

For Flood Victims' Sake

Ever since the 18-month old political crisis began, all sorts of hardship piled up on our people both due to mis-governance and due to hartals. Nothing that we did, or said mattered much to our political leaderships of either side. They were so busy "protecting the Constitution" and "ensuring our right to vote" that both sides forgot about the general people who became genuinely worried about their Right to Live.

The 32-hour hartal is upon us. Though it has been shortened, and we commend the opposition for it, yet it will impose tremendous hardship on our people. Already prices of essentials have shot up. Rice, vegetables and daal prices have gone up by 20 to 30 per cent as yesterday. It is likely to go up even higher. What we are concerned with now is the 96-hour hartal (4 continuous days) which is round the corner — from 16th to 19th of this month. This country will be "closed" — as far as the world is concerned — for four days and nights. How absurd, but true.

On earlier occasions, we appealed against such actions in the name of human and civic rights, economic well-being, hardship to the poor, etc. This time, we would like to renew our appeal in the name of the millions of flood-affected people. Postpone the four-day hartal.

As it is, flood victims get far from adequate relief. The four-day hartal, with its disruptions of the port, railway and road communication is bound to impact negatively on the relief efforts. It cannot be the intention to hurt the common man, specially when they are already so badly hurt by the devastating floods. We think that a four-day strike would give an uncaring and insensitive image of the opposition. It would also provide a powerful propaganda weapon for the ruling party.

We also make a fervent appeal to the ruling party to take a bold initiative and offer talks in a manner that brings the opposition to the dialogue table. We repeat, that the onus to break the deadlock lies with the government. People expect it from those who are in power.

However, our final appeal is to the opposition. Considering the over-riding humanitarian aspect and the great suffering of our people caused by flood, the opposition should unilaterally postpone its four-day hartal. Such a gesture will be greatly appreciated by the general people, who will get a practical demonstration of the opposition's concern for the misery and plight of the people.

Rice-price Out of Hand

The government is being deliberately impervious to opposition demands and actions. The inspiration for that is political. And the end in view is also political. The government is being equally, if not more, impervious to possible consequences of an unending spiral in rice-price. It is not appearing to grasp the possible political damage of an already abnormal rice-price rising to dizzy heights every week for the past so many months.

With the passing of Eid-ul-Fitr it was reasonably hoped that price of rice would show some elasticity and go back to the vicinity of the pre-Eid level. No luck, the price held ground. And after weeks it started rising. And kept at it till the coarsest varieties crossed Tk 440 a maund. Nazir-shail, the most popular of the medium varieties recorded a rise to past Tk 18 per kg during the time. One thought the ceiling was lint. No, in the last few days Nazir-shail went past Tk 19 and the coarsest ones past Tk 11.50.

Government devices to hold the price has done little to arrest the rise. Liberal imports and OMS operations are failing to have any impact. And the outlook is harrowing. With the rice-surplus districts in the north all flooded — for the third time this year — rice-price is feared to rise further. Add to it frequent breakdown of inter-district transportation, for natural reasons or man-made ones such as hartals of both government and opposition variety. And you will simply panic.

With a wonderful inflation rate ruling at around 7 per cent, this high price is specially hurting. The repeated natural visitations and the interminable erosion by a number of rivers are panpering vast areas of our population. How will these people get their daily morsel of rice? Shephali Begum, poor and flood-affected, in a Pargachha thana village in Rangpur was driven by hunger to steal rice — barely more than a quarter of a Kg — from the neighbour's house. Scolded for the act by the villagers, she killed herself by taking insecticide — her freshly cooker pot of rice untouched. Shephali was no professional or habitual destitute. How many would be put to such a condition by the galloping rice-price? Millions.

This must not happen.

DCC's Initiative

We welcome DCC's initiative to clear roads and public places illegally occupied or used by people. Recently, we have noticed a rise in incidence of people using public roads as places to pile up constructions materials for their houses, or even, store business materials. To make use of every inch of land, many houses are constructed without leaving the mandatory 4-foot space. This makes them impinge on the footpath, and use it in a way that abstracts free use by pedestrians.

There are many other ways in which building codes are being violated. There is an atmosphere of free-for-all, and people seem to think that they can get away with such infringement on public property.

Situation came to this pass only because of negligence of DCC. Even when they take up their supervisory role, it is on an ad-hoc and piecemeal basis. There is very seldom any follow-up.

Therefore, while we commend DCC, we also reprimand if for not doing its work properly. Now that it has taken this new initiative to clear the roads and other public places, DCC should go all the way and cover all residential areas. They should also keep constant watch and make these drives a regular feature.

Politics and the "Battle of the Sexes"

To both the ruling and the non-ruling parties in Bangladesh, it is alleged, democracy is what democracy is interpreted by them. This universal concept is very much now localised and pocketed to use it to pursue narrow party interest.

HERE is, perhaps, very little disagreement to the notion that the present configuration of political scenario in Bangladesh is chaotic, confusing, conflicting and confrontational. The brewing politics warrants immediate solutions which seems hardly in the offing. Suggestions are in abundance (from Sir Ninian to Ishtiaque Ahmed and others) but seems barely welcome in the realm of the "insensible" shots in our political movie on display. Given the past futile attempts to resolve the crisis and also given that the rays of hopes, more often than not, turn out to be mere forlorn hopes, one might feel tempted to theorise the political behaviour of our learned politicians. While delving into the current crisis, and the attitudes of the political actors, one would be suggestive of going through an example of the famous game theory called "The Battle of the Sexes." In a post-editorial article "nobody wins, nobody loses" [in a celebrated daily, Zahid Hussain and L. J. Bhadra also cited this.]

The battle of the sexes reads as follows: Suppose a husband and a wife, weary of hardworks throughout the year, decide to go for a break outside the home country. Where? Well, the husband proposes to go to Sri Lanka where they could eat local

food. The wife, on the other hand, contends to go to Nepal and to have there Chinese food. If the husband assumes the dictatorial status then, needless to mention, the obvious solution is to force the "beloved" wife and tow her to ride on the first boat. Conversely, if the wife appears as a dictator (not unlikely in many families even in men dominated societies), then the husband could be forced to ride on the second boat.

Besides this dictatorial solution, a compromise solution, comprising two parts, could be chalked out. First both agree to go to Sri Lanka but, at the same time, commit to eat Chinese. Second, both agree to go to Nepal but commit to have local food. Remember, in each of these cases, the husband and the wife agree to forsake one of their respective preferences in terms of either location to visit or food to eat. A "quasi" dictatorial solution would be either to go to Sri Lanka or to Nepal and choose food of own liking. This can be called a one-way-traffic solution where one only gives up but nothing bags in return. Further, the last solution can also be construed as non-dictatorial

(democratic) but non-compromising (undemocratic) too, the wife goes to Nepal and eats Chinese but while the husband leaves for Sri Lanka to eat local food. The present political stalemate surrounding the establishment of a rigging free election — an offshoot of which is a caretaker govern-

ment — seems to suit both democratic and undemocratic routes i.e. a separating solution and thus tends to demise the relationship between contending parties. There is also a problem with respect to the compromising solution. Who will compromise: Khaleda or Hasina? The former is said to be a well-publicised "uncompromising" leader by her party itself while the latter, claims to be uncompromising on national interest as she deems it to be. The crux, however, could be clipped through a volley of steps viz.,

one, a neutral election into a rigged one etc. To both the ruling and the non-ruling parties in Bangladesh, it is alleged, democracy is what democracy is interpreted by them. This universal concept is very much now localised and pocketed to use it to pursue narrow party interest. If democracy would be preached and practiced with all of its original novelty, Bangladesh could, perhaps, be few yards ahead by this time. The ruling party continues to allege that the opposition parties are poised to

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



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Ataturk's Republican Party and its New President

FIFTY-seven-year old Deniz Baykal was elected President of the Republican People's Party (CHP) recently in a nationwide Congress. He easily defeated his rival Murat Karayalcin who had served briefly as the President of the Party and Deputy Prime Minister in the coalition Government of Prime Minister Tansu Ciller. With the election of Baykal a new page has opened in the life of the Republican People's Party founded by the founder of modern Turkey Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

Baykal, who has made a career in politics for the last 26 years, studied Law at the Ankara University. He was elected to the parliament in 1973 from his native Antalya, the beautiful city on the Mediterranean, where each year tourists swarm by the

million. He was spotted early by Bulent Ecevit, the Turkish Prime Minister of the mid seventies, who made him his Finance Minister and Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources. The military coup of 1980 saw Baykal under house arrest from where he was released shortly after.

With the resumption of political life in the eighties, Baykal made several unsuccessful bids for top position of CHP which he finally reached recently following nearly 48 hours of non-stop political pow wow; 1083 delegates from all over the country, who had packed the Ataturk sports hall voted overwhelmingly in his favour. In his victory speech, Baykal spoke out in favour of unity

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from Istanbul

within the ranks of Social Democrats of all stripes and extended an olive branch to his rival Karayalcin.

Hikmet Cetin, the outgoing President of CHP tendered his resignation immediately to Baykal along with his Cabinet colleagues. Since 1991, Turkey has been governed by a coalition composed of centre right True Path Party (DYP), whose leader is Prime Minister Tansu Ciller, and centre left CHP, whose new leader is Deniz Baykal.

When reporters asked Baykal about the future of the coalition government he said, it will be decided by the party leadership. During his campaign for election he stated, "We shall stay in the government if we can achieve honourable balance." During

the last four years the coalition has continued without much friction.

Turkey's national elections are exactly a year away. The main opposition party, Motherland Party (ANAP) with its leader Mesut Yilmaz has been campaigning for early elections without making much headway. Within the fold of CHP there is a noisy group, who have been asking their party to quit the coalition, because they find that their party 'pays too heavy a price' to stay with DYP with its right wing policies. Baykal will have to contend immediately with this faction. CHP which leans heavily on organised labour will have to face their increasingly vocal demands including strikes.

In the short term, Deniz

Baykal will have no interest in rocking the coalition boat. On the other hand keeping in view the general elections the temptation to have a free hand unencumbered by coalition compromises may become irresistible. The pressure for early polls will rise. Since the last military

coups in 1980 the entire political spectrum of Turkey has been fragmented. Deniz Baykal is the new unknown star on the Turkish political scene. Can he unite the fragmented Social Democrats and lead it to be a winner as did his one time mentor, Bulent Ecevit, today leading a small fraction of Social

OPINION Of Accountability

Munira Khan

We invited some guests to dinner and were still at the dining table eating, when the electricity went off. I was worried. The other night, it went off at 7:30 pm and came back at 3:30 am. Nobody in the house including the kids could sleep because of heat. In our childhood we used to sleep under mosquito net with other brothers and sisters even without any fan. I cannot remember a single night when we failed to sleep because of heat. I know this is habit. Now we are habituated to sleep in airconditioned room or at least with fans. We do not know what to do or how to do without the electricity. Also, we do not know what to do to restore the electricity but only to telephone the electric supply office.

The other night, I telephoned and telephoned without any result, because there was no electrician in the supply office to repair our line. My driver rushed to get one and at last persuaded in some way or the other some linemen who were repairing some other faulty lines, to fix ours. We could not have done anything if he would not have got them by chance. As a matter of fact, we the tax payers do not have any knowledge about the supply and maintenance of electricity, water and other necessary amenities of our day-to-day life. We do not know who is responsible for supplying and maintaining those in different area so moreover, who is accountable to us for this? Or is their any accountability on the part of authority or any government officer to the people? I guess not. Not for any inconvenience made for the citizens for their bad planning, for their inefficiency or callousness. I know a relative of mine received money from the government of UK as a compensation for twisting her ankle on an uneven road which was badly repaired by the concerned authority. But if we go through the Green Road, we could see big big ditches on both sides of the road (someone told me that they are installing new cables for telephone lines) which have been there for months without any explanation, causing accidents and traffic jams. My son's car got stuck in a hole just in front of our gate which was not there when he left the house. We never know how long it would take to repair any road, and who would do it.

It seems very funny to me that we the tax payers are least informed about our rights and privileges. Nobody is accountable to us in any way. Those people who run the administration and those who run the government office don't seem to be public

servants, they are the bosses. When we go to them for any service, it is as if to ask for a favour — not for rights. But everybody knows that to make democratic system effective you have to have some accountability to the people. It will have to start from the politicians.

The elected representatives should be accountable to the voters who voted them to power. The government should be accountable to the people for any action they take and for any administrative crisis they create. And we will have to begin to make the tradition by showing it to the people. When Mr A M Zahiruddin Khan, former industry minister, resigned in April last claiming to take the moral responsibility for the fertilizer crisis, we were happy to see that the process has started. But we were dismayed with the incident in Dinajpur. Except some officers were transferred neither the Home Minister nor any MPs of that area gave us any clue what really happened there and who were truly responsible for the crime and death of an innocent girl and others afterwards. The press note was really confusing and not reasonable enough to convince the people and we do not understand why the authority could not come out clear by telling us exactly what happened and could not take stern action with the police officers involved with the crime and let us be informed about it. That would have lessened the anger of the crowd taught the government officers to be accountable to the people of the country of their action. That would have helped establish the rule of law in this country and prevented the people not to take law in their own hands. If I could go to the court, get justice for an electricity-free night in my area for lack of maintenance and negligence of some officers, or if I could go to a court for the death of a patient for the negligence of a doctor or a medical staff then those people on duty would be more careful, more efficient and dutiful. Everything should be accounted for to the public by the public servants. And for this, all of us should act with integrity, should have fidelity to truth. No nation gets its character instantly. It has to make tradition and for that the leaders should take the responsibilities. Responsibility is to run the affairs of the state honestly and to point out the irresponsibility — also honestly. Accountability in every sphere of a life of the people which is very necessary to nurture our very much wanted democracy is very much needed.

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.

Scar on Society

Sir, With deep sorrow and anguish I have gone through the report published in your esteemed daily covering the shameful incident of stripping an official during the recent strike. There is a limit to everything. These strikes are already getting on people's nerves and now we find the picketers exceeding all moral and social norms!

I strongly believe that a strong condemnation is essential on the part of mainstream opposition parties and a drastic step is essential on government's part. An unruly opposition and an irresponsible government both are equally destructive for the society.

Abdul Awval Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Health care and legal aid

Sir, There are repeated assurances by our ministers, political leaders and bureaucrats for "health for all by the year 2000 A.D." Many of them have also been asking ceaselessly for "independence of judiciary." But unfortunately the standard of services of "health care" as well as "legal aid" in our country have been deteriorating day by day.

We are in the habit of talking loud about human rights, market economy and democracy but as a matter of fact only a limited resourceful and affluent persons enjoy the fruits of life and majority of the people who belong to poor, middle and 'have not' classes are deprived of the bounties of the nature due to our socio-economic, administrative and political anomalies and inequalities prevailing in the country.

The usefulness of our government hospitals, thana health complexes, maternity and family planning centres have gone to the lowest ebb. An indigent person or a patient is required to go to a private clinic which is attended by a government or a non-government physician

and he is to spend a minimum Taka 100 (Taka one hundred) as doctor's consultation fee. Then the question comes for purchase of medicine etc. In most of the cases the doctors ask the sickman for urine, blood, stool text, X-ray or ECG reports. If the condition of the patient is serious he is referred to a specialist or advised admission in a private clinic for treatment.

How the poor people of our country whose per capita income is only USD 220 can afford spending such a huge amount of money for health care? Further the people fail to understand the actual cost of varieties of medicines as there is no price list displayed nor the medical shop owners hand over any money receipt/cash memo to the customers.

Similarly the sufferings of most of the people who seek justice and redress of their grievances filing cases in different courts know no bounds. Because the lawyers go on realising more and more fees from the clients showing various grounds and reasons and the cases are left pending in the judicial courts for indefinite period.

We hope our intellectuals and public leaders whether in the government or in the opposition may kindly give a serious thought to the 'health care' and 'legal aid' problems and difficulties, introduce some systematic methods and procedures and help mitigate the untold sufferings of the people.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203.

Anxious Citizen

Sir, Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina on September 23 labelled the present government as illegal one and urged upon the foreign countries not to enter into any agreement with this government. Well, in the same briefing session, the AL chief demanded formation of a caretaker government to be headed by the Chief Justice.

The point is, when the present government is illegal, according to Sheikh Hasina then how could she trust the Chief Justice appointed by this government as the head of her proposed caretaker government? By the way, if this government accepts AL chief's demand, would it be again turned into a legal government?

As I understand, the actual motto of the AL chief is to ensure a free and fair election. I think this can be ensured through holding dialogues with the government. There is no need to ask the foreigners for causing national loss. I am confident that the current democratic government would take courageous step for holding a free and fair election for strengthening the institution of democracy and to restore political stability for the economic growth in Bangladesh. M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor BAI, Dhaka

Rare example

Sir, I refer to a news item published recently in an English daily under the caption "Multi-million dollar wedding of Jayalalitha's foster son". We don't have much words to decry this heinous act of profligacy perpetrated by Ms Jayalalitha, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, India, who dared to ignore the lamentation of the afflicted community by hosting a multi-million dollar feast for her foster son to which two lakh guests have been invited and where 5,000 goats, 25,000 chickens have been slaughtered to satiate their palate.

In a country where millions fight for scrap of food in rubbish heaps and many starve to death, such brazen and odious precedence of profligacy that has been set forth by a Chief Minister through this sumptuous feast does not let one to remain unconcerned. She was definitely not made a CM to paradigmatised such an impudent act of extravagance.

This surely unveils the actual countenance of some of the demagogue, who all along their life hanker after power to fulfil their ominous desire and to quench their thirst for wealth. But there is no room for complacency only by branding Ms Jayalalitha or their

class. Are we immune from it? How far do we maintain frugality in our daily life? The prodigal life led by a section of our society, the nature of our squander-mania which is evident in various social functions — the lavish expenditure, perpetrated in various regal ceremonies — aptly reveals the inbred nature of a spendthrift nation. The sooner we realise, the better it is for us.

Md Anowar Masud Department of EEE, BUET

Cable and Authority

Sir, Ever since the Dish Antenna was introduced and put to use by Bangladeshis, there has been mushroom growth of Cable Operators most of whom do not apply moral or social ethics in using it. Their main goal is to make money and they are doing it by befooling the government, by not paying taxes, etc. They fool the customers by not giving them the number of stations as promised, charging money as monthly fee which is not reasonable and by giving service which is far from satisfactory. All these are happening right under the nose of the benign authorities who have shut down their eyes to it. This should be streamlined and the authorities are required to take appropriate steps to stop these malpractices.

Following suggestions are given for such actions as the authorities deem it necessary to take: 1) all cable operators should hold valid license. 2) they should under no circumstances be allowed to evade taxes, Vat, etc., as they are making enormous profit in this business; 3) authorities should discourage the operators to show stations like 'V' ATN 'EL TV' etc., which show nothing but trash and vulgar hip movement and lewd lascivious dances and shakes. They also continue to show one film for the umpteenth time. From social, moral (if we at all care for one) and ethical point of view these have no value. On the contrary 'DD-7', 'PTV', 'Prime Sports', 'BBC and CNN more or less are free from such obscenity and be categorised among the lesser evils; 4) the authorities should keep the cable operators under their constant check and supervision. Abdul Aziz Mia Dhaka-1205