

On to Talks Now

From being virtually incommunicado only a week or so back, the opposition and the ruling party have now moved fairly close to talks. The atmospherics have swayed towards a focused discussion on the caretaker issue following a count-down to serious political troubles in the horizon and in the midst of a routine, yet co-incidentally significant, familiarisation trip of the US Asstt. Secretary of State for South Asia Robin Raphael to Bangladesh.

The two successive long-drawn hartals having caused some deaths and wounded several people, it is with a high degree of trepidations that we look at the 72-hour countrywide strike scheduled to begin from September 16. However, we note that both sides are taking into account the high stakes involved in any further deterioration in the political situation. That is why the majority of the MPs at the BNP parliamentary party meeting the other day made out a strong case for a negotiated settlement of the political crisis adding that they were opposed to political confrontation which could harm the party's image.

The Awami League Leader Sheikh Hasina while elaborating afresh her idea of an interim government for the polls sounded circumspect about having to call hartals that caused hardship to the people. But to come to the brass-tacks, she has in mind the 1991-type interim government to be headed by the serving Chief Justice who would be assisted by an advisory council. The transitional arrangement, like in 1991, is proposed to be ratified through the first session of the new parliament.

Sheikh Hasina has not obviously said something that the BNP would feel enthused to readily agree to. Especially, her equating the present imperative with that of 1991 may not quite carry favour with the ruling party. At the same time, the BNP has not been saying anything new lately to draw the opposition to the negotiating table.

Since it takes two to negotiate a settlement, the wiser course for both sides would be to try and expand the positive circle in preference to the negative one and then reach an agreement. For instance, both sides realise the wisdom of a negotiated settlement and the BNP has accepted the principle of an interim government through the PM's readiness to resign with her whole cabinet ahead of the polls. These agreed points need to be developed into an arrangement so that they can move on to the next steps of announcing an election date, re-strengthening the EC and having a code of conduct — all of which brook no delay.

France Got it Wrong

Ever since French President Jacques Chirac announced his decision to carry out nuclear tests at the Mururoa Atoll, protests have swept across the world. After the underground blast, the protests have turned violent in some countries of the Pacific region and Asia. France has ignored the angry reactions from both the environmentalist groups and the governments. It is determined to go ahead with its plans for yet another seven tests at the atoll.

France's reply to the opposition to its tests is plain and simple. It wants to create computer simulations which, France argues, will help its weapons to achieve precision targeting. A country possessing nuclear arsenals might feel the need to make them as perfect as possible. But there are other questions that need to be addressed. At a time when pressure is building up world-wide for dismantling nuclear arsenals, why should France go for weapons perfection? Both Russia and the US — two old foes — have already dismantled quite a significant number of their most destructive weapons. Second, by carrying out this test, France has broken a three-year moratorium which all nuclear powers, except China, have been signatories to. The third is, of course the more precarious question of environment.

The French blast, therefore, disqualifies the nuclear powers to insist on other would-be possessors of the advanced technology to abide by the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). The French insistence on armament perfection does not hold good, specially because the compulsion for using such weapons is gradually diminishing. A total of eight such tests — each blast equalling 20,000 tons of TNT will certainly have their adverse effects on the Pacific and the countries around it. When the effort should be particularly devoted to making the world free of nuclear weapons, the latest French move will certainly give a wrong signal to the countries on the threshold of acquiring the nuclear status as well as those already possessing it.

Guidance to Farmers

Within a matter of 20 years, some 10 districts have recorded a fall in paddy yield by fifty per cent. According to a report, these districts in the southern part of the country had produced 28 to 30 maunds of the stuff per bigha in 1971 but in 1991 the yield came down to 12 to 15 maunds. This sharp fall in production has been attributed to indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers. In fact, the farmers have been ignoring the organic manure, altogether.

We have long been emphasising the need for soil testing before application of chemical fertilizers. Not that the agriculture experts thought otherwise, but the hard fact is that the prescription has not been incorporated in our agricultural policy. It is common knowledge that the soil differs from one place to another. So, there is no point using the same fertilizer everywhere. But that is exactly what our farmers have been doing in the absence of proper guidelines. With the introduction of chemical fertilizers, the farmers have severed their link with the traditional farming practices and perhaps knowledge, too.

Already the damage has been done. Now the government must embark on a salvage operation. We suggest that the agriculture extension department undertake extensive tests to determine the deficiencies of the soil first. Then it should impose a ban on the application of chemical fertilizers accordingly. Mobile teams can be formed for the purpose of monitoring. They will not only suggest the quantities of fertilizers to be applied but also advise farmers about using the organic fertilizer.

UP in the north, people may be talking about the criminalisation of politics. But here down south, at least in Tamil Nadu, the topic is the forthcoming wedding of Jayalalitha's foster son. The marriage pandal under construction is estimated to cost Rs 1.5 crore and feasts Rs 2 crore. The total expenditure may be around Rs 10 crore.

Infuriated Jayalalitha, as reported by a Madras daily, reacted in her royal style and said that the expenses would be in line with what could be incurred for the marriage of a chief minister's son. If this does not take you very far, her one more remark was: "Others need not worry themselves by interfering in the cost aspects of the marriage."

The chief minister, often over dressed, is known for ostentatiousness. A cavalcade of dozens of cars follows wherever she goes. Her meetings are more than a *darbar*. Yet Tamil Nadu is the state where even the rich are simple in their attire, food and living. Today when consumerism is overtaking the country, the state reflects austerity and unaffectedness. There are very few fast food joints, very few swanky cars and very few screaming billboards. Jeans are rare; the *dhoti* doubled in the middle is the normal dress.

Still, the austerity does not hide the dire poverty prevailing in some parts of the state. A recent study by a voluntary organisation, already submitted to the state government, reveals the harrowing conditions in which child workers of Kanyakumari live. A majority of them — the study covered 20,000 children — dig into ratholes for foodgrains.

Jayalalitha has done little

to improve the people's lot. Still the image of the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) is that of pro-poor. The credit for it goes to the late M G Ramachandran, Jayalalitha's predecessor. He initiated free mid-day meal to school children, now duplicated practically all over India. He was the one who built a large number of tenements for the lower strata. And he created many jobs.

Coming from the cine world as he did, MGR transferred to politics his picture of Robin Hood, who looted the rich and distributed the booty among the poor. Both AIADMK and Jayalalitha bask in his glory.

Initially, Jayalalitha was also hero-worshipped because in his lifetime MGR had chosen her as his successor. For some time, she has been sliding in popularity. Her non-performance has cast a shadow on her party as well. There is no achievement of hers that the AIADMK can flaunt, much less humility which differentiated it from the rival, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) during the MGR regime. She dictates and the party obeys. The relationship is that of master and slave.

MGR was accessible. He was the man of masses who would meet as many people as he could. In contrast, she stays distant. Her contact is confined to such persons as can add to her stature. She met the other day the Janata

A Ruler Called Jayalalitha

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Dal leaders, Karnataka chief minister Deve Gowda and former Orissa chief minister Biju Patnaik, to disseminate the impression that whatever her critics might say, she counted in the all-India politics. And it looks she will keep the National Front and Congress on tenterhooks as long as she can.

Unlike MGR, who cultivated journalists, her relationship with the press is that of an adversary. She does not brook criticism. Even a

sharing at one function the same platform with Rajnikanth, a matinee idol, who does not spare the chief minister whenever he gets an opportunity. Veerappan came under a concerted attack by the AIADMK leaders. It was apparently orchestrated because the identically-worded statements were issued by them to condemn him for his failure to "defend the administration in the face of slanders by an outsider."

The outsider, Rajnikanth,

Minister Narasimha Rao a few months ago. She can sense the Congress annoyance. State Governor Chenna Reddy has given permission to move the court on the charges of corruption against her. The finance ministry's enforcement and income tax Directorate have issued summons and search warrants against her close relations. The Centre is also examining a memorandum, which the governor has forwarded, to appoint a commission "to probe into the corrupt deals of the AIADMK government."

She was looking forward to meeting the prime minister at Kancheepuram earlier this month, and impressing upon him the need for changing the state governor, whose recall has been demanded by the state assembly. She believed that if the prime minister agreed to it, she would well have been on the way to rapprochement with Congress or, for that matter, the Centre, which she knows has the authority to nudge or dismiss her.

But the prime minister took ill and cancelled his visit to Kancheepuram. She is still not sure whether it was a diplomatic illness because state Congress leader G K Moopanar, who has always wanted Congress to go it alone, was opposed to the meeting from the beginning. She is, in fact, herself to blame for the estrangement with Congress because she cut off relations with the

party in March 1993 on her own, after calling it "treacherous." True, the Bhartiya Janata Party supports her blindly. But she knows it does not cover her in Tamil Nadu, which has no history of Hindu-Muslim tension.

What should be her plank in the forthcoming parliamentary election is her predicament? That anti-Centre line, which is her trademark, sells in Tamil Nadu, which once raised the demand for secession. But she is conscious that she cannot control such forces if unleashed. She already find it hard to discipline two champions of the LTTE, Nedumaran and Veeramani, in her party.

She is also afraid that the fallout may strengthen the LTTE sympathisers, who at present are not many and who have been on the defensive since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. She feels her policy of not siding with the LTTE elements, without coming hard on them, has given her the best of the two worlds. She wants to keep it that way. That explains why she has preferred to keep quiet, despite New Delhi's proddings, on Sri Lanka's proposals on conciliation with the LTTE. The escape of LTTE prisoners from Vellore's special camp may question her bona fides. But she trusts that the storm will blow over.

Over the years, she has come to believe that things ultimately settle down. So, why not concentrate on the son's wedding, which gives her an opportunity to invite leaders of different political parties from different parts of the country? Who knows something may emerge out of this, she is still popular.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

respected paper like *The Hindu* has been a victim. She blamed it for not giving adequate publicity to her defence of corruption charges against the government. The manner in which the News Editor of the Tamil daily, *Dinakaran*, was hauled over the coals for publishing some expunged proceedings of the state assembly — she is the leader of the house — constitutes a threat to the freedom of the press and civil liberties in the state.

Not only the press, the party has not escaped her wrath. Many AIADMK stalwarts have suffered for having taken exception to her functioning. Only recently did food minister R M Veerappan come to grief merely for

is not taking things lying down. His standing off with the AIADMK has paid. He talks all the time about the "bomb culture" that has gripped the state. He receives daily a large number of people at his residence — he lives very close to Jayalalitha — to let her know that he too draws crowds. Indeed, she is worried about him because the common man in Tamil Nadu is carried away by a popular film hero, as she witnessed in the case of MGR when he joined politics.

But at present her obsession is Congress, which she fears the most. The party has not forgiven her for the AIADMK siding with the opposition in a no-confidence motion against Prime

International Literacy Day

Intensive Efforts Needed to Achieve 'Education for All' by 2000

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque

Crash Literacy Programme of 'one classroom-one teacher' schools in every nook and corner of the villages is to be taken immediately.

EDUCATION is the fundamental right of all citizens. Bangladesh being a participant and signatory of the resolutions of the World Conference on Education For All (WCEFA) by the year 2000, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, is both nationally and internationally committed for ensuring Education for All by 2000. In the 'Summit on Education for All' held in November, 1993 in New Delhi the heads of UNESCO and UNICEF reminded and entrusted the heads of nine most populous countries to be personally and actively involved in energising the activities in their countries and to lend their prestige and authority to the world-wide effort. The countries are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico and Nigeria. Together these countries account for three quarters of the world's 1 billion illiterates.

According to the census of 1991, the literacy rate of Bangladesh was 24.62%. By the end of 1995 the rate may rise to 30%. With the burden of an ever growing population the target of EPA by 2000 is a Herculean task no doubt. Yet steps so far taken are — i) a Compulsory Primary Education Legislation has been passed in 1990 and implemented in 68 districts in 1992; ii) a Five-year General Education project and a Government-run programme for Integrated Non-Formal Education have also been taken. The present number of schools are:

Registered Non-Government Primary Schools-Schools awaiting for registration	37,740
Primary Branches of Secondary Schools-Kindergarten-Integrated Madrasa-Integrated Higher Madrasa Branch	4,688
	2,583
	2,500
	16,028
	6,086
Mosque Tola and others-	239

According to primary school mapping, there is only one school in every 2 sq. km. In the year 1992, out of 1,73,50,000 school-going children only 76% were studying in primary schools. By the year 2000 the number of primary school-going children may cross two crore. So one lakh additional classrooms will be required.

At present almost 60% students give up studies in class I and II and according to World Bank report, only 10% complete the course. To minimise this colossal wastage various steps have already been taken, such as, liberal promotion in class I and II, supplying attractive reading materials and text books free of cost, appointment of 60% female teachers in primary sections, improved salary structure and refresher training courses. A revolutionary programme of 'Food for Education' has also been taken only to induce the students of poor families to come to school. In 1993, the target was to bring 7 lakh children from 5 lakh families and gradually to bring the entire country under this

programme. In reducing the rate of drop outs the NGOs have a better success. The Non-formal Primary Education Programme (NFPEP) of Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has introduced 'one classroom-one teacher' school having only 30 students, mostly females, teaching only the three Rs. (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) up to class III. The success of this system is mainly due to the involvement of the local people, the business and religious organisations and personal contact between the teacher, selected from the locality, and the guardians of the children. The teachers motivate the parents and actively involve them in their regular attendance. The system of education and the timing of teaching is fixed according to the convenience of the parents so that their children can provide necessary help to their parents.

The cost of those schools is very low as they mostly use rented rooms for some hours of the day and the teachers are also appointed on part-time basis. The money thus saved is spent on supplying books and reading materials to the students. As education is brought to the door-step of the children at no cost and in suitable time, most of the illiterate parents get satisfaction to see their children

benefitted by schooling. These schools teach only up to class III to prepare them to go to regular primary schools. This principle of bringing the education at the door of the most disadvantaged group, establishment of closer contact with the parents and involvement of the larger community have proved amazingly successful in lowering the drop out rate from 70% to only 5%.

The National Literacy Mission of India is another example of success. It is a multi-million-rupee national literacy drive funded by the UNESCO to achieve 100% literacy rate in all the states. The basic principle of this project is also to involve people at the grassroots level to inspire the parents for their children's education. This NLM has 140 literacy projects in 182 districts with five million teenager volunteer instructors who have created great enthusiasm among the illiterate mass in remote areas for learning. As a result, even the adults took the course seriously. Now the literacy rates of some Indian states are, in Kerala 100%, Karnataka 56%, Madhya Pradesh 43.4%, Uttar Pradesh 41.7%, West Bengal 70.39% and Bihar, 38.5%.

The rates are rising sharply due to the NLM.

In Bangladesh, over the last decades, about 500 million dollars of aids have been spent through the Govt. and the NGOs but the rise in literacy rate has not been commensurate with the investment perhaps due to the conventional centralised policy. The allocated money is to come down to the actual field passing through many stages of 'obstacles' created by 'corrupt officials', the final result is then bound to be very poor. The conventional school system does not adjust to the situation of the child, rather the child is expected to adjust to the system irrespective of his or her circumstances. The social distance between the teachers and the under-privileged children, lack of motivation and ill behaviour of some teachers towards them, poverty of the parents compelling the children to work for a living, parental negligence in sending girls to schools and, last but not the least important, lack of awareness about the importance of education are the main hindrances towards achieving EPA by 2000. The rate of drop-outs can be minimised from 60% to 5-10% by taking such steps as— 1) Crash Literacy Programme taken by organising non-formal one classroom one teacher school teaching up to class III in every village to be run directly by the organisers of the programme. 2) Closer parent-teacher contact; parents are to be induced. 3) The timing of the school

preferably in the late hours of the day. 4) Cash incentives for regular attendance and good results. 5) Parents may be compensated for the loss of their child's income. 6) To cover shortage of schools in all remote areas, spaces may be rented on hour-basis; mosques, outer house and extra rooms used on request. 7) Parents neglecting their children's education to be socially disapproved. 8) Begging by children of school-going age to be punished by law. 9) Parents fined for their children not completing the primary school course. 10) Illiterate adult mass compelled to attend Vocational Training Centres to utilize their labour as valuable human resource. 11) Girls to be educated to check population growth and as a source of better investment.

To encourage girls' education, steps have been taken for exemption of their tuition fees up to class VIII and special stipends are also being given. Through an Integrated Non-formal Education Programme for the 15-35 years age group, Government has been giving training, mostly field-oriented, to involve them in the mainstream of national economic growth. A Crash Literacy Programme must be taken to create immediate enthusiasm in the minds of the vast illiterate mass that only education and training can transform them into valuable national assets. Let the International Literacy Day, 1995 be the most auspicious beginning of the mission.

To the Editor...

Remembering Yasmin

Sir, We still cannot get it over or forget the recent sexual abuse and subsequent killing of 14-year-old Yasmin. Fourteen is so very tender age, this is when normally boys and girls are students of class eight or nine. This is when someone is about to prepare and choose a way of life. This is when parents are extra precautions, protective and hopeful for a better future of their children but for evil doers and sexually perverts age is no barrier.

So tender and passionate was Yasmin's love for her parents that in spite of possessing nothing, she almost made it all by herself. It was indeed nice of the bus owner to drop her half the way. When Yasmin was barely 10 miles away from home, all her excitement and childish affections to be with her mother was brutally dashed down in vain by the marauding policemen who were not dacoits or miscreants but the law enforcing personnel.

What a shame indeed. It was the sacred duty of the police to reach the helpless and shelterless girl to the loving arms of her mother. Look at the guts of such uniformed devils to bluff the press by making up concocted stories. And just see

how devilish their minds were? Well, where do we see the difference between the out-lawed criminals and them? This is perhaps why the law and order in the country is getting bad to worse!

We appeal to the Minister of Home Affairs to seriously look in to the matter and put every endeavour not only to bring the accused policemen to book but also to arrest the rot from going deeper.

We salute and express our sympathy to the 'brave seven,' who have sacrificed their lives in Dinajpur, in their bid to protest and seek trial of the criminals.

Over and above, this disgraceful and heinous act took place just before the ongoing Beijing conference. What happens if this is brought before the consent of the huge audience there? Will not our heads hang in shame?

An annoyed citizen, Dhaka

Exhibition soccer

Sir, It is most unfortunate, that a handful crowd of Stadium on the 20th and the 22nd August, 1995 in which the visiting Indian Olympic soccer team lost miserably. From the very low atten-

dance, our observation is that the Dhaka crowd is club-oriented and they do not have any headache for national pride. When a club of any country takes on a foreign team, the matter does not remain confined to the arena of the club itself, rather it spreads to the national realm.

Secondly, the BFF/DAMFA could have exercised a decision more judiciously having selected Fakirerpool Youngmen Club, a local composition, instead of Brothers Union club who fielded three Nigerians at whose victory we are not so much delighted as much as we have been in the win of Muktiyoddha Sangsad who are, till date, free from foreign intrusion.

Thirdly, the Television, Radio and some of the newspapers gave little coverage to the tour for which the two exhibition matches could not attract the soccer fans sufficiently. In fact, the media coverage was very poor, one of the reason of which was that the standard of Indian football is extremely poor, like ours. Another cause may be the step-motherly attitude of Dhaka Television towards football. One who watches the TV at the national news times will bear the testimony that the authority and the news producers have been trying utmost to make Lawn Tennis our national sports.

To end, India won soccer gold in the 1951 and 1962 Asiad after which it has become a sub-standard team. Correctly speaking the soccer standard in the SAARC region is the poorest in Asia, far behind West Asia as well as East Asia. Unless scientific steps are taken and the players as well as the crowd five proper attention to national pride, a day may emerge when football will perhaps take shelter in the museum.

A T M Nurun Nabi, Khilgaon, Dhaka

BAI problems

Sir, Recently the newly elected office bearers of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute Central Students' Union met the Prime Minister.

They placed some demands for the welfare of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI), Dhaka before the Prime Minister. The PM gave a patient hearing to their words and assured them that she would take up the matter with the concerned ministry.

The demands include: i) Conversion of Bangladesh Agricultural Institute into Mono-faculty Agricultural University with a view to solving its long standing academic and administrative problems and to introduce

competition in the higher agril. education sector; 2) Construction of pucca building at the site of the present dilapidated tin-shed 'Siraj-ud-Dowla Hall' to mitigate the sufferings of the residing students; 3) Appointment of a Krishibid as Member to the Public Service Commission;

4) Arrangement of job for the unemployed Krishibids through filling up the vacant posts in the Agri-cadre and by ensuring equal opportunity to Agri-graduates in BCS (General) examination.

It is honestly hoped that the Prime Minister will take her personal initiative to solve the problems of BAI as it was once taken up by the late President Ziaur Rahman to set-up a 'Faculty of Agriculture' in Dhaka University for improving the quality of higher agril education and to bring competition in the agril education arena.

M Zahidul Haque, General Secretary, BAI Teachers' Assoc

Unusable city roads

Sir, We, the residents of the capital city have been facing tremendous difficulties and sufferings due to non-repair of potholes, craters, dug up portions of the main main thoroughfares. The minor craters, pot

holes along the turning point at Ittefaq Bhaban Motijheel approach, at Dainik Bangla, Malibagh, Moghbazar, on Moghbazar-Mohakhali Road, Asian Highway running from Mouchak to Railway crossing, Soudabad crossing and especially approach roads to culverts, and bridges there are but a few major instances to mention.

The condition of the Bangabandhu Avenue and Shantinagar simply beggars description. Unrepaired unusable parts and waterlogging over there are importantly and significantly contributing to traffic jams.

We observe with dismay, dissatisfaction and frustration that when VIP roads are carpeted and recarpeted several times over, the minor potholes, craters and dug up parts of the other roads (more used than the VIP ones) are left unattended.

Honourable Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia may kindly see for herself once driving over those roads and sites as mentioned to use her good offices, if necessary, or immediate actions to alleviate the sufferings and difficulties of the common masses.

M A Rub, Naadapara, Dakshin Khan, Uttara, Dhaka