

DU Flares up Again

Imagine the campus of Dhaka University around noon last Thursday. By all description it was a virtual battle field. Two groups of so-called students were trying to show one another who had how much power, meaning gun-power.

Given the rising tension in the overall political scene, it was only a matter of time that its violent reflection would manifest itself in the country's student politics. That is really what had happened in the Dhaka University last Thursday.

The political meaning of what happened at the DU campus can easily be gauged from the fact that within hours of the event, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, one of whose better side is her circumspection, quite uncharacteristically took a public position, and pointed finger at her favourite devil incarnate, the 'particular party'.

Campus violence has been with us for quite some time. One of the major failures of the present BNP government is its failure to do anything about it. It is extremely difficult to understand that the whole law enforcing machinery of the government could not sift out the campus terrorists in the last three and half years that this government has been in power.

The Road Block at Sayedabad

Last Tuesday, from early morning upto 1 pm in the afternoon, truck drivers and workers put up road blocks which had cut off the capital city from several districts of Bangladesh. There are two sides of this event that we feel obliged to highlight. First is the humanitarian aspect, and the second is the legal and law and order aspect.

This brings us to the next point. How was it that this blocking of such important road junction was allowed to remain for more than 12 hours? Wasn't it a mockery of the law enforcement agencies, and more directly of the government itself? When a group of truck drivers feel that they can close important inter district roads to realise some demands that they have, then we are really in trouble.

In the past when Adamjee workers barricaded the Dhaka-Chittagong road, the government did not take action against them. This no doubt emboldened others. This time if no action follows then the government will have more serious indiscipline on its hands.

On the otherhand, we also urge our truck owners and truck drivers to think of other means, which are legal and democratic, to pursue their demands.

What We Need—Right Economic Fundamentals or Fundamentalism?

by Abdul Bayes

THAT the growth of fundamentalism in a society is inimical to the socio-economic and political development of that society is, perhaps, a forgone conclusion. Fundamentalists always place religion at the core of politics and since politics is the major determinant of economics, fundamentalism with its canine ferocity, also tends to dictate economic principles and practices of the society.

Just take the example of our neighbouring country India. By its sheer physical size and natural and human resource endowments, India should have emerged as the richest country in Asia long before. But it does not have a track record a growth rate trend exceeding, on average, even 6%.

History and contemporary events tell us that the further a country is from fanaticism, the more likely to be its development. And as we all know, being secular in their national charters, Muslim countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are at the top in terms of growth and development as compared to their Muslim brothers elsewhere.

religious than we are in this sub-continent, but the whole gamut of religion lies in the private domain and the state stands to protect, as it does for properties, religious rights.

Not after Taslima alone!

Bangladesh seems to enter into the most perplexing situation where the fundamentalist forces are up to seizing state power. It all started with an oblique reference to Taslima Nasrin who is alleged to have made some objectionable remarks on our Holy Book (she, of course, disowned the remark). Taslima's unparadigmatic remark, quite obviously, hurt the sentiments of all of us because we hate any adverse comments on any religion, religious book or race.

While the whole nation would like to condemn such a remark, the most disconcerting event, however, is that those who virtually cooperated in the killings of innocent Muslims of Bangladesh during the war of liberation, who witnessed and thus helped the burning of the Holy Quran while millions of houses were destroyed during the occupation rule, who helped our women to be raped by Pakistan army and forces loyal to it—all anti-Islamic activities—appear to use the remark by Taslima and emerge as the vanguards of establishing the Islamic principles in this soil and are assuming the status of the sole custodians of Islam.

Islam now seems to vest on those who rather quitted the teaching of Islam during the war of liberation. But, a deep peep into the recent happenings would unveil a plaque of grave concerns to show that there are more motives beneath the carpet than a mere Taslima and her alleged remarks. Just take few examples:

If Taslima's remark is the lone issue at stake, then why should NGOs in rural areas be attacked? Did they say anything against Islam? I believe not. It is, perhaps, because NGOs are trying to pull women out of unemployment and put them on to more worthy task, give them education and provide them with health care facilities. All these activities are dictates of our religion Islam and the avowed policies of our present Government BNP, major opposition party Awami League and other political parties of the country. The fundamentalists, it appears, is wrestling Taslima's remarks to use it as an instrument of attacking the targets of socio-economic development, especially of women's.

While blasting Taslima and the "non-Muslims", why should speakers at the so-called 'Long March' make such remarks as 'birth of Bangladesh was a conspiracy'? Did the freedom fighters of a liberated Bangladesh ever make any comment which, the speakers could show, went against our religion? When a comment of a writer on an issue breeds adverse remark on the nationhood of a country then it is to be explored whether the motive is any respect for the Holy Book or disrespect to the freedom fighters.

The heightened audacity in such comments could also be gleaned from their remarks, as

appeared in newspapers, that all those who are now in the parliament are non-Muslims! It implies, arithmetically, that since the representatives of almost 100% of the population are non-Muslims, then Bangladesh remains hardly a Muslim country. And logically it follows that the Prime Minister and Ministers, products of the parliament, are all non-Muslims and therefore Bangladesh is ruled by non-Muslims! What a pity! It appears then that actually Taslima's remark is taken as an instrument to be used to attack the targets that strengthen the existence of this nation.

Sauce for the Government

It is being hypothesized now by the critics of the government that, unlike in some other countries the appearance of fundamentalism in Bangladesh has been and continues to be, unfortunately state sponsored. As the last national or mayoral polls seemed to indicate, the roots of fundamentalism are no more as strong as it used to be thought of, and the Muslims of Bangladesh, by and large, have negated fanaticism and anti-liberation forces. But the fundamentalists are given state patronage, so argue the proponents of the hypothesis, to create the chaos (or havoc) so that attention of the people is not pinned to the mismanagement and failures of the government. Few illustrations are placed in support of the above contention:

If Taslima Nasrin could be wanted due to her alleged remarks that hurt the sentiments of the Muslims of this country, then why not the speakers at the 'Long March' rally be equally charged for their alleged remarks that hurt the sentiment of the whole

people who love Bangladesh as well as the spirit of Islam? Why should not the Khatib be dismissed for calling every one in the parliament non-Muslims?

During its three and a half years tenure, the present government, probably more than any other government of the past, has a track record of promulgating Sec 144 to avoid any confrontation between two or more political rivals. Knowing fully well and also much beforehand, that the arrival of Ghulam Azam in Chittagong could result in a blood shed why, instead of promulgating Sec 144, the government appeared so "democratic" as to the deployment of fleet of BDR and police and also allow the intrusion of private arms cadre to protect the so-called "popular" leader? Why should there be not a press note on Chittagong episode when even small events get wide TV coverage?

If the present government's determined objectives are to ensure the socio-economic emancipation of the people, especially of women, then why should the fatwas be chased rather than chased. What steps did the government take to punish those who burnt NGO schools and attacked NGO offices?

If hartals are anti-development, as the government rightly tends to view, then why the hartal call of 30 June by the anti-liberation forces was not equally slated? If any damage during opposition movement could capture TV screen, then why not the damages caused by the fundamentalists to the Sangsad Bhavan?

The government could think that the activities of the fundamentalists succeeded in diverting people's attention to somewhere else. But such a complacency can be very short

lived and soon the same government might realize the costs incurred to do that. The sauce for the government may not be delicious for the nation! On the other hand, the main opposition party Awami League might have thought that they edged over the government through isolating government's main ally. However, such complacency again could be very short lived. To embrace fundamentalists, either to be in power or to go to power, is like digging that canal to invite the crocodile! The sooner our politicians realize this, the better it is for the nation.

Mutually Exclusive

The present government, more often than not, boasts of representing: (a) right economic fundamentals; (b) democracy and (c) socio-economic development. While one can be appreciative of some of its achievements so far, one must condemn the fact that, in its power game, the government appears to have let loose fundamentalists through various supports. The above package and the existence of fundamentalism are mutually exclusive events and we have to choose either of them. There is no doubt that political unrest and chaos delays investment, foreign or local, but the surge of fundamentalism simply kills the prospect for ever. The donors, on the other hand, expressed their grave concern over recent developments. If the present trend is to continue for a longer period, then the government might end up with wrong economic fundamentals and the right fundamentalism. And as conscious citizens we can only say, "die and you see said," ... I to die and once to live, which is better only God knows...

MORE than a year after the departure of United Nations peace-keeping troops from Cambodia peace remains elusive.

Despite the installation of Cambodia's first elected government in two decades and the pouring in of international aid towards rebuilding its shattered economy, the country's number one problem—dealing with the extremist Khmer Rouge guerrilla forces—remains unsolved.

After months of futile negotiations with the Khmer Rouge for a peaceful settlement, in early July the government finally labelled the guerrillas "outlaws," in other words declared open war on them.

The Khmer Rouge, which was a signatory to the 1991 Paris peace accord but did not participate in last year's UN-sponsored elections, had been demanding a place in the government. The demand is unacceptable to both the Hun Sen-led Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the Prince Ranariddh-led Funcinpec, which currently share power.

Negotiations also failed because of the repeated eruption of ground battles during the past year between government troops and the guerrillas for control over strategic positions in the Khmer Rouge-held territories close to the Thai border.

In response to the passing of the Bill in the Cambodian parliament "outlawing" the Khmer Rouge, leaders of the extremist outfit declared the formation of a parallel government based in the area under their control. Though there is little possibility of any foreign government recognising them as a legitimate force, the move signalled the final break in the temporary truce between government and rebel forces.

But much more disturbing for the future stability of Cambodia than the recalcitrance of the Khmer Rouge are the deep divisions and internal

Inept Government has Cambodians Seeing Red

Satyanarayan Sivaraman writes from Bangkok

Despite a democratically-elected government and considerable foreign aid, Cambodia remains a shattered nation. As Gemini News Service reports, government mistakes have made even the murderous Khmer Rouge look like a reasonable alternative to many citizens.

Cambodia: still searching for peace



1954 Independence from France; 1970 Civil war; 1975 Khmer Rouge takes over; 1-2 m deaths from execution, starvation and disease; 1978 Vietnam invades; 1979 People's Republic of Kampuchea established; 1989 Vietnam completes troop pull-out; 1990 UN peace plan proposed; 1991 UN-brokered peace treaty signed in Paris; 1993 UN-sponsored elections; 1994 Peace talks fail; Khmer Rouge banned.

rivalry that has plagued the country's coalition government since it took power in June 1993.

Born out of a marriage of convenience between the CPP and Funcinpec, after the both rivals failed to get a decisive majority in the polls, the government has lost much public credibility as a result of the squabbling of its members for control over various administrative and military posts.

Added to this has been the hectic lobbying indulged in by the country's aging monarch, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, for greater control over the running of government than is accorded him under the country's constitution.

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.

Real estate agents

Sir, Recently the Bangladesh Television had telecast a drama title "Dooorotto" which was quite entertaining because of the theme. The story of the drama was related to the job and life of a real estate agent. This has actually become a popular business in our society. Often some unscrupulous agents cheat people by selling a single piece of land for one or more time to different buyers. As I was witnessing the drama, I was wondering whether these agents have any licence issued by the relevant authority for doing such estate business. If they do not have, then I think that the authority should make it compulsory for them to receive licences before involving themselves in the real estate agency business. However, the drama was well produced and the roles played by the artist were satisfactory. I think Bijuri

Barkatullah needs more practice

to skillfully present the emotional scenes. Hope she will make it in her next role. Zahid Dhaka

Vanishing stethoscope and mixtures

Sir, While I was a school and college student in Calcutta in the thirties and mid-forties, I observed that the doctors in those halcyon days, had the ubiquitous and indispensable stethoscope while attending patients either at their dispensary-cum-chambers or the patient's home if called for. The medical profession was rather free from commercialisation in those days and doctors would thoroughly and comprehensively examine the patients. They would feel the pulse, observe respiration, take temperature, and apply stethoscope over the heart and lungs region to listen to the beatings

Prince Ranariddh

An abortive coup attempt led by Sihanouk's estranged son Prince Norodom Chakrapong in early July further compounded the impression of growing anarchy in the country. In a move that had no visible motives, Prince Chakrapong, a bitter rival of his step-brother, Prince Ranariddh, was said to have been the mastermind behind a rebellion by nearly 200 soldiers who were arrested on their way to Phnom Penh.

The government has also been alienating the public due to its inability to check growing corruption within its ranks. With the average salary of even senior government officials just \$30 a month, corruption has become almost a way of life for many in key administrative positions. This has led to widespread discontent among a public still mired in poverty.

Instead of putting its own house in order, the coalition government has responded to growing criticism by cracking down on dissent and raising

OPINION

Corruption

While I found Mr Abdul Bayes's article on the above subject, published in your esteemed daily's July 9 issues, very illuminating and interesting, I cannot quite understand what the learned writer meant when he said, "Think of the reputedly corrupt governments like Japan and Malaysia who are also dubbed as highly efficient economic managers". True, these two countries, particularly the former, were rocked, at a number of times, by financial scandals at the ministerial levels. But I cannot recollect an incident that involved more than one or two ministers of any government of these two countries at a time and which can, therefore, justify summarily branding governments in these two countries as egregiously corrupt. To speak of Japan in particular, it could not have elevated itself to the position of the world's second largest economy with bands of corrupt people in power. After all, if we are to believe in the adage that it is the managers—neither laws nor rules of government and economic—that make resources productive, then managers must, of necessity, have generally to be of unquestionable integrity. Japan could, doubtless, not be an exception to this rule.

Secondly, by way of seeking to prove that corrupt societies do not necessarily have slower rates of economic growth, Mr Bayes drew comparison between what he termed as "a middle corruption country" i.e. China, on the one hand, and "low corruption countries like Taiwan, Singapore, the United States or Germany", on the other. In the first place, to term China as "a middle corruption country" is, to me, not fair, although economic reforms, alleged by some quarters, have broad rampant corruption in that country. In my opinion, even cases such as the

one—the biggest ever bribery case in China—relating to the arrest of Wang Jianye, former Director of Finance and Trade for the Planning Bureau in Shenzhen City, on charge of taking bribes amounting to US \$1.3 million (as reported by AP and published in your paper's July 17 issue) should not lead us to think that graft has grown so normal a phenomenon in China as to justify its appellation of "a middle corruption country". We should not forget the fact that few countries in the world take so serious a view of corruption as China does and putting functionaries, found guilty of corruption, on the gallows in that country is a proof thereof. In the event of their being even marginally corrupt, people in power in that country would not have dared take such stern steps against corruption.

This apart, achievement by China of a growth rate of 13 per cent during the last year is almost solely attributable to its vigorous pursuit of a substantially liberalised economic policy and highly imaginative development strategy as well as to its economy's vast capacity for absorption of investment. As a matter of fact, except the one-party rule and its logical corollary—a controlled press and freedom of expression—China has shed almost all its socialist plumes and thereby, attracted huge foreign investment—the largest in the world. Certainly a country, riddled with corruption at almost every alternate tier of administrative echelon—which it would have been in the event of its being "a middle corruption country"—could not have succeeded in attracting foreign investment on such a massive scale, let alone the largest in the world. Foreign investors are no gullible fools that it will not occur to them what may happen to their investments once they get

caught in the tentacles of an arm-twisting and palms-greasing mechanism.

Besides, who, after all and in the ultimate analysis, make a country corrupt—be it rated a "middle corruption country" or a "low corruption country"—except its leaders? And so long as the Chinese leaders remain uncompromising on the question of corruption—as they are at present—there will, I think, be little scope for corruption to enter the sinews of the Chinese society. In that event, corruption will remain a matter of only a few stray cases to talk about. And, in all fairness to China, what else but stray incidents are a few hundred cases of corruption a year in a country of about 1.2 billion people?

This is, however, not to say that corruption is endemic in the under-developed world. But of one thing one can perhaps be sure, Corruption—be it in the form of bribery or favouritism and nepotism—is the single biggest impediment to development. A look at the state of affairs in any country belonging to the under-developed world will prove this point. Corruption can, in fact, as the writer of the article said, be one of the indices of under-development so that more a society is corrupt, harder it finds the ladder of development to climb. With its lumberly way of doing things through an array of inefficient functionaries, appointed or posted mostly through bribery or undue influence—the latter variety of corruption, putting, as it does, square pegs in round holes, being worse than the former and doing the greatest damage to a nation's move towards progress—it tends to find the goal of development perched at an olympian height.

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