

Landmark Judgement

An landmark judgment the High Court Division of the Supreme Court declared the ten month old boycott of the parliament by the opposition as illegal, and has asked the leaders of the three leading boycotting parties to join the session as and when it is reconvened again. The Opposition has, in the meantime, sought and received a stay order of this judgment, during which, will appeal to the Supreme Court for its reversal.

The verdict has added a new dimension — the legal — to the political crisis that has been starting us in the face ever since the boycott of the parliament began on March 1, '94. Whatever rhetorical reaction the leaders concerned may give to the verdict, its more serious legal implications, they can neither deny and far less ignore. The Opposition has every right to contest the court's verdict, and we welcome every effort to use the legal process to sort out our differences. But we hope that all parties exert restraint while the process is on.

There have been some quick and rather harsh reaction to the judgment from political leaders. It is somewhat acceptable, and could be even considered to be healthy, to give instant and off the cuff reaction to political events, governmental decisions and policy announcement. However in legal matters more circumspection would perhaps serve everyone better. The question of sovereignty of the parliament, jurisdiction of the High Court to parliamentary proceedings and to whether or not such a verdict will sour the relations between the legislature and the judiciary, are all immensely serious matters. These issues must be seriously considered and views on them expressed after sufficient thinking. The very fact that the Opposition is appealing to the higher court shows its wish to settle this legal issue legally. Why then say the type of things that has been said? High Courts and Supreme Courts are integral parts of the Constitutional process, and in fact, the latter is its final interpreter.

Undoubtedly the court verdict has posed a serious problem for the Opposition. Whatever may be said, High Courts and especially the Supreme Court are held in high esteem, and a judgement emanating from such bodies are bound to have significant impact on the public mind. The opposition will be well advised not to waste too much time on the political bias issue and to concentrate their full energy in preparing a far superior brief for their appeal.

Checking Price Spiral

In a meeting on Sunday with the commerce minister, the representatives of the commodity-based traders pledged to take effective measures to keep the prices of essentials within the buying capacity of the commonman during the Ramadan. A very heartening news indeed. For, the whole population of this land starts panicking before the Ramadan over the price spiral the holy month sets in motion. The traders' welcome pledge should work as an effective balm soothing the commodity-price fears.

Is it within the power of the trade leaders to stem a price spiral? If they have the power, the question naturally would slide to why then do they not check this bad blackmail of a business malpractice. And the disturbing thought that who could stop the grind and yet do not, must be having an interest in the spiral — cannot any more be suppressed.

The demand for food-related items, say sugar and daal, or, for that matter, muri or puffed rice, leaps up with the approach of Ramadan. There is nothing so religious about that. The craze for purchase can be staggered. It is all a matter of the Ramadan culture of the feverish kind which is no less valuable. The galloping demand situation pushes up the price-line of everything, very naturally. It is mostly on the retail level that sellers take advantage of the situation and ask for irrational prices and exact that too in a perfectly seller's market.

In nations with healthy and dynamic trading realities, the whole thing works the other way round. All manufacturers of consumables go into overdrive to feed the festival market. To get out of the reselling market glut and with a profit, there ensues a rebate competition on the retailer level. Many families do wait for Christmas or puja to do their year's shopping at a hefty bargain.

Will the trade leaders seriously exert themselves to bring the mad Eid market to some sense of sanity? If successful, they will be doing our people and the economy as a whole a good turn.

Reforming the Lathials

Once upon a time no less a personage than that great disciple of August Comte — and incidentally the Bengalee people's first great writer of fictions and other prose, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee waxed eloquent on the virtues of the big stick — the lathi — and was all praise and pride over the practitioners of the weapon. Whether in attack or self-defence this was the weapon the Bengalee excelled in and did better with it in the face of all kinds of technologically superior instruments of killing — the sword and the spear, the bow and even possibly the catapult. The fierceness of the Bagdis and the Katbaras was known — and respected all over the subcontinent, the Decean included. The lathi and the lathials were both facts that were achievements and just the right thing to be proud of. But, come twentieth century, both passed into oblivion, irretrievably.

For some months past lathials are back in the news. In the recent weeks they have been blamed for playing havoc in the islets of greater Barisal. Now it is reported that in the charlands rising from the Padma and the Meghna in the Chandpur area, peasants are passing sleepless nights for fear of possible attacks by lathials any day, any moment. The term lathial is now being used in a way recalling the *Thuggee* and the *Thangarey* — criminal classes of people practising their violent criminality as if it were some esoteric religion. But lathials were never anything near that. Whoever was initiated into the deep mysteries of the lathi were at once made to adopt strict ethical standards well-spelt and evolved over centuries.

The government as well as society has a role to play in winning back the lathials to a clean and honourable life.

Malaysia's Success: Lessons for Bangladesh

by Belal E Baaque

MALAYSIA has been making rapid economic growth consistently for over a decade and all indicators bear this out. For example, from 1983-93 Malaysia's average economic rate of growth was 8.7 per cent compared to 8.0 per cent for Singapore, 8.9 per cent for Thailand, 6.9 per cent for Indonesia and 4.1 per cent for Hong Kong; inflation for the year of 1994 was at a reasonable rate of 3.7 per cent. From 1989-1993 its stock market capitalisation grew by 37.45 per cent compared with 17.19 per cent for Singapore. Last year (1993-94) the market capitalization of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Market grew at the rate of 30 per cent and now stands at US\$ 225 billion. The current national savings rate of Malaysia stands at 32 per cent, with internal savings expected to generate US\$ 35 billion to finance government and private sector projects to be undertaken over the next few years.

Role of the Private Sector in Malaysia

The driving force of behind Malaysia's progress has been a visionary leadership that could successfully tap the initiative of the private sector to initiate and sustain rapid economic growth. The most recent example of the fruitful results of this strategy has been the commissioning of the North-South Expressway (NSE) in September, 1994. This project cost US\$ 2.25 billion, took seven years and was completed 15 months ahead of schedule by PLUS (Projek Lebuhraya Utara Selatan), a private company that built and now maintains and collects toll on the expressway. The NSE is 848km long, starts at the southern most tip of the Malayan peninsula at Johor Bahru, runs along the west coast and ends up at Bukit Kayu Hitam at the border with Thailand. The NSE has, for example, halved the overland travel time from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur and in general has ignited a veritable explosion of growth along the NSE economic corridor in real estate, agriculture and industry.

The NSE is only one of many examples where Malaysia has mobilized the private sector to build the economy as well as the infrastructure required to sustain the current economic boom. Malaysia has also made use of the private sector to achieve huge savings of the public exchequer through the privatization of government enterprises. More than 100 government businesses have been privatized since 1983 leading to an estimated savings of US\$ 24 billion annually for the Malaysian government, the savings being in the areas of capital expenditure, development and operating costs.

South East Asia and overseas Chinese capital

The stunning success of Malaysia in its economic and social development is of particular significance to Bangladesh and to other Third World countries. The economic success of the Asian Tigers, namely Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore has been attributed rather one-sidedly by some observers to "Confucian" values or similar ethnic-based and ethnic-biased cultural and other non-economic factors. While there is definitely a lot of truth in singling out and recognizing the seminal role played by overseas Chinese capital in the development of East Asian countries and the cultural affinity of Korea and Japan to Chinese culture, this mode of thought is obviously bad news for the rest of the Third World who would like to draw lessons from the Asian Tigers that transcend and ethnic-based values.

Dr Mahathir's leadership

The alliance between overseas Chinese economic power and Malay political power has further been crystallized in Malaysia by the central role of the political leadership in finding a suitable arrangement to produce a stable political equilibrium between the major ethnic groups.

It can safely be said that the single most important factor in charting out the modus operandi for Malaysia's explosive growth has been the visionary, able and charismatic leadership of Dr Mahathir Mohamed, a political leader of world calibre who has been the Prime Minister of Malaysia since 1981.

Many of the decisions critical for Malaysia's economic success were personally made by Dr Mahathir. For example, in 1983 faced with the manipulations of Britain which caused a collapse of the rubber prices worldwide and particularly hurt Malaysia, a major rubber producer, Dr Mahathir initiated and adopted a policy of Buy British Last and Look East (instead of looking to the West) for economic progress. This was the period just preceding the sudden and large appreciation of the Japanese Yen starting in 1985 and which forced Japanese com-

panies to relocate their production facilities overseas; hence Malaysia was ideally positioned by its Look East policy to capture large Japanese investments and which have continued to pour into Malaysia upto the present. Another courageous decision taken by Dr Mahathir in 1984 was to manufacture cars in Malaysia, namely the Proton; this decision has also paid rich dividends as it has provided an indigenous car satisfying the needs of the majority of the consumers as well as opening up a major new line of industry for the Malaysian economy.

The examples above are only a few of the numerous difficult and complex decisions taken by Dr Mahathir to guide Malaysia onto the path of stability and prosperity.

Potential fault lines in Malaysia's development

All has not been smooth sailing for Malaysia. After gaining independence from the British in 1957, it first underwent a merger and then a split with Singapore in 1967; faced a hostile Indonesia in the early sixties and an insurgency problem locally. Inter-communal tensions were widespread and flared up as recently as 1969 when there were widespread communal rioting between the Malay and Chinese communities. It was only when the UMNO leadership stepped in to oppose communal strife, promulgated steps to rectify the economically secondary position of the Malay and incorporated the Malaysian Chinese Association into a National Front government that amity was restored between the races.

The Malay and Chinese community's have since then formed a synergistic relationship which has paid rich dividends to both of them. It is simply incorrect to deny or downplay the pivotal role played by the majority Malay's and its leadership in the current economic boom of Malaysia and try and attribute all the success to the Chinese business community. Without the mutually reinforcing and inter-dependent relationship of the Malay and Chinese community's no progress is possible for Malaysia.

Malaysia today still has problems that could throw it off its present course. Foremost is that inter-communal harmony be maintained, and which could possibly be disrupted by the rise of PAS. The quality of the leadership of UMNO is crucial, and there are destructive and corrosive

forces of corruption and nepotism at work in the UMNO and in the government machinery. Keeping the political leadership relatively clean and above factionalism and in-fighting is a pressing task. UMNO has taken a major step towards stability by ensuring that a new crop of leadership, as embodied in Anwar Ibrahim, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, will smoothly succeed the current generation of leaders.

Malaysia's international policy

Unlike most East Asian countries who have been almost solely concerned with their own country's well-being, Dr Mahathir has brought Malaysia to the stage of world politics and has shouldered the onerous task of being a spokesman and defender of the cause of the developing Third World countries. Malaysia was an ardent supporter of the struggle against apartheid in Namibia and in South Africa, has supported the Palestinian cause, is now one of the few courageous countries speaking out against the genocide of the Bosnian Muslims, and has consistently upheld the position of the developing countries in international forums. More recently, Malaysia has taken the British government to task for slanderous allegations made in the British press against the Malaysian leadership.

Malaysia is an active member in ASEAN and SE Asia in general. It has been a stabilizing force and has opposed the military presence of foreign powers; in particular, Malaysia stand on the Spratly Islands that all parties involved are committed to a peaceful solution and that this issue is no cause for the intervention of outside powers.

Malaysia proposed the concept of the EAEC (East Asian Economic Caucus) in 1991 and which met with a positive response from the ASEAN countries, China and Vietnam. However EAEC has met with furious opposition of the US and its Pacific ally Australia; the US has gone so far as to "forbid" Japan and S Korea from joining the EAEC. Given Japan's political current defiance towards the US it is unlikely at this juncture that Japan will join EAEC. However, with the waning of the power of the US and the rise of China, Japan will have little option but to ultimately throw in its lot with the rest of East Asia and de facto make EAEC a reality. This realization is slowly dawning on the Japanese people as well.

Malaysia continued with its independent stance at the second meeting of the APEC countries at Bogor, Indonesia in November, 1994. While the other APEC members all fell in line with the refrain of the US for a "definite timetable for free trade", probably due to their dependence on, and attraction for, the US market, Malaysia was the only country that signed the Bogor declaration with an annexure clarifying that free trade would be possible by 2020 for all countries of APEC only if the developing countries had reached the economic levels of the advanced countries, and not otherwise.

These events and encounters of Malaysia with the pillars of the Western powers shows

how profoundly the old balance of power has changed with the Western powers being in a state of decline and losing their erstwhile global economic and political hegemony. It is going to be emerging and rising powers like Malaysia that will set the tone for policies in the twenty-first century.

Lesson's from the Malaysian experience

The lessons from the example of Malaysia are many.

Firstly, that the economic boom currently underway in East Asia is not a Chinese-based ethnic phenomenon. Although overseas Chinese capital is playing a dynamic and powerful role in this boom, the leadership of countries such as Malaysia are in firm control of political power and their populations at large are all active players who can see beyond current internal economic imbalances, and who have the patience and self-control necessary to allow for economic growth to spread to the population at large. Secondly, as has become common knowledge the world over, the leadership of a developing country is the single most important factor in bringing about an economic and social renaissance; a third class leadership can only accelerate a Third World country's descent into disaster.

Thirdly, Malaysia is one of the few Muslim-majority and Muslim-led country which has the distinction of successfully modernizing its economy and society without surrendering itself to Western culture and Western decadence. It is clear from the examples of East Asian countries which have a myriad of religious and other beliefs that religion is neither a liability nor an asset in initiating and sustaining an economic boom. Politics based on making religion a contentious issue is however surely going to be a disruptive force and could even end up thwarting economic growth.

And lastly, the dynamism of the private sector and the market, both domestic and international, should be judiciously used by the leadership to get their country out of the trap of economic stagnation and social backwardness.

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'Goodwill Ambassador' Embarrasses the Military

by Cameron Duodu

GENERAL Sani Abacha's military government blundered when it ordered the seizure of the passport of the Wole Soyinka, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.

For 60-year-old Soyinka has become too big for Nigeria, and it was wishful thinking for the government to believe it could confine him within Nigeria's borders. As an international writer and Goodwill Ambassador of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Soyinka is in great demand abroad.

So it was no surprise when UNESCO invited him to a meeting in Paris.

"They have seized my passport," Soyinka told the organization.

"No problem," UNESCO replied. "We shall organise a UN travel document for you."

And so it did. Neither Soyinka nor UNESCO considered the possibility that the Nigerian government — a signatory to the UN Charter and thereby legally bound to respect UN documents — would refuse to allow Soyinka to leave.

But when he turned up at Lagos airport on November 3, the immigration authorities seized his papers, including his UN travel document, and stopped him leaving. The government then placed him under surveillance, even using a helicopter to monitor his movements around his house.

He pretended that he was spending his enforced "internal exile" by indulging in the aristocratic hobby of a

partridge shoot. His minders did not know that he was casing out the forest to find out the easiest crossing into neighbouring Benin.

Within a few days, he put his plan into action. Setting out as usual for his partridge shoot, he slipped across the border and found his way to Cotonou. Once there, he proved to the Nigerian authorities that a Nobel Prize is not as unrecognised elsewhere as it may be in current ruling circles in Lagos. He soon obtained a "laissez-passer" certificate, and with it, a visa for Paris from the French embassy.

The Abacha government is anxious to keep Soyinka at home because he has sought a declaration from the courts that the government is illegal. The government does not welcome the prospect of Soyinka going around the world using



Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka: Eluding surveillance

his considerable verbal talents to preach to all and sundry that the government is an illegal entity.

Abacha is particularly sensitive over the issue, because he himself seized power in November 1993 after a Lagos High Court declaration that the "interim government" of Chief Ernest Shonekan was "illegal."

Indeed, Soyinka's court pleadings argue that if the "interim government" was illegal, then so is its successor. The initial round of the case has gone against Soyinka, but he intends to appeal all the way to the Supreme Court.

In addition to the legal tussle, Soyinka is deeply involved in the civil disobedience campaign, under the aegis of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), that is trying to unseat Abacha.

Between July and

September, NADECO was able to bring out the oil workers, who produce the petroleum from which Nigeria obtains at least 98 per cent of its foreign exchange, in a prolonged strike.

The oil workers determination is all the more striking given that the high rate of inflation — estimated at more than 100 per cent a year — makes it difficult even for those who receive regular wages to make ends meet.

Soyinka is pressing the case that Nigeria will progress only if military dictatorship comes to an end. He wants the winner of the June 1993 presidential election, Chief Moshood Abiola, to be released from prison, where he is awaiting trial for treason, and allowed to take up his post as President.

In his campaign against military rule, Soyinka has some strong ammunition. In October, a committee headed by a prominent economist, Dr Pius Okigbo, which was appointed by Abacha to look into the affairs of the Central Bank of Nigeria, reported that the military government of former President Ibrahim Babangida (in which Abacha was the No. 2 man) failed to account for \$12.2 billion of proceeds from petroleum sales.

This money had been placed in "dedicated accounts" overseas, ostensibly for urgent projects. But it had just vanished into thin air. So far, the Abacha regime has made no announcement of any prosecutions arising from the report.

— GEMINI NEWS

To the Editor...

BTW news sources

Sir, BTW's coverage of foreign news is mostly from the western sources. Why BTW cannot be free and independent and present news, views and comment from different sources? We are having an overdose of BBC, CNN (and VOA on radio).

It is time the Third World or the South had its own international news service. Europe and the USA are apparently anti-Muslim.

How long the Iraqis will be made to suffer and punished is a very relevant question vis-à-vis the Western partiality and passivity in Bosnia.

authority before settlement of such claims. Only victims know how bothersome, costly and time-consuming the process is.

Small severs find it absolutely difficult to obtain such certificate when the amount is nominal. The nominees lose interest to pursue the matter when they find the cost involved for the procurement would exceed Tk 2000, only to draw a sum of Tk 1000 or Tk 1200.

Such problems can be easily solved by keeping provision of nomination at the time of opening savings accounts at the banks and post offices. Even in the case of existing

savings accounts, the banks may be advised to collect nominations from the account-holders.

It is hoped, the present democratic government which is also termed as accountable and which assumed office as a result of free, fair and impartial general election will examine the pros and cons and introduce the nomination system.