

## "Illegitimate" Government

The opposition parties have been saying for sometime now that Begum Zia's government has become illegitimate. This claim became more strident from the time the opposition seats were declared vacated following their 90 days continuous absence. The so-called "illegitimacy" issue came to a head when Awami League chief, Sheikh Hasina, while speaking to the Overseas Correspondents Association of Bangladesh (OCAB) last Saturday, called upon foreign governments not to sign any agreement with the BNP government.

There are two aspects to the "illegitimacy of the government" argument which we would like to bring out. We should determine ourselves first, as to whether or not our government is legal. Only then may we involve foreign countries to get involved in our domestic politics?

Opposition's claim that the present government is illegal springs from the fact that in a parliamentary system, the total absence of the opposition is an unheard of phenomenon, and as such can be construed as a fundamental deviation from parliamentary tradition, norm, and practice. The opposition also argues that in the absence of 147 members, the Parliament is unable to perform its full function like impeaching the President, or amending the Constitution. A parliament that cannot perform its full function that the constitution gives it, cannot be a proper one and as such should be immediately changed. Whether we accept these arguments or not is a different matter. However, these are very serious questions and should be resolved immediately. We think that the best and the most competent institution to resolve this confusion is the Supreme Court, which is empowered by the constitution to resolve these vital "legal" issues.

So the Awami League should go to the Supreme Court, much before going to foreign countries. Ask any of the Ambassadors based here and they will say "why involve us in your internal political issues?" However much we may hate each other, do we really want foreign governments to tell us whether our government is "legal" or "illegal"?

We fervently ask the opposition, especially the AL, to seek the verdict of the Supreme Court and clarify the "legality" issue. We, the voters, are quite confused as it is. Please do not confuse us further.

## Self-rule and the Dream

A milestone was set on the painful road to Middle Eastern peace when on Sunday an agreement on Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank was signed in the Egyptian resort town Taba. Although officials of the Israeli and Palestinian sides initialled the document, both Yasser Arafat and Shimon Peres were there to thrash the last crimps.

The West Bank, wrested by Israel in the 1967 war from Jordan, provides, under the agreement, a 'home' to the Palestinians in political terms and signifies the sure beginning of an end to the Israeli-Palestinian or precisely Arab-Israeli strife. Forty years is a long time. But 40 years in constant conflict, often violent and ceaselessly psychological and emotional, made the time inordinately longer. For the homeless and camp-dwelling Palestinians it must have been aeons.

Thanks to the 'great perseverance' of Yasser Arafat and the unwavering commitment of Shimon Peres — supported, of course, by Rabin — to the one cause of seeing peace reign and Israeli insecurity end for good — that 40 years of an endless nightmare is going to be over. We welcome it as one of the rare seed events of our time. But at the same time we should be wary of not reading into it more than it can come to really, as so aptly put by President Clinton.

Everything has a price. In this case the payer is the PLO and the price the Palestinian dream — the dream of living in their own homeland as they had done for centuries from before the Biblical times. With the dream, will the 40-year saga of unmatched heroism and sacrifice have also to go?

As long as vestiges of that dream will remain, suffering will remain and there a seed of strife will remain. The pathological hate with which the Arabs and Israelis hold each other will not dissolve into love overnight and the sense of being wronged will grow in the Arab mind.

Perhaps the Palestinians are seeing in the home rule on West Bank only a stepping-stone to the realisation of their dream. It is not yet time to call that hope foolish.

## Ominous Move

A strange coincidence — so strange that it smacks of being deliberate — marks the prelude to the opposition's planned grand rally on September 28. Some transport owners have scheduled a strike for the same day in what looks like a deliberate bid to restrict public movement on the day of the rallies.

Besides, could we point out that Pujya-time mobility will be badly circumscribed by the transport strike?

During the last 72-hour strike, the government very wisely allowed it to run its course without being unduly intimidating or interfering. The ruling party picked up some laurels for such a hands-off policy that helped keep violence at the barest minimum.

All these seem to have changed this time around. For a report in a leading Bangla daily adds that the police are bracing up to make some preemptive arrests. If this turns out to be true then we have an extremely worrisome scenario before us. Confrontation is now in the air but some are seemingly itching to force it on to the ground.

We cannot say how distraught the peace-loving citizenry must be with such a vicious political trend. Government leaders should immediately rein in adventurist and short-sighted party enthusiasts.

# The Dinajpur Uprising: People Strike Back

THE Dinajpur mass uprising must be like a bad dream for the government which, I am sure, they would like to forget quickly. Indeed the government is acting as if it was only a local incident — a minor irritant — and now that the local lady MP has been able to enter the town without bloodshed, every thing should be back to normal. Regrettably, a section of the Press are most assiduously claiming that it was only a matter of resentment against the local police and that it was a non-political event and therefore one must not read too much into it. Protests of independence notwithstanding, one can read between the lines to see through their attempt to cover up what was in many ways a most revealing chain of events.

The idea of forgetting the Dinajpur uprising as a minor local incident disturbs me. In my view, it was an event of great national significance and the whole nation, irrespective of party affiliations, must reflect on it and take lessons from it. Eyewitness reports about the emotion-charged crowds attacking police stations in blind fury reminded me of the story I had read about the storming of the Bastille in Paris on 14 July, 1789. The fortress of Bastille where prisoners were held without trial was a symbol of the French King's autocratic rule and the French Revolution began with its destruction by the Paris mobs.

The police station, to the Dinajpur crowd, must have similarly appeared as a symbol of injustice and oppression. It would be unwise to ignore this point. The image of the police force in Dinajpur has been severely tarnished. To my mind, the Dinajpur event resembled in some ways the Language Movement of 1952 in Dhaka. While the firing by the police on unarmed students triggered a massive outpouring of public sympathy and support for the students and turned it into a Bengali nationalist movement, the rape and killing of Yasmin set off the uprising in Dinajpur. Excited crowds faced gun-wielding police and para-military forces with reckless abandon.

The clumsy attempt to present Yasmin as a prostitute added to the public indignation. Several newspaper offices were burned down because of the false reporting about Yasmin. In Dhaka, one may recall, the Morning News office was also burned by the crowds for similar slanted reporting. It is interesting to note that neither the Prime Minister nor the Home Minister nor indeed any other BNP leader had a word of sympathy for poor Yasmin or those seven persons who died in police firing. They did not express regrets at the tragic event. Indeed the whole nation including many members of BNP was shocked when the Prime Minister, while addressing a public meeting on

The lesson that one must learn from this sad episode is that politicisation has become a major threat to the quality, integrity, objectivity and impartiality of the public services. The BNP government seemed to have chosen this policy in the belief that this will ensure their re-election.

1 September to observe BNP's founding, failed to even mention the Dinajpur incident in her long speech.

The then Chief Minister of erstwhile East Pakistan Mr Nurul Amin also refused to condole the death of the students and visit the hospital to see the injured students. Mr Nurul Amin did not know, of course, that the blood spilled on 21 February would set off a chain of events leading to the independence of Bangladesh.

Perhaps the Prime Minister and other BNP leaders had realised that things had gone too far in Dinajpur and that is why they could not muster enough courage to face the angry people of that district. Begum Zia used her Beijing trip to justify the delay in reacting to the event but obviously the people did not accept the excuse as reasonable.

One kept on hearing the question: Is Dinajpur further away than Beijing? The people expected that she would visit the town, express her condolences and give assurances about proper enquiry and legal action against the accused persons to calm down the people. As the head of the government this was her minimum duty. But she did nothing of the kind. She went away to attend the Beijing Conference as if the death of so many innocent people by police bullets or the collapse of administration in a district were too insignificant to deserve prime ministerial attention! She did not, of course, realise the irony in her trip to attend a conference for promoting women's rights while a young woman was raped and killed while in the care of her police.

It was perhaps in Beijing that the realisation dawned on her that she had to do something to deflect the criticism she was facing on account of her silence and inaction on the Dinajpur uprising. So she went to Dinajpur upon her return but that was exactly 19 days after Yasmin was raped and murdered by the goons in police uniform.

Clearly designed to impress the Dinajpur residents about the might and majesty of her high position, she entered the town in a huge motorcade. The massive security forces mobilised for the occasion gave the impression that the Prime Minister had to be protected from the townspeople. Are not these the people amongst whom she is reported to have spent her early years? She spent only a few highly publicised hours. The expression of regrets at the sad incident and meeting the mother of Yasmin were all done for getting maximum publicity. She gave a cheque for Taka one lakh to Yasmin's mother. Was

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



she surprised when the poor woman did not seem to care about the cheque and instead, kept on demanding the trial of her daughter's killers? How does a mother put a monetary value on her child's life? Quite clearly, her advisers have not yet learned any lesson from the Dinajpur uprising. They did not realise that it is the "politicisation" of the administration which was at the root of the crisis in Dinajpur.

Contrary to expectations, the Prime Minister's visit did not have a calming effect on the town. Instead, the tension was once again reaching the bursting point. The cause of this renewed tension was a gratuitous remark by the Prime Minister that those who burned down the newspaper offices were trouble-makers and miscreants. The term "miscreant" is a highly evocative one. Pakistanis used the word when referring to our valiant freedom-fighters. The residents of Dinajpur know that it was not a group of "miscreants" but practically the entire adult popula-

tion of the town who, out of anger at the distortions and lies of the newspapers, set them to fire. What they did was certainly wrong but such enraged crowds often act in a highly emotion-charged atmosphere. The Prime Minister not only failed to take this into account, she seemed to miss the underlying cause of the Dinajpur uprising.

Let me quote from the report of the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) which sent a two-member team to Dinajpur to investigate the event. The report said, "Due to politicisation of the administration, there had been wholesale irregularities, corruption and misuse of power in Dinajpur for a long time."

This time it was not the Awami League which made the statement but a non-political body having no links whatsoever with the opposition. Yet it had to pin-point the main cause of the simmering discontent in the town. Its conclusion, shared

by other observers, was that the ruling party leaders had turned the local administration into their fiefdom in which public interest was routinely subordinated to the interests of the ruling party.

The district administration obeyed the command of the ruling party leaders regardless of government rules and regulations. In return for such subservience by the top officials, the BNP leaders had to give protection to these officials for their extra-legal activities. Secure in the knowledge of their immunity, there was no check on them. As long as they kept the local ruling party bosses happy, they could flout the law. The rape of Yasmin by the policemen fits in with the environment created in Dinajpur.

Most sensible residents of Dinajpur identified two factors as the underlying causes of the outburst of public anger. Poor Yasmin's death under brutal circumstances and the disgusting attempt by the police to present her as a prostitute were, of course, the immediate cause but this was actually the spark which ignited the fire.

What seemed to weigh heavily on their minds is the overlordship of the BNP leaders over the district administration and the rampant corruption by the officials. The DC and SP seemed to be the special target of public

anger. The lesson that one must learn from this sad episode is that politicisation has become a major threat to the quality, integrity, objectivity and impartiality of the public services. The BNP government seemed to have chosen this policy in the belief that this will ensure their re-election.

No one knows whether they will succeed in their plan but in the process great harm has been done to our public services. Apart from corruption which seems to flourish under the protection of the ruling party, the reputation of the officers and of the bureaucracy as a whole is getting compromised. As a result, when the public's wrath is turned against them, they stand helpless and vulnerable. The DC and SP of Dinajpur had to run for their lives!

I believe the Dinajpur situation is not unique. Similar discontent is simmering underneath in many parts of the country and not only the ruling party but also the government machinery will be the target.

Time has come for the bureaucracy to take stock of the situation and step back from the abyss. Otherwise they will be sucked into the whirlwind which is building up against the ruling party.

As regards the political parties, the Dinajpur uprising should serve as a warning to all of them. It is not safe to take the people for granted because, once in a while, they will rise and strike back at those who betray their trust.

## Why Not Blame Yourself?

We are so much engrossed in constantly blaming someone else for our mishaps, predicaments and problems that this behavioural pattern has developed into a culture of sorts. The practice of blaming others extends from the broad national perspective to our schools, offices and homes, and to pettier levels.

No other nation has perhaps taken the adage *A bad workman blames his tools* as religiously as Bangladeshis. As soon as something happens, we jump to the conclusion that it must be someone else's fault.

If you accidentally cut your finger, the knife must have been too sharp and it need not have been there in the first place. Who put it there? If you break a glass, it's the flaw of the insincere ceramic company because they do not make them like they used to. If you fall flat on your face, it's the floor and not the fact that you are only eighteen months old. Yeah, the blaming-game actually begins that early in life.

And, of course, if a marriage fails, it's his or her fault depending on whether one is wearing a saree or a lungi. In matrimonial cases, blaming

can be wild. The wife could blame the secretary, the husband could point the finger at an over-smart cousin, it could be the mother-in-law, it could be her nail polish, his tie knot and what not. Actually, when a marriage does not last, it's meant not to last. Finding an excuse for the break-up is a futile exercise to prove one's innocence to the world. And, let me tell you, the world was never interested in your marriage. So, why waste time. Either patch up or shut up.

quick to blame the neighbours' kids. Or, pass on the onus to his grand-parents for showering too much love. Love spoils no one; it is only misplaced affection which may.

The mother of any spoilt brat will blame her husband. The father will blame his wife. Someone will come up with the bright idea of blaming the bus or even the school. The best would have been for parents to blame themselves for failing to bring up the child properly.

## Pinch of Salt

by Chintito

If we fare poorly in an exam, we blame the school, rebuke the teacher, blame the questions, even go to the extent of ascribing it on the diet. *Should not have had that egg for breakfast.* But, seldom do we admit that we had not been regular in class, that we had not prepared well, that we are just not fit to pass the exam. I mean, I would fail the French paper; so why blame Mademoiselle.

If my child is a community nuisance and is castigated by the neighbours, I am

appointed the referee, blame the federation which appointed the guy who appointed the referee. Ridiculous! But, we hardly ever stop for a moment and ponder that on the given day, the opponents simply were a better side.

If traffic conditions are unbearable, blame the road, the other driver's driving ability, the lady in the other car, the rickshaws, the buses, the traffic police, the hawkers, the people on the street. *Just stop for a moment and blame yourself.* If you are driving in the right lane, see whether you are instructing the rickshaw-puller to violate a rule, see whether you are the woman holding up traffic.

If the boss scolds you at office, he is a bad boss, a temperamental one; he should not have been here in the first place. *Utter rubbish!* He was the one who hired you. But, the fact that this was the seventeenth time the boss had asked you for a monthly sales report because you are the Monthly Sales Reporter is not to be brought into consideration.

Let's start each day by blaming ourselves for our own sufferings. Try it, you may actually find no one else to blame anymore.

## To the Editor

### Eye hospital

Sir, It has been reported that the government has appointed a committee to enquire into the recent infections at Islamia Eye Hospital where many patients' eyes were infected after surgery that led to extraction of eyes due to the negligence of doctors and staff.

We want to know the details of the investigations and we request the government to publish the report of the Enquiry Committee in the newspapers so that the people can be aware of the matter. We urge the authorities to give the exemplary punishment to the irresponsible doctors and staff so that this type of sad event does not occur any more and the patients can get good treatment.

Mithir Ahmed  
Wari

### Scar on Society

Sir, According to all leading dailies on Sunday last, Sheikh Hasina "congratulated" the people for spontaneously observing the first day of her 3-day non-stop hartal. This statement appeared more cruel and ridiculous utterance this time because the hypocrisy and falsehood of this statement became ever more apparent in view of a frightful and soul-stirring picture that was published on the same page that highlighted her so-called congratulatory statement. A middle-aged gentleman was walking (I would like to emphasise the word walking) to his office. The poor gentleman was accosted by Sheikh Hasina's pickets and viciously stripped of all his

clothes and exposed naked. The two front-page pictures published side by side in a leading English daily depict a scene that is enough to make any citizen's blood boil in anger.

In the first picture, the poor man is seen trying in vain to keep a small remnant of his clothes over his private parts as two of the goons (I say goons) are viciously pulling down his pant and underwear. The second picture shows him fully naked, cowered down in ultimate humiliation and begging with his two hands to retrieve his clothes. It was gratifying to note that the newspaper had the decency to blacken out the poor man's face in an effort to conceal his identity. So we do not know who the man was. However, he could have been you or me — or maybe anyone's father or uncle! What was the man's crime for which the goons meted out to him such a humiliating punishment?

The imposition of hartal forced him to walk on foot to his office (he had no choice). The political terrorists (the newspapers call them pickets) had no pity for him. He had probably walked many miles in the blistering heat and in all likelihood was the age of their father or uncle. The emotional scar that was imparted to him would probably last throughout his lifetime. The question is: doesn't this man have any rights as a free citizen of this country? Don't we have any rights at all any more? Probably not, as long as we have politicians who are so hungry for power that they will stoop to anything. They think the country belongs to them and that they can do anything by

means of coercion and hooliganism. A dead-body on a hartal day to them represents a political boon to be paraded around in 'ecstasy'.

While neighbouring countries are doubling their foreign investments, the frequent hartals and agitations are also a main factor for keeping away our much needed foreign investments. Being involved in the export trade myself, I know first hand how the name of Bangladesh invokes a negative image abroad. In the last Euro-money investors' conference in Dhaka, the opposition deliberately called a hartal and created a reign of terror, thereby scaring off the probable investors. Other such examples can also be cited. Yet Sheikh Hasina and other leaders speak of their love for this country. How ironic! Of course, for them it is another story. It is common knowledge that Sheikh Hasina could not gracefully accept her defeat in the hands of her arch-rival Khaleda Zia. If we are to believe the newspapers, she is alleged to have vowed publicly "not to allow Khaleda's government to rule in peace". Maybe she thinks it is her "birth-right" to rule this country whether the people want her or not. Whatever her reasons are, she has succeeded in creating unrest in the country. When our poor country is plagued with innumerable problems, the opposition boycotts the parliament and takes to the streets over an issue that could have been ably solved staying in the parliament. Even when the renowned Commonwealth arbitrator came up with an unbiased solution and even Khaleda Zia conceded

halfway. The opposition was adamant and labelled Emeka as a "stooge" of the government. The truth is simple, if there is a peaceful solution how can she keep her vow of not allowing Khaleda Zia to rule in peace?

We, the people, who are not politically connected, feel too helpless nowadays. In the streets, cars (costing lacks of hard-earned money) are smashed by hoodlums hired for by the political agitators for no reason whatsoever. Ironically not a single opposition politician has rebuked his or her partymen for this. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that they are encouraging this openly.

I had never written any letters in the readers' column in the past. Maybe, it's the sense of utter frustration and helplessness that has compelled me to. It may be also the hidden anger that has been simmering within all of us. We are just sick of the political hypocrisy that surrounds us and seems to be engulfing us day-by-day. How can Sheikh Hasina join hands with the much dreaded anti-liberation (Razakar) forces and equally hated autocratic forces of Ershad and still proclaim her love for Bangladesh? Are we, the common citizens, so dumb and foolish so as not to comprehend motives?

I would also like to point out an ominous development that is building up within our very own neighbourhoods. On hartal days, our neighbourhood streets are brutally taken over by a gang of youths. These youths on other days are the social outcasts who are involved in various anti-social activities. On hartal days they are not afraid of

anything and anybody because they have the licence to carry on their vicious activities unhindered and unobstructed (and sadly enough legally within the hartal law). With welding sticks and hand-made bombs they pounce on anybody they feel like or create any mayhem of their choice. We are suddenly afraid of them — they can do anything to us in broad daylight and with full impunity. Nobody can and will help us against them.

The elected government of Khaleda Zia has a track record that is nothing to brag about. The fertiliser incident, the terrible incident in Dinajpur proved that Khaleda does not possess the dynamism that we expected of her. When the gentleman was being manhandled and stripped in broad daylight, why didn't the police or BDR protect him? Why is the government encouraging the police/BDR to be mere onlookers? What are they so afraid of? If Khaleda Zia's government really and sincerely tried, it could easily improve the law and order situation in the country a long time ago. Doesn't the PM realise that if her government improves the everyday law and order situation and reasonably contains the widespread corruption (a legacy of the Ershad regime) that has pervaded her administration, she can hope to win the next election quite comfortably?

According to one newspaper account, at least two of the hoodlums who took active part in stripping the gentleman Saturday last, have been arrested. On previous occasions, Hasina or other opposition leaders would

most likely blast this arrest as a "government repression and police brutality on innocent partymen." Not so this time! This time everything has been captured in black and white through the lenses!

A scared citizen  
Dhaka

### Fiscal sector

Sir, Thanks to Mr Abdul Bayes for his valuable article titled "Performance of the Fiscal Sector" published in your esteemed daily on the 9th instant. He has elaborately discussed about tax revenues, direct and indirect taxes, sponsored self-reliance and government expenditure, etc.

We like to point out some suggestions for our fiscal authorities as under: a) We require structural adjustment in the fiscal sector. So, from high level to lower level of administration, we should follow "time economy". It means that we should strictly follow our regular time-table from our own house to every sphere of life including offices, mills, factories, etc. It is the main reason behind development in the developed countries, b) We should be polite in behaviour and firm in determination. The root cause of development in the Western countries lies there, and c) We should not think too much for labour but for labourer. Our mind should be work in pace with heart.

So, we request the authorities of the fiscal sector to think how to develop the activities of the personnel employed in this sector.

M Ali  
Rajshahi