towards formulating the long overdue policy aimed at 'eradication of poverty'.

Once again, as a commoner, I take the liberty to put forward a few pointers:

1. Loose decision makings, often found to be overlapping, do not retard the pace of pauperisation of the huge mass.
2. Development should be systematically taken to the countryside emphasising upon agricultural and industrial based gaining ventures.
3. Evolving of formula to exterminate the age-old disparity between urban and rural areas by accepting, first of all, that 90% people do not live in cities but they are the ones who work from dawn to dusk to provide us most of the agricultural produce we consume on our expensive dining tables, and secondly, that a country destitute of real rural advancement must obtain state of the art from advanced countries for total mechanised production to attain higher yield.

4. Bring amend to the excuse that each government is caught in a dilemma between wanting to introduce modern technology for development and the unavailability of funds to do so. This can be done if the policymakers shift their focus to create harnessing of the colossal strength that lies dormant in the idle and mostly unskilled/semi skilled huge manpower. In today's Bangladesh industry accounts for only about 10-12% of the GNP and employs just about 10% of the total working force. The history of all developed countries stands evidence that without industrialisation neither optimum agricultural production can be achieved nor the problem of unemployment solved. Without these the purchasing power of the mass keeps reducing resulting in various types of anti-social activities to survive. The present day moral degradation, drug addiction, physical and psychological breakdowns of our youth, frustration and a complete collapse of family values can only keep getting worse.

5. The onus of priority of the Sangsad during this session should fall upon freeing this nation from the fetters of poverty as then situations will be automatically created to face other poverty aligned problems, such as, illiteracy, non-adoption of family planning measures, malnutrition, etc.

In the final analysis, the honourable members of the Sangsad are requested to note that the headlines of all the newspapers say, November 26, bear significant proof that personality clashes, party affiliations and uncompromising attitudes on nationally insignificant issues are only a wastage of time which the country's multifarious problems can ill afford and yet there is total lack of matured initiative from any side to stop this rignarole and get down to serious work to eradicate the vice of all vices, the fundamental problem of Bangladesh — poverty, by creating a road to socio-economic revival.

Syed Tasleem Hussain
Utara Model Town, Dhaka

To the Editor

T & T Board

Sir, Within the T & T Board — from 'nil' bills to ghost bills, anything is possible. But, of course, these things take place at the expense of the government and innocent telephone subscribers.

The operation of digital telephones is now computerised/automated, and hence the possibility of malpractices has been greatly reduced though not eradicated. However, it's with the analogue phones maybe the switch room operators continue to enjoy the field day!

As confirmed by Mr Md N A Majumdar, an ex-engineer of the T & T Board, the repeating and signal units in the analogue phone exchange necessitates manual touch every four to five hours to put the changeover in function. This requires the entry of 'operators' in the switch room and that is perhaps the time the architects of 'system loss' manipulate circuits, switches and whatever tools at their disposal to either decrease or increase meter readings.

Ghost billing of course is understood, but why decrease meter readings? Yes, this is where the 'do business at the expense of the government' is conducted. In effect, such 'operators' are the 'hired' men of several thousand analogue telephone owners especially in the cities. The benefits of such reduced or suppressed meter readings ultimately go to these blue-eyed customers who allegedly pay monthly 'retainers'. It is so alleged that if an operator helps to suppress say Tk 5000 worth calls, he gets around Tk 1500 -2000 while many of the numerous mushroom buying houses, garment factories, agencies and other organisations that have sprung in Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi etc. are also among such

'customers'.

On a conservative estimate the government is losing crores of Taka annually due to malpractices of this nature in the T & T Board. How can such irregularities take place under the nose of the divisional engineers and other senior officials who are there to oversee and supervise the work of switch room operators?

One way to stop this malpractice, if there is any such, is to rotate the operators between the switch rooms on a daily or weekly basis without stagnating them in the same switch room for months. If this too is not possible, the government should immediately computerise the operation of analogue telephones in the country.

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications and the chairman of the T & T Board should at least now intervene and devise ways and means to stop this colossal and criminal waste of revenue.

Md Ali
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

BPMPA and review of Drug Policy

Sir, Recently we came to know through different newspapers that the government has formed a committee headed by Deputy Leader of the House Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury to evaluate, review and amend the Drug Policy of 1982. For the betterment of people, we welcome the formation of this type of committee. But without the participation of the representatives of Bangladesh Private Medical Practitioners Association (BPMPA), the credibility of any kind of committee relating health system and drugs may decrease.

For this, we demand the in-

clusion of the representative of BPMPA in any national committee relating health system and drugs. The BPMPA, representing twelve thousand registered medical practitioners, then may take pro-people steps towards improving the healthcare system.

Through newspapers, we came to know the government is going to withdraw all kinds of restrictions on drugs and pharmaceutical industries e.g. price control, essential drugs list, block list and other drug principles except quality control. Without the opinion of BPMPA this type of steps will isolate special initiatives of these committee from common people and general doctors.

Drug Policy was praised by people but this type of steps seems to have been suggested by vested interest. So we appeal to all concerned in the present democratic government to come out from such clutches.

We promise to support any steps to solve the problems of common doctors and to improve the healthcare system of common masses and so we demand inclusion of the representatives of BPMPA in committees for drafting and implementing health policy.

Dr Ashiqul Alam
General Secretary, BPMPA

Water tax

Sir, I protest the 10 per cent rise in water tax. House rent will increase as the house owners would get a ready pay. Why pay for huge system loss?

Bring down human system loss to 20 per cent and technical system loss to below 18 per cent and you need not increase the tax to raise funds for future improvement!

A tenant
Mohammadpur, Dhaka