

Teachers' Strike must End

There is no sign of the present stalemate, created by the indefinite strike of the non-government teachers and employees, coming to an end. Despite repeated requests by the teachers for the prime minister's audience, the government seems to deliberately ignore the appeal as if things are going to be all right if it overlooked, as is its wont, the issue. Little did it realize that with the passage of time the government will buy not the teachers' compliance but a more hardened attitude. To think of banking on the teachers' economic insolvency is indeed a foolish perception. Teachers of non-government schools and colleges have been through such sufferings and once desperate, they will go to any length before achieving a satisfactory deal in their favour.

However, yet another danger looms from an unexpected quarter in that the government school teachers have made their intention clear for going on strike from April 30. The government school teachers have their own demands and they are certainly not in league with their counterparts of the non-government educational institutions. But their move is surely to benefit those less fortunate of the same profession. But it is indeed baffling to see that the government can be so reluctant to talk to the teachers and have a knack of sitting on each and every issue when the looming crisis poses a real threat to its ability of governance. Time and again the government has resorted to purchasing time and allowed the problems to mount, instead of their speedy solution, so much so that at times it had to concede unrealistic demands before retracting from them.

This time the teachers are surely to blame for choosing a time for their programmes with the motive of disrupting or halting the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations. But the government is no less blamable for deliberately dragging the issue to such an impasse. Clearly, the teachers have been ignored for much too long; they have even been maltreated once last year when they held a rally. So the government cannot claim to have enjoyed a significant amount of trust of the suffering teachers. Moreover, the government is known to have attempted means other than the straight and simple one of a negotiated settlement, to weaken the movement and get a result in its favour.

Fortunately for the teachers, the other initiatives from the government side have fallen through. Now the pressure for holding the SSC examination will start telling on the government. Today or tomorrow, it will have to sit with the teachers across the table for a settlement that is both practicable and acceptable to both the parties. If the government has thought of the pressure coming on the teachers for playing with the fate of as large a number of SSC candidates as 700,000, it is making a serious miscalculation.

It is not the only examination, more are to follow. The Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination is coming on the heel of the SSC. Since involved in this strike are non-government college teachers as well, the pressure will mount by every passing day. The government's policy of wait-and-see may indeed invite serious repercussions. The already maligned education system of the country may collapse altogether. Before that eventually looks all the more real, we urge the government, the prime minister in particular, to hold direct talks with the striking teachers. Not all their demands are realistic, but some of them surely are. When they ask for the same emoluments and status as enjoyed by the government school and college teachers, they are not being practical. But when they call for reducing the yawning disparities between the government and non-government educational institutions, they have a point. Now that is where they must be listened to and a compromise deal must be struck to both the parties' satisfaction.

The Luckless in Abu Dhabi

Some three hundred and seventy-nine citizens of Bangladesh are rotting in Abu Dhabi jails. According to a national daily's report yesterday 75 others of our compatriots are being detained in Iranian jails.

Bangladesh's emergence as an independent state, in spite of the high price that had to be paid for it, hasn't resulted in very many spectacular gains, social or economic. But if a surge in *avant garde* drama production at the Natak Sarani has been a direct result of independence, so also has been a kind of worldwide spread of the Bengalee youth. The spirit of true enterprise, in so short a supply here on our native soil, demonstrates itself wonderfully in the presence of Bengalee young people in perhaps all the countries of the world, in fantastically big numbers in some of them. You are looking for a pharmacist or hailing a taxi-cab or you need the services of some construction-work people — there are high chances of men of Bangladesh origin responding to your need in New York.

But there is also a dark and harrowing side to this population-spattering phenomenon manifesting a one-way poor-to-affluent nation interminable stream of humanity. From the side of the better-off nation, there is no shortage of resolute policies and actions directed to smother such processions. And on the other end, hardpressed men become a study in human ingenuity in their attempt to beat all such.

Unfortunately for us, Bangladesh has so far shown a proclivity for glorying in the successes of who have made it to overseas lands and wallowing in the remittances they send back home — and shying of its duties to those that have not been so lucky in their chase for foreign employment. The reports of Abu Dhabi and Iran incarcerations of Bangladesh nationals do not shock us as it should, if only because this is hardly a new thing. Criminals posing as manpower agents have been sending off hundreds of our young people almost straight to foreign jails. With inexplicable impunity so far. How has our government responded to the problem?

It is very evident that the criminals are at their work — undiminishedly. The government has, under international obligation, to retrieve all those that are stranded abroad. But the government is not understandably keen to do the unpleasant job. It is not only the adventurers that suffer as a result, it is the nation that also suffers. And all its exertions to put up a decent face internationally is reduced to futility.

Why can't the government prove a little more serious in the matter of controlling people going out for employment? Meanwhile, when will they give the luckless in Abu Dhabi and Iran some sincere attention?

RECENT events in Dhaka give us a sense of déjà vu with the opposition calling hartals, the ruling party going for confrontation, innocent people losing lives and the whole process escalating in what seems to be a never ending spiral of national self destruction. What makes it doubly sad is that it does not have to be this way at all. It is possible for all parties including the opposition to achieve their respective aims by discarding the old methods which were perhaps suitable under an autocratic regime, for more far sighted methods suited to the present (albeit still imperfect) democratic order. It is possible for the opposition to achieve their goal of coming to power with the support of the people if they play their cards right while it is also possible for the ruling party to make a genuine breakthrough in Bangladesh's seemingly inexorable descent into poverty and despair. Since neither the ruling party nor the main opposition party have much inner party democracy or inner party debates on policy issues the decision making must therefore come from the leader of each party. These remarks are therefore addressed to both the leader of the ruling party and the leader of the opposition respectively.

The Ruling Party

First the leader of the ruling party who is also the democratically elected Prime Minister of the country. It is important to distinguish these two roles embodied in the same person since the former position is one in which she must promote the interests of her political while in the latter role she must look after the interests of all the people regardless of their party affiliation. Given the history of the involvement of the leader of the ruling party in politics first against the rule of autocracy for many years and then during the elections running against other political parties it is only natural that the perspectives of the party leadership was focused on adversaries such as the then autocratic ruler and subsequently other political parties. However, once she was elected the Prime Minister of the country she has to face a new array of hitherto unfamiliar adversaries including poverty, illiteracy, population growth, lack of health, corruption, labour unrest, fiscal and foreign policy challenges. These require a new arsenal of weapons which were not the same as those she had used in opposition. They require a vi-

The Role of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition

The Need for Statesmanship

by Dr Saleemul Huq

sion of where she intends to take the country and how she plans to do so. It also requires that she put in place a team of colleagues who share her vision and have the capability to bring her plans into fruition. The fact that the Prime Minister is not inherently a 'visionary' is not necessarily a fault as long as she is able to encourage her colleagues to provide the vision in their respective sectors and to give them her support.

To give her credit she has given an unprecedentedly free hand to her cabinet colleagues to carry out their respective policies. Some of them have been able to use this freedom to push through major policy changes but others have not been able to make any impact whatsoever.

It is this lacklustre performance of the government which is of most concern to the ordinary citizenry and is probably the most important factor in the negative vote for the ruling party in the municipal elections where their own supporters who voted for the members of parliament from those same constituencies voted against them in the municipal elections.

The correct lesson to be learnt from this loss would have been to see it as a message to improve her performance of governance for which she still has another two years before she has to face a general election. The opportunity was therefore to have gone for the long heralded cabinet reshuffle with the induction of a number of younger ministers from the ranks of her parliamentary party in order to give them both administrative experience as well as a chance to infuse some new ideas and enthusiasm into the government.

Unfortunately, the opportunity presented by the municipal election results was not used and she continues to burden herself with a lacklustre cabinet some of whom are also in poor physical health. It is only natural that she would wish to reward their loyalty to her during her bad days but there are surely other honourable positions for them

without bringing the functioning of certain ministries to a virtual standstill.

In fact it seems that the wrong lesson was learnt and they went for a massive show of strength in the Magura by-elections. Even accepting that the elections were no more unfair than usual it is difficult to see how the country or even the ruling party was really helped by winning that one seat. Its political fall out in terms of civil unrest was quite predictable and it is unlikely that the same strategy of blanket electioneering could be repeated in a general election.

Finally, the loss of Magura to the opposition would have hardly caused a ripple in the ruling party's legitimacy as it has always been an opposition held seat. By making such an issue of winning it at all costs they have handed an opportunity to the opposition.

There is still time for the Prime Minister to get her act together in terms of inducting new blood into her cabinet, giving them clear instructions on what she wants to be achieved for the country within the next two years and keep a continuous watch on their performance. There are some clear signs of such opportunities such as the successful visit to Japan where she was able to get the Japanese to consider Bangladesh as a place for investment rather than only aid. She needs to follow this up personally to ensure that some major investments come to fruition within the next two years. This will be a bigger vote better than simply vilifying the opposition in public meetings. She also needs to focus at the same time at stimulating further the rural and urban formal and informal economies. If she can achieve a sense of economic activity and employment generation within the next two years then the ruling party stands a better than even chance of being re-elected in the next general elections.

Leader of the Opposition

Assuming that the leader of the opposition wants the best for the country and also wishes

to come to power to enable her to put in place her policies for developing the country, she would be better off to focus on a strategy of winning the next general election to be held in two years time. This strategy would require a single mindedness which should not allow short term and immediate issues to overwhelm her electoral strategy. Thus, for example, putting too much emphasis on unseating the ruling party in mid term to hand over to a caretaker government, however, strongly felt by her party colleagues, does not improve her chances of fulfilling her aim of coming to power.

In simple terms the present democratically elected government should not be equated with the previous autocratic rule and hence street agitation attempting at its overthrow are misconstrued. She would do better to focus her party's efforts at using the unprecedented opportunity of genuine parliamentary democracy to harass and embarrass the government from within parliament.

In this effort she will have plenty of ammunition to use including the continuous absence of the leader of the house and also the tendency of certain ministers to make faux pas which the opposition can make use of. She should also use the parliamentary standing committees to demand and get accountability from the different government ministries and their senior bureaucrats who have become accustomed to functioning without scrutiny. In this effort, she will find that even the ruling party members of parliament will support efforts at ensuring bureaucratic accountability.

In purely electoral terms she should focus on her strategy for the general elections by, among other things, identifying the seats where the ruling party may be vulnerable and working on those constituencies from now. She could also institute some sort of opinion survey to find out what the real electoral concerns are and then focus on those issues. To a large extent the victory of the opposition in

Dhaka and Chittagong was due to a much more mature and effective electoral strategy eschewing high flown rhetorics which paid rich dividends.

She should build on this victory by giving all support to the municipal authorities to show the electorate that they can also deliver the goods if voted to power. On the other hand by continuing along the road of civil strife and on-cooperation, whatever the provocation, she does her own chances of coming to power no good whatsoever.

Indeed, rather than attack the Election Commission she would do better to campaign for its strengthening and ensure the fairness of future elections by bringing the glare of national and international publicity to prevent attempts at unfair means.

Finally, there are certain issues where she has to also rise above her party political objectives and act as a national leader. These include the very important area of attracting foreign investment to Bangladesh. Unless she clearly declares that this is a national and not partisan issue it is unlikely that any foreign investors will want to put their money into Bangladesh if they perceive that the opposition will reverse the policy after it comes to power.

There is another important reason for the leader of the opposition to support large scale foreign investment by the present government, namely the fact that such investments will inevitably take time to materialise as projects are identified, locations found, financing agreed, etc. so that even if investments are contemplated now their effects are likely to be felt after the general election when she may be able to benefit from them if her party comes to power.

So there is a powerful element of self-interest for her to support the government's efforts to attract foreign investments. There is also, of course, a responsibility beyond simply saying that she supports foreign investments since one of

the reasons cited by all potential foreign investors is our reputation for political agitation and its consequent economic losses.

Indeed during the recent visit to Japan by the business delegation accompanying the prime minister, the Managing Director of one of the major Japanese Corporations quoted a figure of economic losses due to hartals in January and February 1993 of US\$128 million compared to Japan's official assistance of US\$125 million till the end of 1992.

The leader of the opposition must bear a large part of the responsibility for such civil disorders since they happen under the aegis of opposition called hartals and other civil disturbances. Even granting that the opposition leader instructs her workers to be disciplined and they were to fulfill her instructions there are too many unruly elements waiting for a chance to create disturbance over whom she has no control but who use her call as a carte blanche to cause destruction to property and people. She owes it to the nation to not allow herself to give an excuse for such elements to create civil disturbance.

Of course the opposition party must also develop its own strategies for development which it can put to the electorate at the time of the elections. In developing its positions it should institute a series of dialogues (which has started already) with other sectors of society including the private sector and the NGO community to get their feedback.

In conclusion, it is incumbent now on both the leader of the ruling party and the leader of the opposition to think of themselves as national leaders having a responsibility of pulling the country out of the morass of poverty in which it seems to be stuck. This can not be done by either party alone but needs both to make their contributions. This does not mean that either the ruling party or the opposition needs to surrender to the other but rather that they both must be able to distinguish the greater national cause from the purely partisan cause and when necessary sacrifice the latter for the former. This is the characteristic of true statesmanship as opposed to mere party leadership.

The author is Executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, a private, non-profit policy and research institute.

THE defeat at Geneva is like the defeat at Dhaka in 1971; the first was a political debacle, the second a military one. This was the retired Air Marshal Asghar Khan's response in Lahore to my query on how he thought Pakistan felt after withdrawing the resolution on human rights violations in Kashmir. Many politicians, lawyers and journalists echoed more or less the same sentiments when I met them in Pakistan during my six-day visit.

They felt let down, particularly by Iran and China, considered the closest to Islamabad. Ironically, these two countries figured in a 'grand design' that former chief of the army staff Aslam Beg suggested during his tenure to blunt America's say in West Asia. Beg's proposal was that Pakistan should sell Iran secrets of the bomb for the price equivalent to Islamabad's foreign debt.

The then prime minister Nawaz Sharif passed on the information to the US to win its support against Benazir Bhutto, Washington's consistent preference. The plan fell through. The army has not forgiven him since. The manner in which he divided the top brass over the appointment of the late chief of the army staff also rankles in its mind.

Were the army, which calls the shots in Pakistan, to change its stance towards Nawaz, now opposition leader, prime minister Benazir Bhutto would be in real trouble. Her stock of political capital is falling fast. She has lost the chairmanship of the Senate, a key position, indicating a shift in the attitude of small parties. They are the ones who had

sided with Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to install her as prime minister and her nominees as the Speaker and the President.

It would probably be difficult for Nawaz to defeat her in the National Assembly, Pakistan's lower house. The MQM (Mahajir Quami Mahaz), which tilted the balance in the Senate, has no member in the National Assembly, the elections to which it boycotted.

Still Nawaz's supporters claim that they will be able to dislodge her within the next six months. But the army prefers her to Nawaz. If she does not retrieve her sagging popularity — there is not a single commendable act to her credit since she assumed the prime ministership seven months ago — the army may be forced to think of her replacement. With its strong dislike for Nawaz, it may look for another suitable candidate like Querishi, the interim prime minister, who gave a clean, non-political government after Nawaz was dismissed.

Nawaz is conscious of the army's opposition. He is, therefore, consolidating his political power. The ousting of his only provincial government in the NWFP, (like Indira Gandhi, Benazir used the governor to do the dirty job) has come in handy to him to consolidate his alignment with Wali Khan and the Awami National Party (ANP).

At a victory lunch in Lahore after winning the Senate chairmanship, Wali and many others openly avowed their support to Nawaz. "It is Bhuttoism all over again and we have to come together," said Wali. "She does not believe

in dissent and uses all methods to smother the opposition," added Shabaz Sharif, Nawaz's brother and opposition leader in the Punjab assembly.

Nawaz's family has reasons to fear her methods. The way their Ittefaq Group, a conglomeration of steel, textiles and sugar, is being squeezed out of business indicates her vengeance. Banks have been asked to stop over-drafts and to call back the credit already extended.

Benazir is acting somewhat in the manner Mrs Gandhi did

in dissent and uses all methods to smother the opposition," added Shabaz Sharif, Nawaz's brother and opposition leader in the Punjab assembly.

Nawaz's family has reasons to fear her methods. The way their Ittefaq Group, a conglomeration of steel, textiles and sugar, is being squeezed out of business indicates her vengeance. Banks have been asked to stop over-drafts and to call back the credit already extended.

Benazir is acting somewhat in the manner Mrs Gandhi did

Pakistan: A Fractured Society

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

during the emergency against her opponents. The house of Mushahid Hussain, an eminent journalist who is Nawaz's information adviser, was raided. Khalid Hassan, editor of the *Frontier Post*, has been ousted from the newspaper because he was found too critical of the prime minister. Musclemen were sent with guns to seize the home of a bright lady journalist after she was labelled a critic of Benazir's functioning. She was also warned not to mix with foreign scribes.

A popular monthly magazine, *Newsline*, admits that the media is "manipulated". It says "the man who most skillfully" does it "is the prime minister's husband, Asif Ali Zardari." But he does much more than that. He has an office in the prime minister's secretariat where indus-

trialists, businessmen and others queue up to ask for favours. He fancies the red and green bulbs installed outside his office.

In Benazir's earlier stint, he was called Mr Ten per cent. Now several deals are attributed to him and he is considered more demanding. The import of second hand cars has been stopped, thereby enriching the car manufacturers in Pakistan. A fine of Rs 80 lakh imposed on a local bank has been condoned inexplicably. Government aid of Rs. 300 crore to a central Asian

Republic has been routed through one of Zardari's confidants. Many civil servants complain about the pressure exerted by Zardari. Rao Rashid, a former adviser, recalls, "when I was adviser for establishment, Zardari tried to interfere with the postings of some officials. He had no official rank, so I told him I would have to check with the prime minister. He did not like this and ultimately I resigned."

Comparing the regimes of Benazir and Nawaz, one senior official notes: "While the Nawaz government was more corrupt, it appeared much more effective. The PPP government has feet of clay." There is yet another difference between the two. Benazir is feudal in outlook. Even when she uses her father's slogan of *Roti, Kapada*

and *Makan* (bread, cloth and house), she is embedded in landed aristocracy thinking. Her hold is in the countryside and that was reflected in the last election when she swept the polls in the rural areas.

Nawaz is a capitalist believing in free enterprise and depending more on industry than land. He won practically all the urban constituencies, particularly in Punjab, which constitutes 63 per cent of the electorate. Lahore is his stronghold. At a lavish and ostentatious wedding reception I attended on the manicured lawns of a well known lawyer's home, Nawaz's supporters were all over. They were unhappy with Benazir's policies which, they believed, had frightened foreign capital away from Pakistan. Indeed, foreign investment has dropped.

The scarcity of foreign capital on the one hand and the reverse at Geneva on the other have made the Pakistanis believe that they stand alone. There is a siege mentality and for the first time I found people admitting that their resources and the size could give them only a modest future living and not *Bhūhist* (paradise). They concede that India is placed in far better circumstances than they.

Not even in their wildest dreams are they thinking of defeating India. "Another war will mean the end of Pakistan," said an editor. "We are not fools to ignore the writing on the wall." Hence there is no more talk of war to crush India. But a feeling of alienation towards India and even bitterness persists.

However, beneath the harshness, one finds effusive

ness and cordiality. A further proof of the Pakistani affection surfaced when I was being shadowed by intelligence people. It was obvious who they were because they had already had a short conversation with my driver and he told me they were behind me in a green jeep. When I got lost in the Liberty of Lahore they showed me the way.

Many are envious of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's 'pragmatism' and they want both Benazir and Nawaz to tear a leaf out of his book. But what they admire the most in India is the strength of its institutions. "You have a system which functions," a top economist said. "We do not have even the rudiments of a system. And whatever there was, the different regimes in Pakistan have destroyed."

The dispute between brother and sister has reached ludicrous proportions. Benazir reportedly offered to have Murtaza released from prison on parole, but withdrew the suggestion when Murtaza said he would only come out on the day of his father's death anniversary. Benazir's mother remains staunchly on the side of her son.

People had a lot of hope in Benazir and they feel cheated. They are turning towards Nawaz, not because he is an ideal choice but because they have no other option. They may prefer a third name (Chattha of Jatoi's group is mentioned) if it is thrown up. But they are not wanting to return to another dose of martial law which may become inevitable if the agitators come on the streets and if the ruling party and the opposition remain inveterate enemies and do not develop even a modicum of equation for the day to day administration.

To the Editor

Japanese investment
Sir, Our Prime Minister's recent visit to Japan is possibly a very fruitful one. All possible efforts were made to attract Japanese government and businessmen to invest in different prospective avenues in Bangladesh.

It has been understood from the publications in our national dailies that Japanese have identified three major obstacles for them which are — 1) infrastructure conditions, 2) labour unrest, 3) bureaucratic problems. So we must satisfy them about the above points otherwise how can we expect them to invest in our country?

So I would like to appeal to our government and all political parties to give a serious thought to it. Industrial and

economic development will be at stake unless we provide a favourable situation and stability in our country.

Motius Samad Chowdhury
Phulola T. E. Sylhet

Sylhet Division

Sir, Recently Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman while addressing a Bangla New Year's Day gathering at Moulvibazar said that the Govt. was actively considering to set up an administrative division at Sylhet and a decision to this effect would be taken soon.

It is sincerely expected that the decision pertaining to the formation of the new Sylhet Division will be announced and implemented soon by the democratic government.

M Zahidul Haque
Asstt. Prof. BAI, Dhaka

Brian Lara

Sir, As a regular reader of your newspaper I am appreciative of your sober and balanced presentation of current events. However, I was amazed and upset to see that the great achievement by the young and talented West Indian batsman, Brian Lara, was not only not considered worthy of the front page but was placed in a rather inconspicuous right hand corner of the Sports page! The

breaking of a 36-year old record in any field of human endeavour is newsworthy but perhaps in the case of a Cricket record even more so, given the popular interest in the game.

I was indeed disappointed in the Star's selection of priorities on this occasion because the front page of a newspaper must perforce contain so much that is tragic and sad that any piece of good news serves to provide one with a moment of pleasure and good cheer. Highlighting achievements and accomplishments is an important function of the media and readers such as myself appreciate a balanced sense of priorities in selecting items worthy of the Front Page just as articles of deeper significance

and analytical content are more suitably placed on the editorial page.

Mrs. Yasmeen Murshed
Baniar, Dhaka

Subha Naba Barsho

Sir, 365 days of the year 1400 BS have gone. One hundred years of the Bangla fourteenth century have also left us for good.

after centuries. This is the fact of life, this is the history of human civilisation for thousands of years to come.

So long a man lives he seeks food to eat, house to live in, cloth to wear, peace, freedom and happiness. This is the universal demand of the people in France, Ghana, USA, South Africa, Palestine, Switzerland, China, Bangladesh, Iran, Nepal, every where.

We have stepped into a new year, a new century. Let us live and let live. Let all the people smile and be happy. We wish all a happy new year, *Subha Naba Barsho*. Welcome new Bangla century, *Shagatom Naba*

Shatabdi,
O H Kabir
Dhaka, 1203