

Stampede Deaths

The several deaths and the physical mauling of many others in a stampede for Zakat clothes at the Motijheel Boys' School were outrageously tragic because these were avoidable.

Leave aside the year-by-year heightening of the scramble for Zakat charities which served its own notice, the train of incidents in Monday's episode itself was full of forewarnings.

Earlier when each was pushing through the impregnable human wall to get to the front there were altercations and fisticuffing outside the gate for hours when it was the right time for the precautions to be taken with a high degree of manageability.

It appears that wide publicity was resorted to get the words around about the Zakat saree distribution which made it all a talk of the area.

When all these actions were taken unmindful of the consequences thereof, the onus surely lies with the organisers. One wonders why there was a laxity not to call the police in for help to keep the crowd in check, especially when it seems that the pious act was being intended by someone belonging to the ruling party.

The sociological and image-oriented messages of the incident should not be lost on us. It did reflect on the extent of poverty and over-population in the country brought to their focal-point through the city's destitute and floating souls.

Opting for Science

In Chittagong the Islami Thinkers and Researchers' Forum organised an important seminar the other day. Titled as "Scientific Research — a Jihad for Muslim Umma", the seminar has drawn our attention to a subject we all know but choose to avoid because of the unpleasantness involved.

Mass illiteracy, disunity, dependence on others and military expenditure — among others — have been held responsible for the lack of scientific advancement in the Islamic world. We would like to add to this list the education that falls far short of meeting the challenges of modern times.

Evidently, Dr Saleh has demanded what would have been the ideal situation. But in reality, the Muslim countries are so backward in terms of fundamental research and experiments that they will only stand a chance of meeting his expectations by a radical transformation in those areas.

Campaign against Diabetes

Yesterday was Diabetic Awareness Day. The Bangladesh Diabetic Society has punctiliously been carrying a single-handed campaign against diabetes, considered to be the third killer disease world-wide after heart ailment and cancer.

In fact, it will go down in the country's history as one of the spectacular successes in the private sector. BIRDEM's enviable efficiency is perhaps the best achievement the society can boast of.

One good thing about the disease is that it can be kept from harming the patient's capacity to lead a normal life. The four categories of people — those who get it through heredity, are overweight, do no physical labour and are over 40 years of age — all have need for disciplined living.

The BIRDEM is overstretched to provide treatment to a huge army of patients. Better it would be if the regional centres were adequately equipped to independently treat patients.

When will this Dialogue of the Deaf End?

On this day, one year ago, a walkout of the parliament, that later turned into a boycott, started on an unfortunate but trivial comment of a former minister. Nobody visualised on that occasion that the opposition's walkout would lead to a mass resignation of 147 MPs resulting in the de facto demise of the Fifth Parliament.

be started — meaning there will now have to be a formal invitation to the opposition to sit for talks. Just as a pious announcement that "anybody who wants to come and have dinner at my place is welcome" will not bring any self-respecting person to the dinner table, so also an open, public announcement will not bring any politician of minimum dignity to a discussion table.

What the public is finding so very difficult to understand is that having made the decision to go for talks, what harm is there for the ruling party to propose it formally? Then again, with all gains of negotiations of the last one year, what harm is there for the BNP to propose a concrete agenda for such talks on the basis of that.

So the game begins anew. The BNP's public posture will be, in the days to come, that the opposition has not responded to its open invitation. To this the opposition will say, there is no invitation at all, to which it can reply, We the public, will now be treated to the next act of the highly successful year-old play, "The Dialogue of the Deaf".

We would like to analyse the situation a bit for the benefit of our readers. The public statement of the PM at Jatiya Sangsad is a poltry announcement. She has informed the half-empty parliament, and through the media coverage of the nation and the world, about her intention to hold talks with the opposition, and if necessary even with the leader of the opposition herself.

litical impasse except to go for elections, and get a fresh mandate from the people. Therefore, all energies of the political leaders will now have to concentrate on how to hold that election freely and fairly. But to do so, a genuine dialogue is what is needed. To make such a dialogue possible we need the BNP to take the steps suggested above.

Looking back, we can characterise the politics of the past year as one of failure of the ruling party to grasp the seriousness of the opposition's demands, and the insensitivity of the opposition to Constitutional provisions. Compounding these two factors, was the overriding suspicion that each felt for the other, prompting leaders of both sides to look for ulterior motives to simple and straightforward demands.

The Third View by Mahfuz Anam

self will lead to narrowing of positions and, hopefully, to solutions.

Every observer of our political scene will vouch that one of the serious flaws in our politics is that it gives so much scope for the contending parties to remain vague. This complicates issues, negotiations and the reaching of solutions.

Often it appears, that the intention, on either side, is not to solve problems at hand, but to try to outmaneuver the opponent. This has led to deep seated suspicions, smearing the atmosphere with venom and acrimony. The current level of mutual suspicion is unbelievable. But both parties must realise that there cannot be watertight negotiations which will take care of all their suspicions.

At the moment, there appears no way out of this political impasse except to go for elections, and get a fresh mandate from the people.

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To the public, there appeared to have been no attempt on the part of the opposition to listen to any view that did not entail Constitutional amendment. The frequent, and justifiable citing of instances of how many times the Constitution was shoddily treated, and how atrocious amendments — like the Indemnity Bill — were incorporated into it by the previous BNP government seemed sufficient ground to justify opposition's demand for a similar amendment.

A good example of how miscalculation led to disastrous consequences is the widely held view that BNP never seriously believed that the opposition, especially the AL will actually resign. There was thus an overriding consideration in the BNP hierarchy for calling, what they thought to be, the opposition's "bluff".

Similarly, the opposition never really gave much importance to BNP's principled position that the Constitution should not be tampered with, and whatever solution arrived

at, should be within its framework. A literal interpretation of such populist views as "Constitution is for the people, people are not for the Constitution" formed the thrust of opposition's propaganda campaign, depriving the movement of any chance of examining the BNP's position in a sober manner.

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Frankly the opposition, once it made up its mind to go for a Constitutional amendment, was loath to hearing any other point of view. It was the justification of their position, not the correctness of it, that occupied their full energy.

Now the question is, are we going to continue through the same series of mistakes and misjudgments, or are we going to learn from the past mistakes and improve on our performances now? At the risk of sounding

repetitive, we would like to say that the experience of the past four years teaches us, if anything, that there is no way that BNP and the AL can go forward unless they cooperate with each other. Yes, if they want to indulge in destructive politics, they can leave things be. For that, nobody needs to cooperate with anybody.

It is our earnest suggestion that both parties stop being clever by half, and desist forthwith from thinking that all God's wisdom has been bestowed on them, and them alone. Nobody has all the answers. It is only a collective formula which will get us away from the present suicidal course.

More important than membership in that government, are such issues as authentic voters' list (computerised, if possible), accountability of election funds, code of conduct for political parties, etc. Fundamental issues of independence of the Election Commission, control of police and the administrative machinery before and during elections remain to be resolved.

All this requires that the ruling party and the opposition must talk. Talks now hinges on a formal and clearly worked out invitation. Such an invitation cannot harm the ruling party. It can only help their public image.

A CASE FOR TRANSPARENT LEADERSHIP — II

Cynical Thinking Needs to be Avoided

by Oli Ahad

The stranglehold of internal colonialism of the politico-civil-military-bureaucratic rule for the last 47 years since 1947 has totally destroyed the moral fibre of the nation establishing the predominance of corrupt elements in every walk of life.

number of MLR convicts got their sentences commuted or pardoned either because of payment of heavy consideration money to the relevant authority or because of the assurance given to become camp followers of Gen Ershad to help him get a footing at mass level.

Muscle and Money Power It is sad and common experience how the "Muscle and Money" play decisive role to score victory in the local level elections of Union Parishads and Municipalities. This nexus between politics, crime and black money had the active connivance of the law and order agency. It is not at all difficult to eliminate and effectively check the gangsters and corrupt elements in election if the law and order agency is mobilised in right earnest.

Lack of opportunity for gainful employment in the rural sector obliges rural unemployed sections to migrate to urban areas in search of income. These economically deprived, socially un-integrated and brutalised by the pressures of a rootless urban existence demonstrate extraordinary tendency and proclivity to senseless cruelty and wanton

destruction of the public and private property at the slightest pretext. What is alarming is the cynical use of mindless and potentially violent youth by almost all political parties as political muscle power. It is also a fact that leaders are deliberately indiscriminate in recruiting their followers. This results in the hesitation of administration especially the police to move against the terrorists promptly and firmly. A considerable section of society specially in urban areas avails of a chance to assert its presence through destruction and violence. They graduate as professional hoodlums over a period of time. Their service is solicited by political parties, thereby the political connection affords them administrative protection. When this permissive climate of condoning and protecting the action of the hoodlums and gangsters rules the political parties, the administrative machinery loses the courage, sense of service and professional objectivity.

Impartial justice and service cannot be guaranteed and ensured from a pliable judiciary and bureaucracy as the records of communist and military or civil dictatorial countries will show. In strict adherence to laws and rules as laid down in the statute book,

judges and bureaucrats will discharge their duties entrusted with them without fear or favour. This means a strict observance of law, i.e. law takes its own course independent of any other consideration. In a democratic representative system of government comes and goes after serving a stipulated period but the steel frame-bureaucracy carries on the governance as per provisions of the Constitution of the country. People's representative, i.e., government formulates the policies and the bureaucracy executes since the machinery of governance is the bureaucracy and for that reason bureaucracy is there to keep continuity of administration. It is in principle least affected because of the change of government — the policy making body. In post-war France till the advent of De-Gaulle, there had been quick rise and fall of the government. It was, therefore, aptly described as overnight fall and rise of govt getting no breathing time to give policy direction. But, the machinery of governance i.e. permanent bureaucracy was in smooth working order. Therefore, administration of the country was the least affected and country suffered least.

Being active and willing partner in the palace clique of capturing power to banish even the semblance of legislature since the dawn of inde-

pendence in 1947, contrary to the expectation of the enlightened section, nay the people of the country, bureaucratic machinery bent and twisted itself to serve the generals to rise and prosper at the cost of the people, making administration brazenly operating as a no-holds-barred spoil system. This is not the end. Disasters are ahead in an environment of disintegrating chaos — the inevitable consequence of civil-military clique rule opposed to the enlightened concept of elected representative government of the people, by the people and for the people.

Politics of Terror The people are on the war path against the civil and military dictators to get their rights back. But one cannot be oblivious of the lessons of history of mass agitations of 1960s, particularly 1969-71. The course of events of 1969-71 and of following years provides bitter experience that constant agitation and the use of terror as an instrument of politics lead to catastrophe. In the light of the past experience, it can safely be predicted, recent happenings will strain the capacity (nay making it impossible) of politicians and political parties to carry out the civil functions of a democratic society and govt. Politics, being fought on the street, its principal strength is the muscle power and the financial capacity to mobilise instant crowd. This process unleashes politics of terror, which threatens decent and enlightened politics of democratic setting. Democratic politics requires self-restraint and strict observance of the rules of the game by all participants. If this condition is not met, there may be the repetition of the 1972-75 politics of terror, violence and killing, random loot and anti-social activities all around.

Decisive Leadership Needed

The stranglehold of internal colonialism of the politico-civil-military-bureaucratic rule for the last 47 years since 1947 has totally destroyed the moral fibre of the nation establishing the predominance of

corrupt elements in every walk of life. Ethics of life has been consigned to a back seat. That is why only a particular section of musclemen and persons with black money are dominating the society, politics and the govt. To check them the honest elements of the enlightened section of the society have to come out of the cloistered life to give the correct and creative sense of direction to the bewildered and stagnant nation.

To arrest the present drift of events toward precipitous decline and decay, this particular patriotic enlightened section must give a decisive leadership and to succeed, must blend flexibility with dogged determination. In doing so, they will have to brave the discouraging rough and tumble of political life with singleminded determination and dedication to salvage the crisis-ridden nation. Democracy is a way of life. The process of establishing elected representative government on multiparty culture demands, in the transition period, enlightened leadership to revolutionise the mental outlook to make the parliament a meaningful guide of the nation. All questions must be thrashed out on the floor of the parliament with courage, knowledge and tolerance and not on the street. To do otherwise is to throttle the very process. Constitutional morality demands members of the parliament, defying all vexed questions, work seriously and sincerely to make the institution a success. Future lies there. Street actions in preference to floor of the parliament is a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma. It is for personal or group aggrandisement or for internal or external power game.

The country is now a captive of the corrupt and criminal elements while citizens groan under the dehumanizing stranglehold of abject poverty aggravated by urban chaos and rural neglect.

Before embarking on any comprehensive programme to regenerate the latent spirit of the nation there has to be critical appreciation by the parliament of what the developed world of democracy has achieved through three Industrial Revolutions in its forward march to post new milestones of civilisation and to attain greater new heights of culture and progress. Let us, particularly the parliament stand in the light of the aforesaid frontiers of advance in science and technology. (Concluded)

To the Editor...

Sunset rule

Sir, Lately I have been reading in the newspapers about the female students protesting the sunset rule at the Dhaka University. It is a major problem that concerns all citizens.

I am also a young student. I have studied at Kodaikanal International School in India. I have been to Germany, Norway and some more countries. I have lived in the USA most of my life. In every country there are rules and regulations for students living in the halls or dormitories. We as natural beings must abide by certain laws and rules to make ourselves

accustomed to the society that is surrounding us. While I was in Kodaikanal I had to abide by certain rules. We, both boys and girls, had to be in their respective dorms within the time. Our dorm parent would then go around, to all the rooms, for nightly routine checkups. In Norway, there are institutions of education where males and females must return to their dorms on time. In USA, in some college campuses there are time schedules. If no one follows them then they lose points or credits.

We as individuals must remember that these sunset

rules were made for our own good. These and some other rules prepare us for the future. We must learn to abide by rules, so after we finish our education and go to our respective jobs or employment that we don't become unruly.

For, if we don't then we will lose our future as well as financial well being. The sunset rule is very important. In the USA or in some other places of education where these rules do not exist, problems arise. Such problems like violent crimes, kidnapping, robbery or mugging, even rape. Because when students,

especially females, are late out at night in this society, many things can happen. And in the future, if we have kids and especially if it is a girl and she stays in the dormitory, we will have great deal to worry about. How about our sisters or future marriage partners? If something were to happen to them we will live a very difficult, unhappy life.

I have a request to all the females of the Dhaka University: Stick to the dorm rule, it is for your own safety and well being.

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