The Daily Star
Founder-Editor : Late S. M. Ali
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Real Estate Development

If there is one sector that has grown on its own, and has generated its own momentum, it is the real estate sector. Without any help from the government, and fully with private money and initiative, a whole new horizon of activities for our entrepreneurs has been opened up. More than a decade down the line, today, they are asking the government for help — not in the usual form of 'do this or that for us' but asking to remove obstacles that are today hampering further growth of this potentially dynamic sector. The current level of gain tax, stamp duties and registration costs, which together comes to more than 18 per cent, is excessively high. REHAB, a body of developers, suggests this should be lowered to six per cent. The argument here is that such a lowering of tax will increase buying and selling of houses or of flats, which will increase government's total earning. There are also strong suggestions for simplifying RAJUK's procedure for approving development proposals. Questions have also been raised about the completely outdated zoning laws that govern urban development.

In the all the above areas government must act, and do so quickly. For a modern city, we need modern laws, modern ways of doing things and, above all, a modern mindset. The attitude of the institutions that run our city affairs, and the laws that govern their functioning, have all got to change. As REHAB puts it, if the government cannot help the sector positively, then it should at least help out by removing the negative aspect, meaning the current obsolete laws and practices.

On the other side, we would like to raise the issue of quality construction by the developers. In the recent months we have had two literally unheard-of incidents of high-rise buildings actually tilting to their sides because of faulty foundation work. We strongly suggest the development of a comprehensive building codes and meticulous adherence to this, by REHAB members, with the provision of expulsion if any builder is found to do a sloppy job. We also strongly suggest the preparation of a comprehensive overview on urban planning. Cities cannot grow without a complete vision, which we seem to lack at the moment. REHAB members have made some very useful points. It is our suggestion that relevant government bodies should take a very close look at what has been said, and examine how to incorporate them into a forward-looking policy framework.

Do it for the Child's Sake

When in 1979 the Shishu Park was commissioned, the reception was mixed. For one thing it took up the area where the Indira Mancha stood and wiped out any trace of that historic place. For the other it was looked upon as essentially filling a void in child recreation.

The joint clicked overwhelmingly. It became the darling of the children almost overnight. The elders escorting the children seemed to like it more than the kids. And it was a joy forever for children of the poorer families as also for those newly come to the metropolis from the interior. From day one up until now the Shishu Park has never had a lean day.

The success hasn't at all proved good in any way to the park. It remains the same old stuffy little place with no sense of space and green. And the mechanical entertainment contraptions set up there in 1979, numbering about a dozen, continue to slog on to this day. It is time the park was expanded both spatially and facilitywise or more of such parks were created and launched. It is with that urgent necessity in view we proffer our preferences to the DCC, most hopefully.

A Shishu Park should never be wholly an amusement arena. It should unfailingly be a park — with water and trees, hillocks and a lot of green space. And for the Shishu part of the setup, best wisdom in the nation should be collected to mingle with best of imaginations to come up with what may enthuse and involve and enrich the child. An unthinking shopping around by contractors employed by bureaucrats and/or politicians for stuffing such a park can only harm the child. Where can a child go to have a go at riding? Or to run after a drove of swans jumping into water to escape from the bunch of imps? Mechanical 'facilities' such as adorn the present park do at best divert the child for a while, but not enrich him or her.

What the present Shishu Park missed at the time of its conceptualisation — if this process was there at all, that is — is love. That same lack continues to bedevil it. You must do something — indeed many things — for the children of this megapolis, Mayor Hanif. And please do all you can with love. Imagination and knowledge will then follow.

For a Fit Welcome to Pahela Baishakh

Eminent members of the nation's intellectual elite, including the V.C of the Dhaka University and three former illustrious vice-chancellors, have in a statement appealed for action against encroachments upon the Ramna venue of the main morning celebration of the Bengali New Year. Last year this nuisance squeezed all approaches to the venue resulting in stampede and other unpleasant incidents on top of most vilely injuring the serene beauty of the ambience of the Pahela Baishakh dawn. We join the intellectuals in calling for steps against the trespassers and unauthorised shops etc. We would, in fact, go a step further in urging authorities of all kind and the citizenry at large to act in a fashion that can contribute to the success of the occasion.

This nation is possibly one in appreciating the importance of the Chhayanaut musical presentation held to herald the dawning of the Bengali new year. This has grown into a national institution and as the mother of all festivity held on the occasion, contributing so much to the culture and unity of the Bengali nationhood, it deserves the loving support of all. Starting from the Ramna *bautomul* the festival has spread to all towns of the country and has even reached the villages. It will not be too much to say that the special way Chhayanaut has been invoking the Pahela Baishakh with the choicest musical creation of the Bengali genius— has helped in a big way to affect a very welcome change in our attitude to music and, indeed, also to ideas about big congregations of people. The whole area, including and around the Ramna Greens turns on that morning into a most colourful throng of about two to three hundred thousand men, women and children — all come to have a feel of the morn, not tempted by any promise of entertainment.

Of Politicians and the People

Whether our politicians enjoy or will continue to enjoy the confidence of the people — that is the question.

Behind the Headlines

Chapal Bashar

THE recent price hike of rice followed by acute fertiliser crisis has contributed much to aggravate the year-long political unrest and the impasse created over the caretaker government issue. At least ten lives were lost in violent clashes at different places over distribution of fertiliser which is an essential input for boro cultivation. Situation continued to deteriorate so much so that the government had to deploy army for its safe transportation. However, there has been little sign of improvement till now. Such a predicament is no doubt unprecedented in this country.

The nation will have to experience another series of hartals — for four consecutive days — in the next week beginning Saturday. After observing the 'Dhaka Siege' programme of March 28, the Opposition has again called countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on April 9 and 10 (Sunday and Monday) to drum up their demand for holding elections under non-partisan caretaker government. Meanwhile, the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) has announced its plan to go for 48-hour strike all over the country from the morning of Tuesday (April 11) to realise 'professional' demands of workers. This strike will virtually turn into hartal for another couple of days since workers and employees of all the sectors are under the umbrella of SKOP, an alliance of 18 trade union bodies. Left Democratic Front (LDF), a combine of eight left parties has also called a 12-hour hartal on April 11 in support of its political demands including that of caretaker government and also to protest police atrocities on LDF activists.

Therefore, the political scenario during the second week of April is not beyond imagination. If the strike programmes from Sunday to Wednesday remain unchanged, it will not be difficult to assume that the week will be a workless one simply affecting the normal social and economic activities.

Everyone — a commoner or a dignitary, a lay man or an expert — perceives that the ongoing political stalemate has been leading the nation only to a disastrous situation. All are concerned and worried as well, about the existing political trend and the country's destiny. But it is not clear whether the politicians, who decide our fate and future, feel concerned at all like the people. If the politicians — both in the 'position' and in the opposition — were truly and equally concerned about the crisis, the stalemate over the caretaker government issue would not have persisted for more than a year now.

The Opposition has been carrying on their hartal programmes and other agitations only because the dispute is still in a limbo. True, the hartals are being observed if called by a major party or parties. But the time is ripe enough for the opposition leaders to scrutinise the real extent of people's support and also the claimed 'participation' in their agitational programmes. However, the government and the ruling party have no scope for complacency if the people's 'real' feeling is taken into consideration. There is no reason for the people to be delighted at the performance of the government in handling the situation — both political and economic — nor they are wilfully taking any 'part in opposition 'programmes'.

It is unfortunate, but true, that the people now blame only the politicians (of both the camps) for the continued political imbroglio. They are the same people who were behind the democracy-loving political leaders and also fought undauntedly against the military-backed autocratic rulers. It is a proven fact in this land since long that people protected the politics and politicians and, unfortunately, received least of it in return. It is the people and only the people, who rallied behind the politicians in national interest and also spearheaded democratic movement. The people played such glorious role under the leadership of spontaneous democratic forces as we have seen in 1954, 1962, 1966, 1969, 1971 and lately in 1990.

The bondage between democracy-loving politicians and the people is undivisible. When people's confidence in politicians or political leaders diminishes, it can easily be assumed that there is something wrong somewhere in the concerned party or with the leader concerned. The politicians guide the people and provide sense of direction to the nation. If the guidance or the sense of direction is set on the right track, the people hesitate little to go for any sacrifice to achieve the target. The people's role during 1971 and 1990 remains the brightest as yet.

A politician is not only a leader, he also plays the role of a physician in political context, and greater as such. If a physician makes a wrong diagnosis and provides wrong treatment to a patient, life of a person is at stake. But, if a statesman is at fault in providing the correct guidelines, it would jeopardise the fate of a nation. We would like to believe that our esteemed statesmen and political guardians are well-aware of that.

The statements and announcements made by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina on 29 December and 10 January respectively raised some hope for a possible reconciliation between the two warring sides. The proposals of the two leaders were consistent in spirit, yet still there is no headway. If they really desire, the two sides can sit together and discuss on the basis of the proposals made by the leaders themselves. And such a discussion can bring about the much-desired understanding between the ruling party and the Opposition.

Lack of understanding among our leaders has thrown the whole nation into a state of confusion and uncertainty. The people eagerly look forward to see some light at the end of the dark tunnel. Whatever be the fate of this unfortunate nation, one thing can be stated, without hesitation: Our statesmen and politicians are at an ordeal. This, will reveal whether our leaders enjoy or will continue to enjoy the confidence of the people.

Confidence of the people is the only asset of politicians and political parties. But it is often forgotten by many.

CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

Leaders Must not be Oblivious of the Need of the Hour

by S H Khondker

The nation sincerely wants that the Prime Minister and the leader of the Opposition should not behave merely as political leaders but also as statesmen... To a political leader the interest of his or her party may have the uppermost consideration but to a statesman it is the nation whose interest and well-being come first and foremost.

THE present constitutional crisis is a creation of the political leaders whom we had voted to the parliament in 1991 to lead us and give us direction in matters - political, social and economic. Whether they have been able to give us that leadership is now a big question.

The current political deadlock does not appear to be insurmountable; yet, it remains unsolved, much to our disgrace. We, the voters, did not expect that those whom we voted to the parliament and made leaders should disappoint us so terribly. The inability of our leaders to rise to the occasion will certainly not give a good impression of them to the world outside.

The apposition MPs boycotted the parliament for more than a year, and after giving due warning they resigned enmasse on December 28, 1994. As reported in the press, just on the eve of submitting resignation by the 147 MPs an acceptable solution was at hand but because of the imposition of a precondition requiring the opposition political parties not to resort to strikes and sieges till the expiry of the tenure of the present government, the solution slipped out of the net.

This condition was really unacceptable to anybody — not to speak of the leaders of political parties - having a bit of self-respect. Therefore, can one be blamed if one surmises that the pre-condition was imposed knowingly that it won't be acceptable and as a result the crisis would continue. The opposition MPs having no alternative submitted their resignation and with their resignation the total strength of the parliament has been cut down to almost a half. Such a truncated parliament, though not illegal, is incompatible with the concept of parliamentary democracy.

After much dilly-dallying the ruling of the speaker on the acceptability or otherwise of the enblock resignation of the 147 MPs has been made public. The opposition camp, however, does not seen to see eye to eye with the ruling. But since the ruling has not been challenged in the court of law, it may be contended that these 147 MPs are still holding their seats in the parliament. Whether they will join the next sessions of the parliament or not is a matter to be seen. But as things are moving, such a possibility appears to be slim. The opposition is, instead, bent upon agitating against the government with a view to toppling it down. But the government does not seem to be purturbed. Whether the strikes and sieges, which the opposition has again resorted to after the holy Ramadan will be able to cause the government to fall, is yet a far cry. But what is certain is that the inconveniences and sufferings of the people are on the increase, not to speak of damage to the economic growth. All these are jarring on the people who may turn away from the politicians in disgust. The sooner the politicians realizes this, the better for them and for us as well.

The nation sincerely wants that our political leaders-specially the Prime Minister and the (former) leader of the opposition should not behave merely as political leaders but also as statesmen or should I say states-women. To a political leader the interest of his or her party may have the uppermost consideration but to a statesman it is the nation whose interest and well-being come first and foremost.

In the past few months many a plan was formulated and proposed including those of Sir Ninian but none came to fruition. The labour of those who worked behind formulation of the plans went in vain. The reason for these failures is not far to seek. It is absence of pragmatism and statesman-like sagacity and vision.

Now that the ruling of the speaker has rendered the enmasse resignation of the 147 MPs invalid, the opportunity to get over the crisis is there. The broken dialogue should again be started as early as convenient but certainly before the situation gets worse. The rice and fertilizer scarcity has added momentum to the agitation of the opposition.

The Prime Minister has once said that, if necessary, she would talk with Sheikh Hasina. We feel, the necessity for talk is there. It will be a show of magnanimity if the Prime Minister takes the initiative and invites Sheikh Hasina to the talk she has in mind. The talk should be meaningful and not for biding time and to be meaningful the talk should centre round the latest proposal of the ruling party without the precondition that had accompanied it. There was an indication that the opposition would have accepted the plan last time had there been no precondition of the kind mentioned above. Therefore, it may reasonably be expected that the opposition may be inclined to accept it this time too. If the plan calls for an amendment, it would be wise on the part of the opposition to join the parliament session and get it through. Thanks to the ruling of the speaker that has kept alive this opportunity.

There is no reason why one should be averse to any amendment to the constitution. The constitution is not a holy scripture. It is a man-made document and it exists for the guidance of the nation. Therefore, any amendment to it, if necessitated by the need of the hour, should be done and for that no crime will be committed.

Let good sense prevail on our leaders. The people are no longer in a mood to live in a state of chaos and confusion and to see that whatever prospect of economic growth is there should be lost in the process. When the next election is held, the politicians will have to go to the people to solicit votes. Let it be remembered that the people will not then be oblivious of the sufferings they are now experiencing for no fault of their own.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes

THE Florida Attorney General's decision to sue the tobacco companies could be a big bonanza for lawyers. Everyone who ever smoked a cigarette will be joining the "class action."

I was in Palm Beach the other day when I overhead the conversation of two people standing outside Saks Fifth Avenue.

The man lit up two cigarettes and then handed one to his companion.

"Who is you lawyer?" he asked the woman.

She inhaled deeply and replied, "Arnold and Porter. I tried to get Mayer, Brown and Platt, but they had a conflict because they were representing the tobacco auctioneers of America. Who's yours?"

The man puffed nervously, "kaye, Scholer. I showed them an X-ray of my chest, and they said they'd take me on contingency. Although I do have to pay expenses."

"Are you going to go for a jury trial?" the woman asked.

The man said, "My lawyer, feels that it's the only way to go, providing we can get 12 jurors who are nonsmokers."

"I have a friend who sued Philip Morris and had F Lee Bailey as counsel. He won $10 million, but the judge threw it out.""

"How come?" the man asked.

"Apparently one of the jurors had sold his horse to the Marlboro Man. Have we got time for one more?"

They lit up two more cigarettes. "I'm requesting compensation for pain and suffering. People treat you like a leper if you start puffing on a cigarette in their presence."

The woman agreed. "You can say that again. Half the eligible men in this town won't go out with me because I smoke."

The man started to blow smoke rings in the air.

"It's gotten so bad that every time I light a cigarette after making love to my wife she makes me go outside."

The woman said, "That's awful."

"It's worse than that. Our apartment is on the 34th floor."

The woman asked, "Do you think that they'll let us smoke in the courtroom?"

The man replied, "My lawyer told me that even if they did, he didn't think it would make a good impression on the jury."

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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.

Hartal and public property

Sir, This refers to a photograph published in several national dailies recently showing a red flag warning hoisted on a portion of Dhaka- Narayanganj rail-track at Chasara, Narayanganj which has been cut down 2-3 feet long and removed on the occasion of rail-road-waterways blockade on March 23.

We feel whoever has committed this sinister act, he or she, is out and out an ignoramus.

One may have differences with the policies of the government and he or she may not like a particular government. But no one has the right to destroy the public property which in fact is the product of sweat and blood of the common people.

By indulging in destructive activities, violence and terrorism one only loses people's support and sympathy and invites his or her Nemesis. Remember there is no last word in politics.

O H Kabir
Dhaka

Hillary's flying mealservice

Sir, Read with amusement the US First Lady Mrs. Hillary Clinton's flying mealservice to Bangladesh. Her favourite food and drinks were flown over by air for her three days' visit here (Ref. The Dainik Bangla, Apr 2, 1995).

This is not quite expected for a lady of her calibre. Rather I thought she would be more outgoing and adventurous in trying out different food.

Even if she does not feel like an intrepid traveller, the US Embassy here could have surely provided her with boiled water, the odd peanut butter sandwich and Southern fried chicken.

For a more discerning palate, restaurants at the two five star hotels in Dhaka would have happily obliged with herbed escargot, lobster, wild mushroom and imported steak.

In case the worst happened, and a bacterium sneaked through tidbits of Bengali food (eg *sutli kabab* and *bakhar khani*) or the American Food Security System into the distinguished lady's digestive tract — the International Cholera Research Institute can come quickly to rescue.

As she is also visiting the Institute it would be for her to see as to how well this premiere research facility is operating on USA tax payers' money.

(Mrs) Lopa Hanif
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Road 8A, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

NSC lottery

Sir, NSC lottery seems to have captured the hearts of the millions of this poor country. A large number of prizes of various denominations are going into the pockets of mostly poor and jobless people. Big prize winners overnight become rich, start business or some other profit and work generating projects, where they can provide jobs or occupations of various types, to many hapless people like them.

Maybe this is why this state-backed lottery is getting more popular day by day and drawing millions, who do not mind to part with their hard earned ten taka for at least one lottery ticket and look forward to a golden day with the catchy murmuring in their mouth — *'Jadi Laigya Jai.'*

I, for myself as a matter of routine buy five such lottery tickets for each draw, not as much to win a prize (I have already spent more than three hundred taka but no prize as yet!) but to help the NSC at least in their efforts to develop our sport. By now, they must be financially much more solvent to take up ambitious projects!

Flt Lt (Retd) Mohiuddin
Dhaka

Destiny off course

Sir, Over 25,000 Bangladeshis deported by Saudi Arabia recently can sound the alarm in other countries over the overstay of aliens besides other violations of the immigration laws.

Such a move to remove illegal foreigners is a state authority, not to implicate diplomatic fallout if the act is justified as non-retaliatory, within the jurisdiction of the sovereign land without flouting international regulations, but the thrust of this kind may only be adding salt-to-the-wound of this Least Developed Country which has been fighting tooth-and-nail to beat the vicious circle beyond some recent macroeconomic gains.

An action as disappointing as deportation should be corrected to save some hope for the victim's career as much as the reputation of the civilized justice.

By mistake, one or more unfortunate ones might have been identified wrongly to share the destiny with others.

In the matter of any faulty case detected to have high merit to be treated sympathetically, appropriate legal proceeding should accommodate a plea for review of the defendant's explanation of the circumstances and evidences in defence against the charges for possible reinstation.

M Rahman
Zila School Road, Mymensingh

Behaviour from a physician

Sir, As a physician from the US, I, was happy to accompany my elderly mother to a certain diagnostic centre on Elephant Road in Dhaka recently. I had hoped to talk to the cardiologist performing the test, about Dhaka Medical College, my alma mater, if indeed he had attended that august institution. I did not have that opportunity, however, as my mother was unceremoniously asked to disrobe and put on a rather filthy examining table, not even a gown for modesty. She was then so to say, roughly examined and tested for her heart. Throughout this whole procedure, I felt, the esteemed physician hardly looked at or acknowledged the patient as a person, let alone her attendant. After the procedure was completed he turned away abruptly, and "dismissed" her, but before she could get off the table, another patient was placed on it almost causing her to lose her balance and fall.

I practice medicine too, and I know the value of time, but never in my whole life have I witnessed such unpalatable behaviour from a physician; and for this we were obliged to pay Tk 1500. The BMA should monitor and reprimand its members.

Rozana Alam M D
DMC Class of 1974

OPINION

Administrative Reform— Motivation Lacking

M M Ahmad

The commentary on the administrative reforms and reality by Saiful Bari (Star, March 26), is well-argued, and deserves serious consideration.

The whole point of the exercise is that the senior bureaucrats of the BCS do understand very clearly the implications involved in going for the administrative reforms in today's changed world. But the needed motivation is lacking. Why is it lacking has to be carefully probed by the political leaders (including the Opposition) and the outside experts, and also by taking the bureaucrats into confidence. This urgent exercise has not yet been taken up seriously at top level. What we have seen is some sporadic and ad hoc efforts.

Also, there is hardly any seminar or symposium on the issue; which will bring out many points into the open for public scrutiny. Bangladesh is not the only emerging or developing country to suffer from this type of delays and recurrent exercises.

The political and service hurdles and snags have to be resolved once for all. In administration there is more than the application of mere logic and rationality. Human beings react; therefore the heart also comes in; which means compromising with such problems as emotions, ego, security, rank and status, and so many other invisible factors well known to the modern management schools. The donor agencies are aware of the traps in the solution seeking exercises; therefore they should not forget their responsibility