

No Looking Back from Gorazde

On the face of it, NATO's two days of air pounding on advance Serbian positions around the Muslim enclave — Gorazde — seems to be the first-ever application of force by the alliance against the recalcitrant party. But a closer look yields an enigma that can only be put to rest by appropriate and conclusive follow-up to the air strikes that the NATO has after all made.

What is evident here is that the action has taken place at the request of the UN troops on relief mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, pursuant to the UN Security Council resolution 836. This resolution provides for the UN forces to summon NATO's air cover with a limited objective of clearing the course for relief operations on the ground. Thus the writ is not there for a comprehensive military intervention against all Serb-held positions that made them preponderant power in that entire area by the sheer force of weapons.

That is why the Serbs are undeterred by the NATO air strikes and keep advancing towards Gorazde with artillery bombardment of their own. There is a saving grace in the realisation though that the Serbs will have to be prevented from capturing Gorazde because it will provide them with a strategic link between their strongholds in the Southwest and those in the east. To our understanding, a disjointed military action, that too with a limited mission, amounts to only touching on the fringes of the Bosnian tangle. The defiant aggressor is clearly identifiable and what needs to be done against it, is also known. There has to be a combined aerial-and-ground assault on it through a joint command, preferably sanctioned by the UN Security Council.

The current equations in the Security Council may not instantly favour this course particularly in view of the Russian objection to the air strikes on the ground that she was not consulted before taking a decision on these. Moreover, Russia has been well disposed towards the Serbs from the beginning. Her veto can undo any new move to re-write the Security Council resolution. On the other hand, within the NATO itself, France and Germany are rather ambivalent on this issue. They may be mindful of their growing trade ties with the region.

However, it should not be absolutely difficult to evolve a degree of consensus at least on the question of creating congenial conditions for the peace talks to resume between the contending parties in former Yugoslavia on a result-oriented basis. Even allowing for the loose ends in the collective will of the international community, it defies comprehension as to why it should not be possible here and now to get the Serbs retreat to *status quo ante* and bring them back across the table for the peace talks to proceed. Are we to believe that the NATO and the UN forces on the ground are so powerless that they cannot even achieve this minimum objective?

Since the air strikes have come about after a long period of barren diplomacy, the temptations to go for a propaganda hype are very much there. Already a lot of breath and words have been wasted on the Bosnian question. To add more to the record verbiage on the subject would be a cruel joke on humanity's sensibilities for justice and fairplay. The danger also lies in the fact that if an assertive action, in whatever form it maybe, is allowed to peter out or prove as a flash in the pan, it will not only become suspect in terms of basic motivation but will also act a new stimulus for wrong-doing.

BTV Going Abroad, Why Not?

A nation's cultural advancement is directly proportional to the amount of disgust it feels for its television. Conversely a nation is as worse off culturally as it is lost in love with its TV. How does Bangladesh fare going by this dictum? The government is soon opening a second channel for BTV. Alongside five new relay stations are going to be completed. And work is under way on a full fledged television centre in Chittagong. All this is routine development work and doesn't speak of any infatuation.

The government is, however, also actively considering possibilities of buying satellite time to telecast BTV programmes to at least 30 foreign nations. Why not, — should have been a healthy normal response to the piece of ego-warming news. But for two reasons, reservations become irresistible. One, is it that BTV would go international with the standards of its programme remaining at the present levels, levels so effectively losing the BTV its home viewers in an unending exodus? Two, who in the wide world would waste his or her time poring over a Bangladesh Government Ministry of Information handout in visuals? Perhaps not even a very very homesick Bengalee sitting marooned in some Saudi desert or encapsulated in some Canadian icy waste.

However, we very much welcome the idea of offering the tens of millions of Bengali speakers around the globe, a hefty part of them originating in Bangladesh, — a living bridge to their mother culture. But as things are with our economy, we cannot indulge in this if this be a luxury entailing a perennial drain on our national coffers. We have a premonition that government would try to offset that by increasing the price of television time on top of the recent push to the advertisement tariff to a bursting state. We reject the idea for it is the people that would be made to pay for overseas television through hiked commodity price.

This forbidding prospect contrasts sharply with the promises of what overseas BTV could do to both the cultural needs of the Bengalees around the globe and to the state coffers. The difference hinges on one fine point: quality. And programme quality wouldn't visit Rampura as long as there isn't imagination there unhindered by political straitjacket. And as long as there aren't talents there determined not to sell his or her soul to anybody except true creativity.

WHO is out to wreck the Parliament? Which party, to be more exact?

BNP says, it is the Opposition, and in particular the Awami League. Opposition, with Awami League as the main component, says, it is the BNP. And, paradoxically enough, each is right in a sense. The Opposition, by raising issues repugnant to the Treasury Bench, has often blocked the scheduled proceedings of the House. It has employed all available means — walk out, abstention from participation in the proceedings through boycott — to register its protest over certain stands of the government. This, in the eyes of the government, is a policy of non-cooperation, as far as the business of the Parliament is concerned. The other side has its own point. When vital issues are sidetracked, when the Parliament itself is bypassed, and the government chooses to govern with the help of ordinances, all this amounts to denying the Parliament its legitimate role. And the Opposition thinks that this is precisely what the BNP government has been practising for the last three years. The chronic absence of the Leader of the House adds force to this argument.

Many sessions of the Parliament, including the latest, were unproductive, and marred by unseemly conduct of some members. More importantly, there has been a perceptible tardiness on the part of the government to let matters move smoothly, a most obvious dragging of the feet. There are many instances of this negative attitude of which a glaring example is the Majedul Haq-Tofael Ahmed case. Tofael Ahmed levelled a

serious charge of corruption against the Minister, and his ministry. The Minister replied by throwing a challenge, which was promptly accepted. But, sad say, the logical developments were throttled. The first obstacle was raised on the question of the composition of the Parliamentary Committee. At one stage, the Speaker refused to chair the committee, since allegedly some Opposition members had cast aspersions upon his neutrality as Speaker. When this was settled, and the Speaker was agreeable to chair the committee, fresh difficulty arose on the question of terms of reference. The committee has met several times, but it has remained bogged down over this issue. It looks as if the whole exercise will be abandoned as the government will not let the committee probe into matters beyond the Minister, keeping the ministry out of harm's way.

The Opposition, as far as I understand, is not happy with the working of the Parliamentary Committees, either. If you asked them to put it in one short sentence, they would probably produce something like this: the government takes neither the Parliament nor the Opposition seriously.

The government's reply to this allegation is a plain denial of the charge. It sees the Opposition as pursuing an obstructionist policy, resulting in frequent paralysing of the

Parliament on the Crossroads

The last session of the Parliament was a debacle. This is the common view. Some of the earlier sessions, too, ended in smoke, but this was the worst. It has left the whole nation in a state of despondency. People had high hopes about the present Sangsad, and the Sangsad has failed them.

House. The paralysing is a fact, but the cause or the causes can be identified differently, depending on what point of view you are speaking from.

One who wishes to be fair would perhaps put it down to immaturity in respect of parliamentary practices, an immaturity shared by both the major parties, — the BNP and the Awami League. The long political vacuum starting with Ayub Khan's take over, and stretching up to Ershad's fall, — a matter of over thirty years, virtually robbed the country of

general mood, the memory of the long years before the present Sangsad came into being, acts as a corrective, as an argument to keep faith in an institution which is conceivably passing through the teething troubles. The saner elements within the House, though often dismayed by the downhill path the proceedings take, cling to this belief. Outside the House, the anxious observers try hard not to lose all hopes about the future of our parliamentary democracy. Democratic culture, they assure themselves, does not grow overnight. The

common exercise, not enemies.

Meanwhile, one notices an interesting development in the city's political drawing rooms. The idea of an Upper House, of a bicameral Parliament is finding favour with some quarters. This is natural, in a world where most democracies have a bi-cameral legislature. Earlier, a particular political party often talked of a five hundred-member Parliament, the additional two hundred members being representatives of different interest groups. Perhaps there was some incongruity in the idea of a House composed of members of two different hues. A bi-cameral legislature is a more familiar thing.

The idea proceeds from a salutary desire for checks and balances. In a given situation, a unicameral House can take hasty decisions, particularly under the spell of a charismatic leader, or when a dominant party thinks too much of its own opinion, and too little of the Opposition views. It is the latter case that seems to trouble many of us in Bangladesh today. The case for a bi-cameral Parliament may gain strength with the passage of time, of which there are indications already.

Finally, short of a far-reaching change implied in the proposal for an Upper House, there has been a proposal to reform the existing

system, by increasing the membership of the House. When the Constitution was framed, we were a nation of seventy-five millions; now we are close to hundred and twenty millions. There is already a case for a House of four hundred and eighty members: one member for two hundred and fifty thousand people. Here is a strong case for a larger House, and a larger House is likely to be more pluralistic than a smaller one.

Sooner or later, the present Parliament will be faced with a demand for further amendments of the Constitution. I am saying this, keeping in mind the Opposition's recent stand that all future elections must be held under a caretaker government. If they stick to this demand, it will inevitably lead to a move for constitutional amendment. Reportedly, the Opposition parties are already working on an agreed draft of the bill. While the political climate is rife with talks of reform, further reforms, with the aim of having a more representative Parliament, particularly in respect of youth and women, should be kept in mind. Political parties may be required to nominate a certain percentage of their total number of candidates from among youth (under thirty-five) and women. Sri Lanka has set an example in this regard (only youth, not women).

The only objection I can foresee to this suggestion is this: it will weaken the current popular demand for the full restoration of the 1972 Constitution. But, with a little patience, both the demands can be reconciled within a single formula. The bi-cameral legislature can wait for a while.

PASSING CLOUDS

Zillur Rahman Siddiqui

genuine political life. We had make-believe Parliaments, and this was not conducive to the continuation of a parliamentary culture. I am not suggesting that, in a House of three hundred and thirty members, we do not have thirty-three members who will pass the test. Indeed we have. But they constitute a minority, and they are unable to fix the norm.

The last session of the Parliament was a debacle. This is the common view. Some of the earlier sessions, too, ended in smoke, but this was the worst. It has left the whole nation in a state of despondency. People had high hopes about the present Sangsad, and the Sangsad has failed them.

While this appears to be the

very fact that we are making mistakes is an assurance that we are learning, too.

It is sometimes claimed, to the credit of the present Parliament, that it has the strongest Opposition so far. Let us accept this to be true, and I believe it is true. And yet, the Opposition complains of its inability to play its role, because the Treasury Bench will have its way. It believes that by paralysing the Parliament, it will force the government to mend its ways, to be less obdurate, to be more accommodative. The next session will be a test as to how far the government is ready to respond to this demand; and how far it is prepared to treat the Opposition as partners in a

Modernity of Capital Management

A Perspective of the Private Sector in Bangladesh — II

by KB Ahmed

IT is perhaps the time for us to understand the functioning of the market and its relation with capital. In the free market system, in particular in privately managed market, capital has become a commodity. Its behaviour or functioning is very much related to its demand and supply. Capital is no longer economically employed directly by the savers. Capital is now accumulated in various forms by the savers, pensioners, investors and producers. These forums are now professionally managed to achieve a definite return on behalf of the savers. The savers will invest in these forums in trust and it is necessary that the trusted managers of these funds find the managers of investments to be equally reliable and trustworthy. This can not be ascertained looking at faces, designer suits, watches, and shoes, etc. This can only be assured by practising discipline and transparency in maintaining accounts, conducting the management and above all stabilising an intent of honouring the trust of the savers.

Under the prevailing circumstances, could anyone find five business houses, five auditing and accounting companies, five law practitioners who with their last five years of functioning and performance will meet the requirement of reliability and trustworthiness for a fund manager to risk the investment of his savers?

If Bangladesh is willing to invite massive investments, then Bangladesh better prepare herself to adapt to the culture of standard Anglo-Saxon management in which the reliability and responsibility become one and reward is directly related to performance and not to manipulated and structured projections. Equity means a right which is not any less than the major holdings, nor is it ignored by administrative oversight.

It is understandable that Bangladesh needs to go along with this new myth of free market in order to convince the donors to continue the support for sustaining the functioning of Bangladesh's economy. Bangladesh is at a cross-roads, to choose a path to trigger a nationwide initiative to break through this vicious circle or to continue to sustain a culture of defrauding.

If this nation has to have a leadership to lead them out from this condemned state of perennial poverty, it is time now for the leaders to come out and face the nation and tell them the truth about the state of affairs. There is no need to offer unrealistic incentives to anyone nor is it necessary to claim to be a super-patriot; but a simple idea of freedom and liberty and protection of life and property will galvanise the people to take stake in the nation's future. For ready reference it may be reminded that

the people never failed the leaderships whenever they needed them. One will have to be at pains to find one leader who had demonstrated such loyalty in return.

It is too late to attribute blame to any one, any group or any organisation now, as it will not recover the lost time, nor compensate for the sufferings, nor would it remedy the ills deep-rooted in the society. But it is not too late to come to a political understanding on the mechanism of administrative regulations and on the parameters of the market. The economic goal must be consistent with the political objectives; in that protection, welfare and consumption of the nation are more important than export earnings. Silly incentives for exports are deluding the investors. When a nation's total produce can not meet 25% of local consumption, it becomes ridiculous that over 65% incentive benefits are transferred to exports. Exports do not replace or compensate for domestic consumptions and therefore the supply must come from somewhere, and somehow it is paid for. Experiences in the export industries have not yet produced advancement of technology nor has it produced any trade skills. Export is, however, a very convenient process to export capital and assets.

If the domestic market is sizeable, and consumption is potentially increasing, the market mechanism is developed for free market, and a common political purpose of stability is invoked by the political parties, capital will flow with no bounds.

To trigger this it is necessary for the political leaderships to build a consensus on the direction of the economy and on the administrative structures in which majority of the nation would be commonly respected and cared for and that nation as a whole could participate in the activity of the economy with commitment and pride. This however cannot be achieved if the leadership is reticent in style and caught by the glitter and affluence of the statecraft.

The politics of terrorising and harassing the people can not secure any economic goal nor can it secure anyone's occupation of the seat of power.

It will be necessary to initiate a dialogue with all those who had been defaulting and squandering the economy and drive home the realisation into them that it would be in their best interest to arrange to pay back their debts and liabilities. If necessary over a period of time and with an ongoing activity of economic recovery. It would not be surprising if all of them are found to be in good financial state with deposits and assets abroad and they had

decided to reinvest in Bangladesh under secured structures of free market. Developed markets however are studying a report where prompted by debt crisis a proposal highlighted the plight of capital and assets from the developing market which may become the main cause of undervaluing the securities and assets against which debt was originally raised. The market may pressurise the governments of the developed world to evolve a mechanism for the restitution of these assets. A kinder approach from Bangladesh government will encourage the Bangladeshi nationals to reinvest in Bangladesh or risk confiscation in the developed world within next five years.

The government has now to painfully decide relinquish the control of the market. All restrictions on imports, trading, manufacturing and investments have to be removed. The government will only act as a regulatory agent monitoring the activities of the market so that the public as an investor or as a consumer are not defrauded.

The government must also remove all sorts of incentives as subsidies in investment and in the products. The investor will take the risk of his investment as he will enjoy the profit. Bankers will fund the investment at their own risk and be responsible for the expected return and performance.

Traders will take risk of his trade and the consumers will choose to consume whatever they can afford. There is no room for bureaucracy or politics to intervene or interfere as long as peace is maintained. Life and property is protected.

The investor and the consumer must be protected by well-defined, unambiguous sets of laws from the crooks, fraudsters and tricksters. The law must also give the right to the investors and consumers to reward or punish the managers on the basis of their performance.

Government's role is to develop and maintain basic infrastructures, assist the local governments in extending benefits to the people to mobilise local initiatives on environment, industry, employment, health care, education, and commerce. Government must well spend the tax-payers money and must account for the same. Government must also clarify the public debts and justify them to the public.

Private sector entrepreneurs from now on need to change the premise on which they will be enthused to invest and change the assumptions on which they will rely to manage their investments.

Free-market is only free for carrying out productive economic activity, but it is not a market where everything is free for all.

(Concluded).

To the Editor...

'Donor Proposes, Government Disposes and the Economy Loses'

Sir, Mr. Baten's above quoted article appearing in Saturday's (9-4-94) The Daily Star goes into details of adverse effect of 10% increase in the price of gas on the competitiveness of Bangladesh products in the market economy advised by IMF/World Bank.

What Mr. Baten has not mentioned and is generally not considered by other writers is that for every increase in the price of the utilities like gas, electricity and water in take of those causing system loss (theft by individuals, commercial and industrial organisations with sharing arrangement of this by the supervisory staff, billing and meter reading staff of the departments) also increases i.e. every increase in the rates of utilities rewards the corrupt.

The Energy and Mineral Resources Minister has several times stated that there was corruption in billing of electricity and gas bills by reversing the meters but he and his department has been unable to stop this meter reversing and reduce the system loss.

The corruption in energy sector is tangible as the gap between production quantity and billed quantity is called system loss which can be mathematically calculated but the system loss in Customs, Excise and VAT is not tangible and is no less than the loss in the energy sector. If the system loss (corruption) can be eliminated than Bangladesh can construct one Jamuna

Bridge every alternate year and there will not be any need to mortgage Bangladesh's future to get aid.

What is needed is to associate highest payers of gas and electricity bills, customs duty, excise duty and VAT for every sector with the tax collecting authorities so that the culprits can be identified and corrective measures taken. Since exposing the culprits will be in the interest of the genuine payers they will be able to identify the culprits. Will the ministers of Energy and Mineral Resources and Finance consider this proposal which can serve the best interest of the country and will reduce system loss to realistic levels. This will also bring transparency in revenue collection.

A Hal Banani, Dhaka

'Plight of stranded Pakistanis'

Sir, The misery of about four lakh stranded Pakistanis languishing in various refugee camps in Bangladesh for 23 years seems to have become their perpetual destiny now with the glimmering hope of going back to Pakistan becoming a mirage for them as years drag by. Despite the sufferings they have been enduring for all these years in pitiful abodes of various refugee camps, their option to be the citizens of Pakistan still remains unflagging. Virtually they are at present deprived of their basic rights to shelter, health, education etc and more truthfully they are being denied of their right to proper citizenship of

Pakistan for the last 23 years.

In fact, Pakistan has been dillydallying this issue on the pretext of limitation of essential funds of accommodate them in Pakistan, although, as far as we know, RABETA has pledged to sponsor the process of repatriation. Therefore, it is incomprehensible and incongruous in respect of Pakistan's policy on stranded Pakistanis that how she could remain so much indifferent to the plight of her own people while expressing so much concern and sympathy for her neighbouring Kashmir for human rights violation there. It is beyond doubt that human rights abuse in Kashmir is very much conspicuous, but I would say that Pakistan's concern for Kashmiris has seemingly turned into a political issue rather than a humanitarian one and we can assume by the reluctant attitude of Pakistan to take back her stranded citizens the plight of these stranded people does not deserve much attention in her human rights agenda.

We all know that Pakistan had accommodated millions of refugees from Afghanistan for almost a decade and more recently refugees from far-flung Bosnia are also being given shelter in Pakistan. No doubt this is a praiseworthy step, but it is not improper and inhumane to neglect and deny her own citizens who have been deliberately pushed into impoverished and ghetto like shelters here in Bangladesh due to Pakistan's virtual insincerity in solving this problem?

Giving priority to this protracted issue should come first in her mind if concern for human rights abuses matters

so much to her and she must remember 'charity begins at home'.

Md Jalaluddin Iqbal Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Corruption and whistle-blowing

Sir, Today much ink is being spilt to discuss the problem of corruption and its remedies. The irony is this that even the corrupt persons find it a pleasure to talk on corruption. However, the present government seems committed to combating corruption and is advocating practice of accountability and transparency in the government offices as an antidote to administrative malpractices or irregularities.

Of late, the Republic of China (ROC) has adopted an administrative reform package which includes measures for combating administrative inefficiency and corruption. Under this package, fourteen important activities, including judicial duties, will be closely monitored. If any official working in the anti-corruption department is found guilty of power abuse, he will be liable to more severe penalty than any other government officials. Cash rewards to a maximum of \$222,000/- have been declared for the whistle-blowers providing correct/valid information on corruption of the administrators and the politicians.

While the present government is set about introducing administrative reforms for which committees are already working, the pragmatic mea-

sures adopted by ROC sound exemplary and relevant to our situation. Whistle-blowing by the responsible citizens may help considerably in reducing corruption but those who will blow the whistle need to be legally protected and rewarded. Persons supplying false or wrong information to the administration with a harassing intent will be penalised, if detected. Measures to this effect merit consideration of the reforms committee or of the government.

Syed Naqub Muslim BPATC, Savar, Dhaka

BNP-AL political row

Sir, Before creation of Bangladesh there was no BNP. After independence of our country we marched from BKSAL to multi-party democracy. Today we are moving slowly but steadily towards two-party system in the country like that of Democratic Party and Republican Party in the USA.

Bangladesh is a new emergence in the democratic world. We have a long way to go to grow into the banyan tree of democracy. Our people are politically conscious but most of our political parties are crude in approach and not sophisticated; not well organised, defined and refined. Our people fail to understand the aims, objectives and policies of the various political parties.

After the ouster of the autocratic regime, holding of a free and fair general election and establishment of democracy in the country two main political parties, BNP and AL, are in the arena, running almost neck to

neck. Both are engaged in intense politics indoor and outdoor, accusing and counter accusing each other. While the AL bitterly criticises the ruling party BNP of inefficiency, corruption and irregularities, the BNP talks loudly about democracy, parliamentary democracy, freedom of press, development plans and programmes and the people are left in a quandary to move in a windmill.

Both the BNP chief Begum Khaleida Zia and the AL chief Sheikh Hasina asseverate their good intentions for being in the service of the people but as a matter of fact most of the people are neither satisfied with the poor performances of the BNP with regard to maintenance of law and order, eradication of corruption and alleviation of poverty nor with the frequent boycott of the Jatiya Sangsad and call for hartals by the AL.

Some political philosophers opine that although the BNP and the AL chiefs talk loudly about democratic rule and parliamentary democracy, in fact they themselves rule their respective parties and there is perhaps little democracy inside either BNP or AL. Whither Bangladesh politics today?

We feel that both BNP and AL need restructuring, reconstruction and refurbishing not for the sake of party interest only but also for the interest of democracy as a whole. Both BNP and AL need far-sightedness, restraint, tolerance and patience to lead our country and people towards peace, progress and happiness.

O H Kabir Dhaka