

Must be Dealt with an Iron Hand

It was all so very anticipated, expected and predictable, yet it could not be pre-empted. The full day's inferno at Sathkira triggered by the publicly resisted and evidently unwanted visit to that outlying district town by Golam Azam has been, to say the least, extremely unsavoury. Day before yesterday it was at Sathkira but tomorrow it can be at Setabganj or some other place. So, the assessable and calculable harm to civic peace associated with such movements and attempted political appearances cannot be given a go-by.

A clear indication of resistance against his arrival was available when an all-party political alliance, obviously minus the Jamaat, had called for a hartal in the town. But the Jamaat, bent upon as it was to push through, ventured a rally four hours ahead of schedule on the day. The reported carrying of weapons including hand-bombs and the attempt to bring out a procession by them had had the effects of chases and counter-chases, clashes and counter-clashes. The fleeing armed elements pushing their way through allegedly damaged shops and caused arson in some important public and private buildings. Quite a few hundred people were injured in what turned out to be a battlefield with the police seemingly being within the shaving range of opening fire which, if they had done, would have made matters certainly worse. However, they made do with lobbing tear gas shells.

Our question is could we not avoid all these by taking timely steps against political brinkmanship by elements the society has overwhelmingly grown wary of, reminiscing their role in the Liberation War? However much they may try to slough off that image by holding occasional meetings with democratic forces it does not wash with the general public.

Our point is, maintenance of civic peace has to be based on facts and trends and, that there is little scope for being fiction-oriented when it comes to recognising a political situation, loaded to the brim with law and order implications. The Constitution does provide for the right to assembly and participation in public meetings and processions but the stress is on the word 'peacefully and without arms'. That is why these are always subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of public order or the Republic's health.

By not a very strange coincidence, the demonstrators of Khatme Nabuyat, aided by workers of Jamaat-e-Islami and some other Islamic organisations, blocked all roads to the Secretariat on Wednesday, demanding that the government declare the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims. The fanatical ferrency on a non-issue not merely paralysed traffic for several hours but also opened our eyes to a conspiratorial design of an international origin to create chaos in our society. The law enforcement agencies foiled the planned sit-in near the Secretariat in the capital city with relative ease but in the outlying areas they would need a well-thought-out stratagem to make an effective intervention possible in case of need. Essentially the attitude should be to deal with the peace-breaking zealotry with an iron hand.

Let Not this be a Foretaste

There was a tell-tale photograph of a gigantic edifice now home to the Dhaka City Corporation, the Nagar-Bhaban that is, on a national daily's front page on Tuesday. It somehow reminded one very much of the Venetian canalscapes by the celebrated canaletto — something "jumping out of the history books on the Italian Renaissance. The impression is created partly by classical colonnades of the elevation of that huge building. But the Venice or Canaletto or the water elements catches you first and you cannot move on to an appreciation of the architecture. In the far anterior part of the sight facade of the building an olden golden porch materialises as if from mist, conjuring itself up from days long past and forgotten. And the porch straddles over a canal that rushes all the way to the foreground of the picture. A full reflection of the porch in the canal water and the massive shadow cast on the same by the massive Nagar-Bhaban building gives the right half of the picture a beautiful painterly quality. Look at it masking the left half, you will be tempted to make an enlargement of the same and have it on your wall.

Now what has the Nagar-Bhaban to do with canals etc in bustling midst of one of the crowdiest of world's cities? The photo-caption comes to the rescue of the befuddled reader. The canal is in fact a brick-soled road leading to the porch. The caption laments that the edifice costing crores upon crores of Taka has come to this even before it has hardly been completed. All because of the corporation's impatience about moving to the new and lavish site and an untenable haste to open the building ceremonially much before it was fit to be commissioned. They were in a race to beat the corporation elections very obviously to make a presentation of it to the victor in the hustings and the first *malik* of the place.

Indeed, what was the hurry really? Some people in the corporation evidently care for effect and serve to impress at the cost of national loss. The hail storm and rainy season are just setting in and the Venetian ambience promises to continue pushing the works bill to soar skywards.

The Dhaka mayoral election and particularly the convincing victory in it by a charismatic 'son of the soil' from the opposition have given rise to many expectations justified so far by the first flurry of Mohammad Hanif's high-principled talks. But the pompous corporation building and its pathetic situational reality bring to mind fears and suspicions that had long been our companion in the seemingly unending days of undemocracy.

THE near drama at Geneva is now a fortnight old. But there is no end to Indian government's jubilation over the withdrawal of the human rights violation resolution by Pakistan. It is as if the Kashmir problem has been sorted out.

What happened at Geneva has, at best, proved New Delhi's greater international pull than Islamabad's. It also showed that Pakistan foolishly took the whole thing to a pitch where the issue got boiled down to mere win or loss. Human rights violation receded into the background.

The lesson for both countries is that very few nations take a categorical stand on such issues when the chips are down. The United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), before which Pakistan placed the resolution, has 53 members. Of these, 45 had informed New Delhi as well as Islamabad beforehand that they would abstain from voting. So the whole fuss was over eight.

While wooing members, both India and Pakistan have washed their dirty linen in public. Not that their animosity towards each other is a secret, but many countries have reportedly begun to wonder whether Kashmir is a cause or a consequence of their enmity. Now they know more than ever before that the charge of violation of human rights against India is as much true as the complicity of Pakistan in training and arming the militants.

True, there is exaggeration on both counts. All stories of killings and atrocities are not

correct. Some, representing Indian human rights organisations, have pointed out this in their reports after visiting the state. Now there are many instances of punishment meted out to men and officers of the security forces than before.

Similarly, all the blame for militancy cannot be heaped on Pakistan alone because many Kashmiris have taken to arms after having found that the ballot box was managed from New Delhi. Till four years ago, there was no uprising, although Pakistan tried to foment it earlier. (Authentic accounts are now available how in 1965 Islamabad inducted "groups of armed men, disguised as freedom fighters into Kashmir to carry out a sustained campaign of sabotage.")

Kashmir is a political question and it has to be tackled as such. No amount of internationalising it will help, as Islamabad has experienced it again and again. Nor is New Delhi's attitude that there is no problem except the one created by Pakistan is of any avail. Islamabad may be guilty of exploiting the situation but it has been simmering for years. It is no use shutting eyes to the facts.

Most Kashmiris have got alienated. They feel that their special status has been eroded

bit by bit. Their resentment against the rulers that Delhi has imposed on them from time to time has turned into defiance, laced with guns. The challenge is how to retrieve the people in the state.

Unfortunately, domestic politics of both countries, more so of Pakistan, has tangled the problem still further. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto cannot afford to lower her rhetoric because Nawaz Sharif, the opposition leader, is using

Geneva. It may have been an adroit political strategy because in case India had lost, the BJP would not have been able to make noise as the opposition is doing in Pakistan. But it also suggests that Rao will be more wary in offering concessions to Pakistan on the one hand and the Kashmiris on the other.

The Kashmiris would have also realised that the problem, despite all that they have done, has stayed essentially between

member, it is Saudi Arabia's business. How do Indian Muslims come into the picture? Is their future dependent on what Saudi Arabia does or does not do? Are Indian Muslims lesser citizens?

Dinesh Singh's remark is all the more unfortunate because his state minister Salman Khurshid, a Muslim, did a good job and even earned the wrath of Pakistan, which called him "a rented Hindu". Khurshid did what was expected of him. Thank god, India won. Otherwise, one shudders to imagine what Dinesh Singh would have said against Khurshid.

What probably cost Pakistan the support of Iran and China, its staunch allies, is the pernicious principle of fact finding it introduced to the resolution. Visits by human rights organisations or the Red Cross are understandable. But no country, much less China or Iran, can accept the principle of admitting in a foreign fact-finding mission. Had it been agreed, it would have been a potent weapon in the hands of western powers, particularly America. Pakistan, too, would not have escaped it.

Both China and Iran have also their axe to grind. Beijing has portions of Kashmir, which General Ayub had given it in 1962. It does not want the

whole question to be reopened, as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and America are demanding. Iran is opposed to Washington coming into the picture, an inevitable fallout if New Delhi had been pushed to the wall at Geneva.

The question is where do we go from here? True, there is a danger of another conflict because the relationship between India and Pakistan has probably reached a point of no return. But another round of hostilities is no solution; it will spell more ruin than the earlier three wars did. Ultimately, there has to be give and take by all sides. The solution will not be to the full liking of either India, Pakistan or, for that matter, the Kashmiris. But that will be the plus point of the solution.

Meanwhile, any effort towards lowering the temperature in Kashmir will be helpful. Jammu and Kashmir governor K V Krishna Rao is quite right when he says that any discussions on granting greater autonomy to the valley would be held only with "elected representatives of the people." But he relies on National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, who is presently not relevant. Foisting him on the state once more will squeeze out whatever few chances of compromise are there.

My hunch is that America will try to keep the problem alive. It is obvious from the deliberate omission of Kashmir from the US delegate's speech at Geneva. He did not want his views to be lost in the shadow-boxing.

A Pyrrhic Victory?

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BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

The Kashmir card to win the game, which he has otherwise lost. When he was prime minister, he had not ruled out even the third option. By asking the head of Pakistan foreign minister Aseef Ali or his foreign office hands, as Nawabzada Nasrullah, head of the All Party Committee on Kashmir has done, he is only looking for scapegoats, not helping the situation.

On the Indian side, prime minister Narasimha Rao has limited his options by having Atal Behari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party as leader of the Indian delegation at

India and Pakistan. This should make them reassess their strategy. They have made many mistakes. One of them is the banishment of Kashmiri Pandits from the valley. This has given the movement a religious colour. They must encourage their return so that the protest is credible, of the state, not of a fundamentalist group.

Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh's outburst against Saudi Arabia has not helped either. Whether Saudi Arabia wanted to sponsor Pakistan's resolution but could not do so because it was not a UNHRC

Aid for Priority Human Concerns should be Trebled

THE world needs an entirely new approach to the allocation of official development assistance (ODA) that focuses on priority human concerns.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says, "Aid should be directed at human priority issues, such as health and basic education, and at environmental security and reducing population growth."

In its most recent Human Development Report, UNDP says at least 20 per cent of total aid should be allocated to people's priority concerns, three times the present 6.5 per cent. The annual report said ODA should be allocated to people rather than to countries and must be based on levels of poverty.

For instance, the ten countries which host three-quarters of the world's poorest people should receive around three-quarters of ODA and not the present one-quarter.

ODA must also be in the mutual interest of recipients and donors, the UNDP stresses. Recipients can insist that ODA allocations be guided by their own priorities in the fields of human development, poverty alleviation, employment creation and accelerated economic growth.

On the other hand, donors could legitimately link their ODA policy dialogue with their concerns of such matters as human rights, reducing international migration pressures,

pollution, nuclear proliferation and drug trafficking, as well as control of terrorism.

UNDP proposes that three per cent of aid funds be earmarked for spending within donor countries to increase public awareness "of the interdependence" of the industrialized and developing countries.

The ODA, UNDP says, should be accompanied by a new form of policy dialogue based on the real interests of people, rather than those of the governments of developing countries that seek aid.

"This means putting more pressure on governments to improve the distribution of income and assets, to direct spending away from military towards social concerns and to attend to the larger issues of better national governance," UNDP explains.

Technical assistance should be used increasingly to hire national experts, to invest in local institutions and to accelerate human development in the recipient countries, according to the UNDP report.

An earlier Human Development Report bared that developing countries are being denied market opportunities worth ten times the annual flows of ODA.

"The long-term solution to poverty", it says, "is not charity. It is more equitable access for poor nations to global market opportunities."

The UNDP points out that

Depthnews reports from New York

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the basic motivation for donors to give aid is to win friends in the Cold War confrontation between socialism and capitalism.

For instance, more than half of the United States' bilateral assistance in 1991 was earmarked for five strategically important countries: Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Philippines and El Salvador.

With more or less five million people and a per capita income of US \$1,000, El Salvador received more US assistance than Bangladesh, a country with 16 million people and per capita income of only US \$120.

UNDP further reports that Egypt received aid of US \$370 per poor person in 1991 compared with just US \$4 per poor person for India although Egypt has nearly twice the income of India.

UNDP notes that bilateral ODA is badly allocated, showing the considerable potential for beneficial restructuring. It cites the following examples:

* Twice as much ODA per capita goes to high military spenders as to more moderate spenders;

* Only a quarter of ODA goes to ten countries containing three-quarters of the world's poor.

hand to collaborate on development programmes for developing countries, a report from the organization says.

The UN Task Group, called Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP), is composed of the UNDP, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), World Food Programme (WFP), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The UN report says four

countries — Bangladesh, Bolivia, Malawi and the Philippines — have recently been identified for joint programming.

The lead agency in each country is UNICEF in Bolivia; UNDP, Philippines; and the WFP and IFAD, Bangladesh and Malawi.

According to the same report, the five agencies in the JCGP provide close to 80 per cent of UN funding for field activities.

OPINION

"A House of Millionaires"

Mahbubur Rob Sadi

Many of us, while they discuss the issue of aspirations and achievements of a democratic movement, do not or cannot assess the limit of the possibilities as determined by objective realities. It is, therefore, they most often, either because of being emotionally propelled or intent on dramatizing the point, raise the question, "Is this what we fought for?"

Mr Shah A M S Kibria has raised such a question about our Parliament in connection with his assumption that our Members of Parliament are very rich. He quotes (The Daily Star, February 27) from Washington Post where a writer, has mentioned the necessity of reducing the millionaires' influence on US Senate. And then he asks about the validity of the Post observation in Bangladesh. I have an answer for Mr Kibria. The problem of influence of the rich on politics is almost common throughout the world. But if we equate the US millionaires' influence in the Senate with a possible similar situation in Bangladesh that will be an exercise in unreality. A great majority of the members of our Parliament are not even financially shipshape and many of them haven't as yet repaid the debt they incurred during their election.

Nevertheless, influence of the rich on politics even in our country cannot be denied. But if this militates one to ask "Is this what we fought for?" I believe I have a very positive answer. The goal of the people's movement of 1990 was mainly to achieve a Parliament elected by the people through a free and fair election conducted by a neutral caretaker government. That was done as perfectly as possible. There was no demand that the members of the Parliament had to be poor. And a man with average intelligence and even without much of political experience easily understands that it is very difficult for a poor man to get elected. The socio-economic realities of the country would not permit that.

What do the people generally fight for in a democratic movement? The right of adult franchise, freedom of speech, opinion and association, independence of judiciary, freedom of information and journalism have historically been subjects of democratic movements all over the globe. To look at it from another point of view we may call a society democratic where each and every citizen can freely exercise his socio-economic rights. If someone raises the point of economic emancipation, I shall say that, specially in a society like ours, it is a dream and will remain practically impossible to achieve for years to come.

If we talk about the oldest democracy of the world which was practised among the citizens

alone (slaves and Metics or resident foreigners had no part in the political life of the city), it is said that the "fundamental thought in the Greek idea of the state was the harmony of a life shared in common by all its members" (Page 25, A History of Political Theory by George H. Sabine). It may be mentioned that the reforms of the constitution of Cleisthenes was adopted in 507 B.C.

The great President of the United States of America Mr Abraham Lincoln, who is known as the father of modern democracy, said, "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." One of the most modern preachers of democracy Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi has said of democracy: "The true measure of the justice of a system is the amount of protection it guarantees to the weakest."

The wisest sage of the sub-continent Rabindranath Tagore said the same long before but in different words: "The country in which every man has a value, grows into greatness with most adroit and skillful means." (কৃত্তিকায়, কলকাতা)

If we go through the history of social movements all over the world, we shall see that in almost all cases of struggle for socio-economic emancipation, this stuff was never fully attained for each and every member of the society. Hardly anyone would object to the proposition "all men are born equal" as a matter of obvious truism, specially at the close of the Second Millennium. But if we want to see an exact reflection of this in reality, at least it has to be assured that each and every child gets equal opportunity for its physical and spiritual growth. This has not yet been achieved in Abraham Lincoln's own country, which is decidedly one of the most developed countries of the world.

Now let us examine our society and try to find out why poor people cannot enjoy their democratic rights. There is no need to mention that the democratic right in connection with the elections means a two-way street. There is the right to cast vote in favour of someone else and then there is also the right to get votes from others in one's own favour. If I am not wrong 75% of our population cannot even afford the security money needed to be a candidate for the Parliament election. Another 10% cannot afford the huge sums of money needed for election campaigning. Therefore practically only 15% can give and take votes and

85% can only give but cannot take it.

To make the elections less expensive Mr Kibria has proposed some specific measures. There are: 1) To prohibit all kinds of charity at the time of election; 2) to prohibit building of gates during the election time by anybody; 3) to ban hiring of trucks and buses for election campaign and muscle-parading processions; 4) election camps in the day of election should not be set up by the candidates. The purpose of these camps may be served by the Election Commission through mailing the serial numbers of the voters directly to them; and 5) number of voting centres may be increased to relieve the voters from the trouble of travelling a long way to cast their votes. And above all, enforcement of the laws (old and new) should be tightened during the election season.

Although each and every part of these proposals cannot be put into practice effectively, there is broadly nothing much to oppose the implementation of his ideas. But it will be foolish to think that a reasonable reduction of election expenditure will be possible by implementing these measures. Because the candidates who get involved in malpractice in election spend a very small part of their total election expenses in these activities. An overwhelmingly major part is spent in an underhand way. Items: (1) purchase of election touts, (2) purchase of hooligans to threaten innocent voters, (3) hellish election eve night attempt to purchase village after villages, (4) paying bribes to whoever is involved in the conduct of election. The measures proposed by Mr Kibria would at best sprinkle some drops of water on a parched up terrain crying for Noah's deluge.

I think Mr Kibria should look at the problem from a positive outlook and try to find out the inherent reasons for the domination of politics by wealth. And every conscious person knows the reason is poverty. A thing which is not ready to be sold can never be bought. Experienced bureaucrats like Mr Kibria should try to formulate measures which can reduce the huge gap between the rich and the poor. As this goal cannot be achieved overnight, for the time being I want to console Mr Kibria that he doesn't need to worry. Not for argument's sake but with full of confidence in our people I want to assert that in this respect our people are much better than the Americans. Many examples can be cited where rich candidates were ignominiously defeated by much poorer candidates. Many of our voters have even been infected by the fun of taking money and then forget about it.

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.

Status of women

Sir, I must congratulate Mr Towheed Feroze on his remarks on the status of women in general and their participation in beauty contests in particular.

He has succinctly pointed out the hypocrisy prevailing in our very male-oriented society. In my own village, for instance, we have the headmaster of the local primary school marrying a girl from class six although he is already married and has over half-a-dozen children from his previous wife who happens to be very much alive and well.

Nor is he the only person I know claiming devotion to the Almighty on one hand and cradle-snatching on the other. In fact, a survey of the marital habits of such folks would prove most interesting to those of us who neither claim special links to the Almighty nor wish to marry a second, third or fourth time, and specially not noble girls snatched from the cradle.

Shaf Rahman, Char Kamlapur, Faridpur

II

Sir, I feel too much fuss in being made over the "Miss Bengali 1994" contest. I refer to the letters of Zehana Akhter (9 March) and Syeda Zakia Ahsan (20 March) on the issue, published in your Letters to the Editor column.

Whether it is appropriate for a Bengali woman to participate in such a contest should be left up to the individual. After all,

such participation can hardly have a negative impact on the status of women who are already 'objects of abuse'. How can Bengali women hope to "twinkle in the firmament of culture and heritage" when the majority of them are discriminated against and blatantly oppressed by their own husbands, brothers and fathers!

Firdaus Ahmed, Banani, Dhaka

Tender for terms of reference

Sir, During the past few months, we very often read in newspapers, heard over radio and BTV regarding finalisation of terms of reference on alleged corruption cases of ruling party stalwarts. The learned JS members could not agree to record the correct terms of reference so that JS committee could work accordingly. We know very well how corruption cases of General Ershad were unearthed as the people were asked to drop information in this regard in a tender box placed at Minto Road. The learned judge scrutinised all those cases and proceedings were held.

Against this backdrop, it would be fair and just on the part of the ruling party (and also for the sake of transparency) to place a similar box maybe for each of the alleged corrupt officials, public representatives etc, and the public can definitely give information

as was done in the case of General Ershad. There is no need to squander public money in the name of fixing terms of reference meetings etc. Let the authority do something tangible and seek public information on corruption and do justice to all.

Sadiq Alee, Maghbazar, Dhaka

Sense of urgency

Sir, Two recent incidents in connection with foreign scholarship expose strange attitude of certain officials. In one, several Commonwealth fellowships for post-graduate research work in medical science in UK was allowed to lapse because the candidates were not contacted in time. In the other, selected applicants for Indian government scholarship were allowed only one working day, during the Eid holidays, to collect the forms and submit the same with documents, photos, medical reports etc!

Is this lethargy resulted due to lack of discipline among the civil servants and their inter-cadre feud? Or are we to believe that our officials are really very busy and that they work very hard? Or deliberate foul play for material gain can be suspected?

A professor of Harvard Business School during discussion with a BBC television interviewer was heard to say that sense of urgency on the part of the policy makers and implementers can help solve many problems (in connection with the unemployment and underemployment situation in Europe).

Is that advice applicable to us for most of our problems in our national life?

Frustrated Dhaka