

Real Solution Awaits

We, along with the whole nation heave a sigh of relief that the Anzar revolt is over. We are sorry, as the whole nation is, that two lives were lost, and several others were injured. The action by the army, BDR and the police was necessary. What was done, needed to be done, perhaps earlier than it has been. About 4000 to 5000 ansars have been out behind bars in various jails all over the country. This number itself is indicative enough of the magnitude of the problem. The very fact that such a large number of ansars joined the misguided action clearly shows that the problem is not one that can and should be brushed under the carpet. On the contrary it should be faced with honesty and forthrightness so that our law enforcing agencies emerge far stronger from this experience.

The first obvious question is why did it happen, and why was it not addressed before the outburst occurred? There seems to be no two opinions that the pay situation of this auxiliary force is indeed pitiful. Their pay and other benefits did not amount to anything that the police, BDR or the army get, though this force is often called to help out our regular forces. In fact they have also been used in counter insurgency activities in the Hill Tracts. The point is that the demand they have made must definitely be seriously considered. As for why was it not solved in time, the question needs to be seriously looked into. Was the home ministry aware that the ansar situation was so close to eruption? Did our intelligence keep the ministry and other relevant people properly informed? It has been said that the process of solving the problem was on, when quite unexpectedly the action by the ansars occurred. If this view has any basis on facts, then it is all the more important that a full investigation be carried out, and the findings studies well by all concerned branches of the government.

Let us be fully cognizant of the fact that due to this event, the government, especially the home ministry has suffered considerable public embarrassment. It could not have come at a more awkward moment for Begum Zia. So she should really get at the bottom of it, and make sure that nothing similar occurs in the future. This she needs to do for the prestige of her government, and also for the sake of stronger law enforcement bodies in the country. We would like to put this incident behind us, but we must do so having gained fully from this unfortunate experience.

A Champion of the People

Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy died unexpectedly, not unlikely of a broken heart, in a Beirut Hotel 31 years ago yesterday. It was as if the land he chose to be his own systematically desisted from appreciating his true worth as a learned thinker and an indefatigable shaper of the life of a polity. Not a few of those who succeeded Muhammad Ali Jinnah as Pakistan's supreme boss were a motley of puny little passing presences compared to Huseyn Shaheed, all arriving through dark alleys devoid of any reference to the concept as well the reality of ultimate importance — the people. And H. S. Suhrawardy, his erudition and western tastes and aristocratic habits of mind and life notwithstanding, was nothing if not a people's man, an inveterate believer in the people's will as the arbiter of the political reality of a society.

Of the many incompatibilities that helped the carving of Bangladesh the biggest was Pakistan's denial to evolve itself into something truly representative of the people — its culture and needs, aspirations and interests. H. S. could not heal Pakistan of that. It remained for his political progeny Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to carry the fight to where the former possibly could not have — solved it — by cutting the knot. The relevance of Suhrawardy in the contemporary Bangladesh context is woven largely of the fact that for far too many years here also the state functioned without recourse to a validation from the people. The national affairs were steered by that self-same Pakistani streak of powers being held by ambitious people from the barracks. The chin that was opened in December 90 need to be drilled wide and deep enough to ensure that this nation does not anymore veer from the truly democratic path. And in this important job a great source of inspiration should be Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy.

We must learn from H S Suhrawardy and pay our debts to him through our renewed commitment to democracy and rule of law.

Abominable Eruptions

Imagine a thousand souls, women and children included, penned in two vessels and stranded on the Padma for 16 hours. An hour or two's journey lengthening to take a whole day or more — without food and without preparation for such long loss of privacy. But another 35 to 40 thousand were going through the same hellish experience on the three busy ghats of Aricha, Nagarbari and Daulatdia — all victims of a most abominable kind of eruption — a fracas between ferry operators and truck drivers sliding into a 17-hour blockade of the Aricha port by transport workers.

From hartals to road blockages to such paralysing of key points to national communication, one supreme social concern seems to have been commonly ignored by the parties involved in protests of whatever size or merit. And that is the concern for people — the common man. There can be nothing more ignoble and contemptible than this insensitivity.

Conflict cannot be ruled out when there is not enough to meet demand or availability is warped and mismanaged. This snowballs into nationalized problem when a handful of people have in them the power to adversely affect people at large, and — in perfect terrorist-style — use that to redress a grievance. This is unacceptable. Without curtailing the rights of the involved parties, ways must be found to keep the nation's communication 'arteries' free and ever flowing with men and goods.

A radical change needs to be effected in our approach to the national highways and waterways. These must be made sacred and inviolate. Nothing may be done by anyone that hinders traffic on these even for a moment. The edifice of civilisation, specially the one in which modern man is involved, is delicately cushioned on safe and unhindered transport of people and goods. We must start on our way to a modern world without delay and this is a very good point to engage that journey.

If democratic politics is about winning hearts and minds of the voters, then I cannot understand how that goal can be achieved by keeping the same voters confined to their homes and away from their business, deprived of their daily meagre income, and in many cases, making them go hungry. How hitting voters where it hurts, namely at their economic well being, can make a party get more votes is quite beyond me. If democratic politics is about persuasion and convincing, then how come shops, cars and other property of the voters are damaged or ruined when they decide on a course of action contrary to the given line of the strike callers. If democratic politics is about voluntary participation, then why is there is coercion and forced participation.

All the above is what hartals amounts to. During the 48 hours strike that is supposed to begin from tomorrow, it has been said earlier there is hint that there could be some relaxation that nothing will be allowed to move during the whole period. Even after working hours, that is during the evening, and at night, no social activity will be permitted. Does it then mean, that every individual in our society will be forced to be confined within their houses for a period of 48 hours? Does it not sound like being under house arrest of some sort? Here arises the whole question of our fundamental rights. The government has no right, except under specified legal conditions, to take away our fundamental freedom of movement. Then how come political parties professing democracy wants to take that right from the citizens. Have our opposition party leaders actually thought it through, as to how people will feel when they are forced to be confined inside their houses for long 48 hours?

Suppose we accept the logic, for the argument's sake, of a hartal during the working hours. The idea is that offices, factories and all sorts of economic activities will be stopped, which will give the

We Must Find Alternatives to Hartal

The Opposition is making no distinction between the country and the government, between society and the ruling party. As a result, the Opposition is punishing the people in attempting to punish the BNP... Over the last two decades of independence, much has changed in Bangladesh, except politics and the mind-set of the politicians.

Impression that government is failing to run the country. This gives the opposition parties a sense of victory. But under what logic can we accept hartal during after office hours. The evening is a time for social activities. People do their family chores in the evening after finishing their day's work. What about buying household essentials, like day to day groceries. People may need to see doctors, parents may need to take their children to hospitals, visit relatives, see near and dear ones, perform social and community activities.

Why should the opposition want to stop all that? How is the government, or the ruling party involved in the personal and family activities of our people?

This is happening because the Opposition is making no distinction between the country and the government, between society and the ruling party. As a result, the Opposition is punishing the people in attempting to punish the BNP.

Over the last two decades of independence, much has changed in Bangladesh, except politics and the mind-set of the politicians. Walk into any office and you see the differences with the past. Walk inside any one of the thousands of new shops that have been set up, and you see how different they are. The sales people are usually so much more polite and subtle about pushing their products. The culture of 'customer is right' is slowly sinking in. The realisation is dawning all over, that a consumer has multiple choices, and that one can sell his or her product only by making them better, and by gentle persuasion — and definitely not by force, pressure or threat.

This is happening all over, except in politics. It is not yet dawning sufficiently in the

minds of our politicians that, regardless of whatever they may say, 'Voters are Right'. What the voters are thinking is going to determine HOW and WHO will run the country. In democracy voters will have to be informed, argued with, persuaded, cajoled, and finally convinced to support one or the other political parties. Never, never forced. Hartals and strikes of today are forced and imposed. The opposition parties should know better to think otherwise. And they should also know how individuals and groups react when they are forced. Remember, people reject even good things, if they are forced upon them.

Opposition parties say that

The Third View by Mahfuz Anam

strikes and hartals are democratic expressions of people's views on an issue. In their case they say, a successful strike expresses people's rejection of the present government. That argument would acquire more credibility and acceptability if the traditional voluntary participation in strikes were still the case. Unfortunately that is no longer true. There is a lot of coercion in the current hartals. People acquiesce to such programmes out of fear. They do not want their property, shops, cars or other possessions to be damaged.

People would wholeheartedly uphold the right of any political party to call for any number of strikes and hartals, only and only if that political party would recognise the rights of those who did not want to participate, to go about their daily work unhindered. Just as the opposition has a right to call a strike, so also those who do

not want to participate in it, have the right not to. But is that right recognised?

The Opposition may say that there is no coercion in their programme. Our reply is, please ask the non-partisan citizens of Dhaka or any other city.

The Opposition's call for a 48-hour strike will acquire an exalted position and much higher moral and ethical prestige if it announces that 'Those who do not voluntarily want to participate in the hartal, are free to carry on their daily activities, and that opposition workers will ensure them that right.' Such a declaration will make the opposition's strike call a

democratic expression that it once used to be.

Where the political parties are going wrong with their hartal calls is that they are not realising the changed context of when this non-violent weapon of mass struggle was 'invented' and the reality of present-day world. During the colonial and Pakistani days, hurting the government made sense because that government was an instrument of exploiting us, dis-empowering us, and subjugating us. It was also true in the Ershad case because his was an illegal and unelected government. The BNP government may be everything else, but illegal and unelected it is not.

The other factor that with the information revolution and the world becoming more and more of a global village, politics also has become much more internationalised than ever before. Just as governments cannot do as they please,

opposition politics also needs to measure up to international scrutiny and standards. Repeated calling of hartals, and going for a 48 hour closure of everything in the country does not create a favourable image of the Opposition at the international level.

There is another dramatic change that our opposition parties seem not to have realised. In this last decade of the 20th Century, and on the verge of the 21st, there is a totally different concept of time. Every minute counts in this world. Nations, companies and individuals spend millions of dollars in research on how to save time in the production, distribution and communication processes. If it was ever true that 'time is money', it is far more true now. In such a world, if we, as a nation and a country, just sit around and lose 48 hours of production, distribution and marketing time, then we must be in a suicidal streak.

In response to my questions, opposition leaders often say, strike happens all over the world. There is nothing special about it here. This is a half truth. Yes, strikes happen all over the world. But are they usually confined to a particular factory, or at best the whole industry-like energy, transport, air traffic, coal mining, etc. It is almost never general. And it is never, never inclusive of the whole population of the country. There are not many instances in the whole world where private individuals have been forced to cease work because of a strike call by a political party. The so-called Indian 'bandh' has never, to my knowledge, covered the whole country, and seldom, if ever, the whole population. In Pakistan it has occurred once, perhaps, in last several years, in spite of a very turbulent political situation there. But

then again nobody is as poor, or as numerous or as resource starved as we are. No other country is devastated by natural calamity as we are. Nobody else has the development challenge that faces us.

I have often faced the question from my opposition friends saying, 'Yes, we agree that strikes hurt the economy. But what else can we do? The government does not seem to react otherwise. The question, I think is very valid. And an answer to it has to be found. Because strike is not really an option in this highly competitive world. Let us put our heads together and find alternatives. But we cannot continue this bleeding.'

Many new, and younger people joined politics, especially in the last elections and even after it. We had hoped that these younger people will bring a refreshing change in the way that politics is done in this country. The tragedy is that instead of bringing in change, they quickly fell into the old mould. So politics continues in its archaic fashion, being out of tune with time and with the world, and of course, with our needs.

It was heartening to read in The Daily Star that the opposition was thinking about relaxing some of the provisions of its proposed 48-hour hartal starting on the 7th.

At last there is some sign, however faint, of the opposition parties taking a second look at their activities and realising that not everybody feels as enthusiastically about hartals as they do. The report said that there is some talk of allowing rickshaws, push carts and rickshaw vans to ply in the streets after dark.

While we welcome these signs, however late, of rising sensitivity of public reaction to the opposition programmes, we would like to urge the opposition parties to make their hartals dawn to dusk, and to allow social and community life during the evening and night. This will, in no way, diminish the impact (whatever they think the impact to be) of their programme, and yet give some respite to the people.

THREE years ago in Madrid an irreversible peace process was launched. Since the birth of Israel, half a century ago, this must be considered the most major development for the region. Old taboos are daily breaking down, old alliances are being replaced daily and the situation can best be described as the game of musical chairs.

In the present phase of the long journey to peace, a very important milestone was the handshake between Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in front of the White House as a beaming President-Bill Clinton looked on. Thanks to modern day media, this became the best known handshake of the world.

Since the birth of Israel and the expulsion of the Palestinians from their hearths and homes, the core of the Middle East problem has been the Palestinian question. It is, therefore, not surprising that the signing of the Peace Treaty in 1979 between Egypt and Israel, did not generate the kind of enthusiasm and an unstoppable peace process, as we witness today.

We have witnessed recently the second handshake — this time between King Hussein of Jordan and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. This time the handshake took place at the tiny desert outpost Wadi Araba, between Jordan and Israel. Bill Clinton came from Washington to witness the event.

As the peace process gather

ers momentum. Other players in the region are busy making their own moves. We have, thus, witnessed in Casablanca, commercial capital of Morocco and the headquarters of Islamic Trade Centre of the OIC, an unique gathering which brought together Arafat, Rabin and many others and was presided by the King of Morocco. The meeting succeeded in bringing together more than 2000 personalities from the world of trade, industry and economy. More taboos fell during this meeting than during the last half century.

Turkey, which was represented by her Prime Minister Tansu Ciller and a large number of businessmen from the private sector, had a side show of her own. Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, who has been feeling the severe pinch of US sponsored embargo, contacted Ciller through her Ambassador in Tripoli and Ciller flew to the Libyan border. She then took a car sent by Gaddafi and travelled for three hours by road (Libyan airspace is closed due to the embargo). The midnight meeting with Gaddafi which lasted from 1 a m to 4 a m and was briefly interrupted by an Arabic style lamb dinner (Mishui) brought a statement from Ciller through which she promised to contact the US President and speak about the embargo. Turkey, who has been very active in the field of building projects in Libya, received a promise of early settlement of outstanding debts and supply of Libyan oil.

Musical Chair in the Middle East

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

As the peace process gathers momentum. Other players in the region are busy making their own moves. We have, thus, witnessed in Casablanca, commercial capital of Morocco and the headquarters of Islamic Trade Centre of the OIC, an unique gathering which brought together Arafat, Rabin and many others

After visiting Israel, which took her to Jerusalem as well, Ciller went to Gaza and held talks with Yassir Arafat. She, thus, became the first Prime Minister to visit Arafat at his headquarters. Two months ago Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's attempt to be the first Prime Minister to visit Arafat was frustrated by the Israeli Prime Minister, because Israeli authorization had not been obtained by Pakistan. During this eventful trip Ciller has visited Palestinian Mayor Feisal Hussein at his east Jerusalem headquarters, raising Israeli eyebrows. This is a remarkable diplomatic feat, when we consider that President Bill Clinton during his first visit to the Middle East, last month, had to cancel his scheduled Jerusalem visit, at the last moment.

The last stop on this remarkable journey was Egypt. Indeed in the musical chairs, one element that is appearing progressively is the convergence of interest between Turkey, Egypt and Israel. The Casablanca meeting was mainly concerned with building up of the Middle East. The focus is Lebanon, who saw the most

murderous civil war for nearly two decades. The next on line is Palestine, where everything will have to be built from — office buildings, roads and infrastructure of every kind.

In the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty one very important element was the sharing of the waters of the Jordan river. In the oil rich and water hungry Middle East, the question that is coming progressively to the forefront is the sharing of the waters. In this, Turkey has a decided advantage with her two rivers Tigris and Euphrates, brimming with water. She is steadily moving ahead with her giant South Anatolian Project (GAP). This huge integrated project, which will supply water for irrigation and electricity to an area larger than Belgium, is the pride of Turkey and hope for solving all kinds of problems. It is even forecast here that the 11-year old Kurdish war, which is being waged in the South Eastern region, will be solved because GAP will provide this impoverished water scarce region with employment and land to cultivate. These two rivers flow into Iraq and Syria and one can foresee hard

The courageous decision of Yassir Arafat propelled him from the status of terrorist to a recipient of Nobel Peace Prize. Late President Sadat and Prime Minister Menachem Begin had been so honoured 15 years ago. These events demonstrate one reality — in our age of instantaneous communication — events seem to move sometimes with incredible speed.

The latest events are a sure sign that a settlement between Israel and Syria and Lebanon is round the corner. That will bring to the forefront the most intractable problem, Jerusalem, on centre stage. Israel has declared Jerusalem her eternal capital, a fact which has not been recognised by any state. Palestinian leadership has declared Jerusalem her capital of the future State of Palestine. Jerusalem is equally holy for the Christians. Jerusalem arouses passions like no other name does.

The peace makers and particularly the US have been wise to keep Jerusalem off limits from the current negotiations. Yet sooner or later the question will have to be faced. The game of musical chairs has brought out one fact — it is not the guns but negotiation tables, which will be the theatre for making the 'desert bloom'.

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.

Indian visa

Sir, The Indian visa office has been pleased to open a special counter for receiving visa applications from ladies and men above 60 years of age. The arrangement is really praiseworthy and the management of the High Commission deserve highest congratulations and thanks.

However, both the processes of depositing and taking delivery of visa are very much tough and perhaps tougher while depositing. But, no doubt the visas are delivered the same day, which is very much advantageous. Usually the time for delivery of visas is from 3 pm to 4.30 pm. Our past experience is that visas used to be delivered even after 4.30 pm and so long there were applicants in the queue, they were given visa. However, on the following day between 9 am and 11 am the visas of the previous day would also be delivered.

But on 15.11.94 it was specifically notified that the visa counter was opened at 3.10 pm and just at 4.30 pm it

was closed, when about 150 persons were awaiting delivery of visa. Although the counter was opened 10 minutes after the scheduled time, the delivery time was not extended even for a minute and the visa seekers had to face great hardship.

To ameliorate their suffering, it is earnestly expected that the authorities will kindly simplify the delivery procedure and, to my mind, if a wholetime counter for delivery of visa is arranged, the people coming to take delivery of visa will have lesser troubles.

One who knows
Dhaka

Sirajganj Kawmi Jute Mill
Sir, Tender has been called for selling 'Sirajganj Kawmi Jute Mill, one of the largest mills of the northern part of the country to the private owners.

the selling. They are sure that if the mill go to the private owners, they will fall deep into unbearable conditions.

It reminds the bane of Sirajganj Spinning and Cotton Mills which, after having been handed over to the private owners, remains closed since die for quite some time.

Under these circumstances, we appeal to the government to take urgent steps to rethink their decision of selling the mill to private owners.
Kamrul Islam
Sirajganj

Lottery

Sir, The National Sports Council has already arranged five lotteries to raise fund for promotion of sports. Another round of lottery has again been floated in the market. It has been reported that the National Sports Council has earned about 13 crore Taka from the lotteries already held. The figure of total sale has not been disclosed. Assumably, the figure must be much much higher.

Most all the buyers of the tickets are the poor and middle class people. These people being allured to win a handsome amount overnight rush to buy the lottery tickets out of their hard earned money. Sometimes, instead of buying bare necessities, they buy tickets to try their luck. And, in trying luck this way many of the poor and middle class

people are losing money.

When we look at the sports arena, we find our performance in the last 23 years as deplorable. Everywhere our teams have miserably failed. We have made some progress in other fields. But in the matter of sports we could not make any major progress even after 22 years. Our football team which showed some progress few years back has again started showing a decline. But we have spent considerably in sending the team and officials abroad.

The profit earned from the lotteries is on the sale proceeds of whole of Bangladesh. The utilisation of profit money should also be for whole of the country. All districts should get a share of the profit money. It should also be considered whether the holding of lottery should be continued for indefinite period or not. Because many of the poor people are being addicted to buying tickets to gamble their luck, which is not so desirable.

Mahbubul Haque Choudhury
Lake Circus, Kalabagan, Dhaka

Administrative reforms

Sir, Over the past several years we have been hearing that our government is going to introduce administrative reforms in the country with a view to streamlining various functions and duties; doing away with irregularities, negli-

gence of duties and corruption in various government offices and public sector corporations and also with a view to improving the standard of public services in different government organisations and public sector corporations. But unfortunately nothing has been done so far.

We strongly feel that for the sake of accountability and transparency, knowledge and information of our people and maintenance of proper public accounts and record, it is imperative that a performance statement as per proforma suggested below may be prepared and issued in the form of a Press Release by each and every ministry separately on quarterly basis: 1) Name of the Ministry — 2) Number of officers and staff — 3) Pay and allowances of the officers and staff — 4) No. of cases/letters/applications/petitions received — 5) No. of cases disposed of — 6) No. of cases pending — 7) Expenses on purchase, repair, maintenance of motor vehicles — 8) No. of motor vehicles — 9) Expenses on purchase, repair of equipment, furniture and purchase of stationery, forms and articles — 10) Expenses on electricity, water, gas and telephone bills — 11) Expenses on inland (domestic) TA/DA — 12) Expenses on foreign tours of Minister and officers — 13) Misc. expenses — 14) State five main achievements/performances in ser-

vice — 15) Total income of the Ministry — 16) Total expenditure of the ministry — 17) Remarks, if any —

The above comprehensive statement may include the report of all government departments, public sector corporations, autonomous bodies and establishments of the ministry. Various government departments, public sector corporations, autonomous bodies and establishments may prepare and submit their respective reports direct to their ministry concerned on monthly basis on or before 15th day of each 2nd month. Thereafter the ministry concerned may compile the reports on quarterly basis and issue a quarterly Press Release on or before 25th day of each fourth month.

We hope that the introduction of issuance of quarterly report separately of each and every ministry would not only help us stop wastage and misuse of public money but this would also help us to strictly follow financial discipline and also improve the efficiency.

Would our Ministry of Establishment Division, Cabinet Affairs Division, Ministry of Finance, Prime Minister's Secretariat and our Members of the Jatiya Sangsad kindly consider the relevant matters as stated above and take necessary steps in the national interest?
O H Kabir
Wari, Dhaka