

Why Shouldn't They Resign

Two students were killed in an internecine fight in the Rajshahi University campus on Sunday. This could be a shocking news had this incident occurred in another country. But such loss of life, caused by the violation of all canons of civilised existence, has ceased to shock us. Nothing will be affected by the killing of Ismail and Mostafiz.

These campus deaths, the handwork of students who will again answer to the roll call in the classroom - do not weigh upon the conscience of the teachers and the university executives, the leaderships of the government and the political parties and would not move the hearts of elders in general of the society and would not either fill with revulsion the minds of the young people of the nation. So how and why would these murders stop? What and who would stop these? It seems that no one has a stake in freeing the campuses of terror. And it is a fact that there are powerful quarters that have stake in the perpetuation of campus violence.

We have very clearly said in these columns the government, most of all and first of all, is responsible for the continuance of this harmful malady together with other major political parties. And without these political quarters wanting very seriously an end to campus violence, things are not going to improve there. And we have also written without equivocation about the raw deal to Rajshahi University. Now we want to be as unambiguous about another party to the abominable campus reality.

The teachers and university executives are contributing mightily to the intolerable situation by choosing to feign as if the murders in the campus were taking place in Timbaktu with them having nothing to do with these. It is a matter of years that self-respecting teachers and officers would resist entry into campus by police or any outside agency on point of sanctity of the academy and professional honour. Now, specially in RU, Dr Zoha's University a dyarchy is ruling; police is charged with the peace and ensuring a condition where the teachers can continue with their academics and the executives with their promotions and disbursements.

People are paying for the upkeep of this university through tuition fee and taxpayer's money. Are they paying for murders unchecked and closures spreading to half the year? Are they paying the teachers for grooming murderers? If the haloed VC and his cohort cannot wean their charges from their doomed ways through their superior wisdom and exemplary lives, because of powers beyond them, why don't they resign and let the JCD and ICS take charge of teaching?

Hanif's Complaints

When Mohammad Hanif became Dhaka's elected mayor, nearly a year ago, it was widely acclaimed as a consequential event for two specific reasons: one, it marked the outcome of a free and fair election to an extent that the ruling BNP's sitting mayor had to bow out to a popular choice in the person of Hanif; and two, it was regarded as an aperture opened for bipartisan work with the ministry concerned belonging to the ruling BNP while the city government in the most important metropolis coming under the charge of an opposition Awami Leaguer.

While this victory along with that in Chittagong city, the financial hub of the country, boosted Awami League's morale, the ruling party got a clean chit on fairness rating as far as the corporation polls went. In addition, there was the pleasant tinge of democratic sophistication and maturity that are the hall-marks of some advanced democracies having recorded such refreshing, but testing, party government variations.

So, a reflected glory was in fact the ruling BNP's, and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia herself held out the needed assurance of support on behalf of other government organisations to mayor Mohammad Hanif. Hanif on his part fully grasped the uniqueness of his position and made it known to all concerned that he was the mayor of all people of Dhaka and that he wanted to act as such, not as a partisan functionary.

However, giving his own assessment of nearly one year in office, Hanif has complained of non-cooperation from the various government agencies in the discharge of his responsibilities. The worrying thing is Hanif feels handicapped in making solid start on the priorities he had set before himself with nods of public approval, and the reasons he has adduced for the same cannot go unheeded for long.

As it is, coordination between Rajuk, DESA, WASA and DMP is suspect in normal circumstances; and now, if it has ebbed unworkably for Hanif having won on Awami League ticket as is being alleged, then it is a serious issue of public denial which has to be looked in very urgently.

Post-drought Farming

The crippling effects of the drought, whose true magnitude remained shrouded so far in notional figures at best, are coming to light in an appalling rapidity. Not only have we to make a rice import worth 5.72 lakh metric tons on this particular account, we are going also to foot the bill of an estimated Tk 160 crore plan to get agriculture in the 36 affected districts back on its feet.

The plan holds goods for the February-April period of the current dry season. This time span is to experience dips in surface and underground water levels with the result that 83 per cent of the manual tubewells, 21 per cent of the low-lift pumps and 41 per cent of shallow tubewells in more than half the number of Bangladesh's districts are likely to be affected. So the last drought is casting a long shadow over farming during the current dry season. It is the low re-charging rate of the underground water that is so very worrying indeed.

We fully endorse the emphasis pattern recommended by the government task force hoping that the order in which this has been laid down will be followed to the hilt. The agricultural extension service should be faultless with an assured supply of inputs at a reasonable cost to the farmer and imparting of knowledge to them on double lifting and deep-setting irrigation pumps. There is no overemphasising the dire need for co-ordination among the various government ministries and departments to make this special rehabilitation programme succeed.

I want to pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque. 65-year-old Palestinian Sakhri Takata apparently from East Jerusalem told an Israeli border policeman.

"It's forbidden" - replied the Israeli policeman. The Palestinian pleaded repeatedly - "I have to go to the prayers because it is Ramadan."

But the Israeli policeman did not care and pushed him aside. The "Peace Club" leaders met at Cairo just a day before the first Friday of the Holy Ramadan - very important religious day for the Muslims but leaders' agenda apparently did not cover this auspicious day's prayer by Palestinians at Al-Aqsa Mosque. Such a summit means nothing to Sakhri Takata and some others who not only missed their important prayer but were harassed by Israeli policeman. The summit could have at least agreed on some form of relaxation during Friday prayer time, if not general lifting of closure, for those who wanted to pray at Al-Aqsa on this auspicious day of Ramadan. But this did not happen. This undoubtedly antagonized a large number of Palestinians and thus strengthened the hands of Hamas and other radical groups. Now if Sakhri Takata whose religious rights stand trampled decides to support or even join Hamas, one cannot blame him. Thus it must be recognized that Israeli leadership and partly PLO self-rule authorities are to accept responsibilities for the antagonism and consequent violence in the area.

The Peace Club meet achieved practically very little except reiterating their resolve to pursue this peace process. But Palestinians would obviously ask - pursue peace process for how long and to what purpose? Israeli leadership gave away nothing in the summit - they maintained their earlier positions on settlements in the occupied territories, on redeployment of Israeli forces on nuclear issue on which Egypt itself has been showing a lot of anxiety and worries. Prime Minister Rabin won in two ways: (a) he got condemnation, of course, rightly from Arab summit leaders including Arafat who hardly reacted earlier on such sensitive issues as he knows he has been benefitting from violence since Intefada days as it seems Intefada forced Israel to go for peace negotiations and (b) he effectively isolated Hafez Al Assad of Syria. Once again, Israel proved that it can deal with Arabs separately and indeed succeeded in putting up a joint front of those who joined the peace process through one by one.

Now the question is - has the peace process been advanced by this? Apparently not. Assad is not a person to take such an insult lightly. Whatever advances were made through secret or open talks with Syria in Middle East and Washington may face a definite setback. Assad will see this as Israel's attempt to put some Arab leaders against him. Though one can assume that Assad was secretly sounded about the summit, but as the reports show he was not even invited. The later may be true as Israel's intention apparently was to put Assad in an isolated position - to tell him that he

is now all alone in the game and has to show flexibilities in his negotiations on Golan Heights. It also seemed to be the intention of Israel to identify Syria as the country supporting and sponsoring terrorism. As reported, Rabin told Israeli television that Arafat expressed his concern on this at the summit. Rabin also mentioned that "in the four-way talks I had a partner, Arafat, to demand that the

territory under Israeli occupation back to Jordan. King Hussein seems to be on a safer ground. He even said, while receiving Israeli Parliamentarians in Jordan, "our peace will be an example to the region." But Arafat's position seems extremely shaky. The expansion of his self rule area to rest of the occupied territory seems uncertain as one does not know what would be Rabin's stand in the next

talks. Redeployment of Israeli forces did not take place despite repeated talks and hence no Palestinian election. Expansion of Israeli settlements are continuing around Jerusalem and some parts of West Bank and no sign of lifting the closure on West Bank and Gaza even after the summit meeting except that some doctors and teachers have been temporarily allowed to travel to Israel. All these loom large on the future negotiations between Arafat and Rabin. Despite the resolve of the "Peace Club" to pursue the peace process, the situation on the ground seems quite discouraging. The latest suicide bomb attack, the third in the series, killed 21 Israelis, mostly young Israeli soldiers

and this sent another shock wave through Israeli population - anger and anguish became widespread. In reply, Israel again sealed off West Bank and Gaza bringing immense sufferings to the working Palestinians. Israeli population including the Israeli government are now seriously thinking in terms of "separation" - i.e. two populations are to be physically separated. The idea is not new, but is it a workable and worthwhile solution? It could be a temporary measure and in any case, West Bank and Gaza remain separated for considerable time after each bomb attack. But bomb attacks have not stopped. Israel has been separated for many years from Lebanon by Israeli self-declared security zone, but attacks on Israel and reprisal bombings by Israel on Lebanon continued. Moreover, separation will only show that radical groups can wreck the resolve for a permanent solution where two people can coexist.

Instead, the better course seems to be to seriously expedite the actual negotiations of the issues that would establish peace and show results on the ground. The aim of Palestinians and other radical groups is practically same - to have Palestinian state on their land. The idea of destruction of Israel by the radical groups could be seen as the extreme reflection of their demand for a Palestinian state. Their demand obviously covered entire land that includes Israel, but they know very well

if he only knew about Bangladeshi realities could well have formulated his celebrated dictum in a different phrasing: Jail space expands to be filled up by inmates. No matter if there were not enough convicts - pretrials and undertrials would be found in numbers able to spill the upazila jail. The police and the courts always take good care of that. When there were no courts and jails, jail detainees of the nation were almost that much short as would be housed in the upazilas.

The first task now is to cope with the exponentially growing number of pending cases. Strengthen the judicial service by a factor of 2 right now and results will begin to show. Task two: release on bond undertrials staying in jails beyond a year. Task three: make sure no pretrial detainee is there in any case beyond 90 days. And then only you enlarge existing jails and build new ones. Otherwise, with the state of affairs remaining as they are, all the existing jails will continue to be brimming most inhumanly with people with an ever diminishing humanity while the new spaces and new jails will in no time rush to the same situation. This cannot be desirable for anyone.

These are the issues that should be taken into account when the government is planning to build new jails. It is only natural that only the jails built when this part of Bengal had about four crore people or even less would not accommodate people fallen foul of law now that the population is nearly 12 crore. The number of convicts and detainees should have at least quadrupled over the last four decades. But society has over the same time-span been subjected to an accelerating rate of criminalisation. When we put population growth at 2.2 per cent per annum, the rate shows rather a decrease and is tending to go steady for some time. This is not the case with the incidence of crime. Although dependable figures would not be available - one knows from experience as from the ruling social situation that growth of criminals has far outstripped the growth of population. Whole sections of our population have been criminalised on a very large scale - youths and students, floating population, professions like police and banking and engineering and areas of government service dealing directly with people, specially businessmen. Without any provocation, the country should now have needed four times as much jail accommodation it had in 1947. The galloping growth rate of crime should call for, very conservatively, 16 times the jail seats of four decades back.

M-E "Peace Club" Meet in Cairo

Israel can never keep East Jerusalem as a part of Israel. Israel simply cannot rule East Jerusalem with all the Palestinians living there. Even a Palestinian state without East Jerusalem will be meaningless in terms of Middle East peace as the fight will continue.

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Spotlight on Middle East Muslehuddin Ahmad

Syrians stop Palestinian terror organizations... (including) Islamic Jihad which has arisen in Syria. As strange as it seems Arafat raised the issue that in fact they are attacking him, that they threaten his life not less than they threaten the lives of Israelis.

Thus the peace process now stands on two tracks - Peace Club track and Syrian track. Two tracks existed even before, but recent trend showed progress on Syrian track too due to US initiative raising the hope for a comprehensive solution. But summit has dashed that hope unless the US again tries to show some carrot to Assad for reviving the talk with Israel.

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territory under Israeli occupation back to Jordan. King Hussein seems to be on a safer ground. He even said, while receiving Israeli Parliamentarians in Jordan, "our peace will be an example to the region." But Arafat's position seems extremely shaky. The expansion of his self rule area to rest of the occupied territory seems uncertain as one does not know what would be Rabin's stand in the next

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Cutting the Crowd Behind the Bars

by Waheedul Haque

Our state and its handlers, the successive governments, should work towards the very attainable ideal of no jail-inmate without a jail sentence. But is it the be-all and end-all of the jail question? In the west they have paroles and probations and suspended sentences that not only ease pressure on the jails but increases the area of liberty and opportunity for the recalcitrant to reform.

commodation is increased to four times the pre-partition figures, we should in all fairness, not question the construction of new jails or other long awaited developments inside the walls. Even after granting this, certain aspects of the jail question literally cry to be examined with a fresh if not radical approach. First, the nation doesn't at all know that many inmates of the jails are not convicts at all. As many as half - and may be more jail residents have never been sentenced by any court to stay there under compulsion. They are detainees. These are people whom the police want detained for reasons of prevention of apprehended crime - with judiciary or quasi-judiciary authority accepting the police plea.

Perhaps the state, as things at present are, cannot possibly do without some of these detentions, the undertrial prisoners in grievous and nonbailable cases for example. But by one fell stroke 90 per cent of all pre-trial detainees can be set free without harming the cause of justice in any manner. Only police wouldn't agree to this. The police, whatever the state feeds and pampers them for, haven't historically proven congenial to establishment of justice in the society. They are allegedly a party if not always to a crime but nevertheless in all cases of supposed infringement of law. The pre-trial detainees are in an unnecessary purgatory wholly created by them.

Law specifically lays down the period up to which a person can be incarcerated before trial. How many pre-trial detainees are there who have run that period out? Thousands. They join the undertrial ones to take up most of jail accommodation. Cannot the state, in the form of the present government, by another decisive stroke, let those undertrial who have been rotting in jail, for, say, a full year? If it is two years and the prisoner is found, not guilty - who is going to pay for the wasted period of

his life? The arguments against letting the undertrials out are two: one, the charged people can jump bond; two, they can intimidate the plaintiff party and influence police. Jumping bond compounds the crime and fresh intimidations are another criminal charge that the plaintiff may press in court without needing to go into further expenses - things can be so fixed. But the first and more pertinent question in the matter is why should a trial in a criminal suit drag past a year? If it does, the police and not the detainees should pay for that.

This will of course hit a very genuine problem - the problem of corruption. All parties having undertrial prisoners would employ their every capacity to make police and the law-court underlings to delay the trials beyond the one-year mark. Thus money will flow, and corruption will rise. And the genuine criminals, knowing that the purgatorial suffering will at the worst be one year's duration, jump into criminal exploits with a more carefree mind. All this is true to a great extent. Even then by cutting down on undertrial incarceration - you move towards justice which is worth even more risks than stated.

The whole problem of bursting jails boils down indeed to one basic thing. The courts are so poorly manned that pending cases pile into an ever-rising mountain. We have 500,000 undisposed cases with the courts. Half of these would hopefully be dispensed within the new year. But the newly instituted ones would number about another 500,000 - leaving us a balance of 750,000. It would go on being compounded to a figure that would reduce the judiciary, as such the police, and by the same token the whole administration and governance to worse than a cruel, very cruel farce.

Having no effective manpower the courts cannot do anything about this impending

disaster - the undoing of the state and society. The courts could ideally pressure police and other agencies of government going to court to keep to a time frame that would eliminate pre-trial and minimise undertrial crowding of jails - for, first, justice's sake and then for the improvement of the jail situation.

Our state and its handlers, the successive governments, should work towards the very attainable ideal of no jail-inmate without a jail sentence. But is it the be-all and end-all of the jail question? In the west they have paroles and probations and suspended sentences that not only ease pressure on the jails but increases the area of liberty and opportunity for the recalcitrant to reform. We do not as yet have any such. A country, more like ours than any, namely Sri Lanka, years back started the experiment of a wall-less jail. We cannot think if it. In our present social situation, what does the jail stand for? Doesn't our whole judicial system, as the sole guarantee for justice, need a fresh look at it from time to time? Has it not to be kept under perpetual review? The state cannot punish a citizen without the court doing it. Are courts mainly an instrument of punishment? Is punishment the main road to establishing justice?

Why are so many jailed in our country? Cannot crime be met with and contained by other recourses than jailing? Out of court settlements are here few and far between. Whatever has happened to traditional conciliation and shalish processes that preclude jailing? These are so many unanswered questions solely because people have ceased to question. You cannot come to grips with any problem without asking good and pertinent questions. Why do we, not question the familiar and the prevalent? At least because both aren't anymore conducive to social and individual good.

When Ershad named the thanas as upazilas, the first ac-

tion taken to show that a change more than in nomenclature was meant was building court buildings and - yes - jails in innocent and virgin land. Was this taking justice to the doorsteps of the common man in the interior? Do indeed courts and jails improve a given populace's situation of security and enforcement of rights and overall justice? The only way to answer this is to compare the situation before the coming of the jail to some place with that of after it had come. Unfortunately, those upazila courts and jails were not to mature and run for any length of time to provide a dependable comparison. A sincere and honest conjecture is that had the courts and jails run a long course there, the justice situation would have dwindled to pathetic proportions and would have remained so till society, in its mysterious and myriad ways, came to take these in its stride. Parkinson,

Art Buchwald's Column Bailing Out

I live in Washington, DC - a lovely little town on the Potomac River just inside the Capital Beltway. We are a peaceful, law-abiding community except for the rare member of Congress or Cabinet officer who occasionally loses his moral compass. Our only problem is that we are broke - dead broke, flat busted, empty pockets and all.

The solution to this dilemma is grim - if the President makes as much effort to save Washington as he did baseball, we will have enough money to purchase sand for the next snowstorm. If not, the capital of the greatest and most powerful nation in the world will have to declare bankruptcy and face a fate worse than Orange County, California.

Some of the wisest and most frugal men in Washington are trying to find a way out. One of the first solutions someone came up with was to give the District of Columbia back to Maryland. Maryland politely refused the offer after the way the Washington Redskins played in 1994. I think the real reason it doesn't want our city is that Baltimore hopes to get another pro football team of its own. So annexing Washington would screw up the state's chances for a franchise.

DC was then offered to Virginia. There was some interest because the governor wanted to turn Washington into a giant parking lot to accommodate all the Northern Virginia residents who commute into the city every day. But the rest of Virginia said that they were not concerned with solving Northern Virginia's parking problems. They maintained that most parkers were voters responsible for Ollie North losing his bid for the US Senate. After the neighbouring states said "no thanks," Washington was offered to Vermont, Oklahoma, Montana and Nevada. Nevada was the only one interested because it was looking for a "site to dump its nuclear waste, and the Department of Energy building in DC seemed to be just the right location.

To the Editor...

Of ministers

Sir, What's the value of a minister in a democratic country? It's said that Late Mrs Indira Gandhi would obtain signed undated resignation letter before appointment of a minister, showing therein ground of resignation - "For the reason of health..."

Is it possible for every prime minister to follow this practice? I don't imagine so, nor it would have been the case with Mrs Gandhi herself in respect of a political stalwart. What about Benazir Bhutto and Begum Khaleda Zia? As far as our own prime minister is concerned, it might not happen so. But the most unceremonious exit of Barrister Nazmul Huda who was closest to her, did suggest something else. The prime minister has been empowered by the constitution to fire any minister for better governance. Mr Huda was

Political stalemate must end

Sir, In a vaporous and opaque atmosphere it is not clear as to how the ruling BNP or the opposition AL-JI-JP are going to resolve their differences, put on the right track our derailed democracy, save our hard hit economy and restore peace and political stability in the country.

It appears that both the BNP and the AL-JI-JP are busy in castle building, dreaming and living in a preposterous and quixotic world of their own at the cost of untold anxieties and also suffering of the people. We find neither the AL-JI-JP have come forward with any constructive, fool-proof, practical legal and constitutional demand, plan or programme nor the BNP has been able to resolve the 10-month old

stalemate with sufficient justification and technical know-how.

As a result, both our democracy and economy are being jeopardised on account of unconstitutional demands and unlawful activities of AL-JI-JP on the one hand and due to indecision and 'to be or not to be' policy of the BNP on the other.

We need a practical approach to resolve this political stalemate. We need the BNP all the way. We need the AL-JI-JP all the way. We need a practical approach to resolve this political stalemate. We need the BNP all the way. We need the AL-JI-JP all the way.