

In It Now

The entreaties with the ruling party and the opposition to start a parley for a defusion of tension, formed over the 96-hour hartal programme of the opposition, have gone unanswered. The much-dreaded strike is on.

We urge utmost restraint from all concerned because it is the longest-ever — and indeed the most nerve-testing — hartal in the history of independent Bangladesh.

The last few strikes called by the opposition passed off more or less peacefully owing to a hands-off policy of the ruling party. The same non-confrontationist attitude is widely expected of the BNP. Party enthusiasts on either side would still need to be held in check to avoid any untoward happening. It is common knowledge that sheer necessity makes people step out of their homes in times of strike. Such movements need not run into difficulty.

Given the organisational reach of the opposition their directives should make a percolatory impact on the field-level workers to remain disciplined. Strike, conceived as a democratic means to peaceful protestation, draws its strength from spontaneity and absence of imposition. The best guarantee for a peaceful strike of this duration is a conscious avoidance — across the political divide — of all forms of provocation and intimidation.

At the risk of being repetitive, the organisers of strike are urged once again to let the ambulances run freely and emergency treatment delivered duly to those who stand in need of it. Even an ordinary transport carrying an unwell or critically ill person should be allowed to pass. The tendencies to pounce on any moving transport, to appear in the self-appointed role of verifying the seriousness any disease, and to ask for the identity of passengers, is plain highhandedness. Avoiding this is key to heading off many a trouble. The hassles the journalists had faced during the previous strikes must not recur. Journalists cover events to keep the people posted of developments in very difficult situations, so that they are entitled to complete immunity in the discharge of their professional obligations.

As the strike goes on, let there be not only some time-wise relaxations but also the maintenance of contact across the whole political spectrum. The efforts for national reconciliation cannot be abandoned under any circumstances.

Is This a Flurry?

According to a national daily 13 officers have been posted to as many districts as their new deputy commissioners. Six months looks like a small span of time for 20 per cent of the districts to have new administrative chiefs. During the same six months as many as 176 TNOs have either been transferred or newly posted or withdrawn from as many thanas. Transferred were also 23 SPs or police officers of equal rank. In the same half year 29 ADCs were withdrawn from the districts and new people put there as replacement.

The TNOs are the actual contact point between the masses and the administration. At first changes were sought to be made in 239 such posts, 7 in the last six months. Later 76 TNOs got a reprieve. There are 460 TNOs minding the nation's 460 thanas. What made the administration put new men in charge of more than half of these? The government may have its own administrative reasons for effecting the changes.

However, there have been accusations in the opposition political circles that this flurry of appointments and transfers and withdrawals in the district and thana level administration is politically motivated with an eye to the general elections. The changes are certainly adding fuel to the charges. Perhaps the government will clear the air that these are routine, periodic postings and transfers.

Risky Business

The Faridpur Sadarpur College tragedy was repeated at Sirajganj on Friday night. Students reportedly trying to fabricate bombs had to pay for the criminal acts. A bomb exploded killing one JCD leader and hurting four JCD activists. In the Faridpur blast also the JCD VP of the college union was killed and four or five activists injured. The casualties speak of a similarity in the cottage-industry bomb making procedure. But the similarity of those involved in the acts intrigues one to no end. Why should the student wing of the party in power go for such risky business? After all JCD is nowhere in a very desperate situation.

Lately JCD has been distinguishing itself by an almost ceaseless spasm of bloody infighting. And there are cases where they have also reportedly been used as tools in the fight between rival BNP leaders.

And then here is this latest from DU. It was said that some influential student leaders had expected to get first class in the M.Ed exams of the university. Disappointed by the published results, groups of students mounted a rampage on the Institute of Education and Research breaking all its glass windows and damaging the director's office. These incidents better not recur.

He Who Laughs Last

Remember Peter the Great! And — do not laugh at the bread lines of today, for isn't it true that Russia has more often than not had the last laugh?

in the audience and was most convinced.

The dismemberment of the Soviet Union was a foregone conclusion with the loosening of the central authority and introduction of certain amount of democratic reforms. Gorbachev's disappearance from the scene was also not unexpected. He brought about the reforms but the events overtook him. Even his momentary success in crushing the pro-status quo coup d'état could not help him long to remain in power. President Boris Yeltsin was the natural and democratic phenomenon which established its dominance in the new Russian Federation.

On January 7, 1991 in a paper presented to the BISS Seminar, I said — "I am reminded of philosopher-writer Lampadusa, a keen observer of the contemporary scene who said, 'we have to run fast to be in the same place.' What is happening today in Eastern Europe has to be seen in the context of history of the area, rather complex experiences of central Europe. Someone likened the development to the events of 1789.

Although we are too near the unfolding of the situation it will perhaps not be far off the mark if we compare the developments in its import and sweep to the events of 1830, 1848, 1870 or 1917. The Research Director of the Policy Planning Cell in the State Department was so enthused with the fast-moving developments that he even called it the end of an era as the events of the 1917 drew the curtain on the Romanov dynasty and launched the Bolshevik revolution.

If history is essentially a form of movement and a purposive movement what is happening in Eastern Europe has to be seen in the wider context of the historic experiences of the countries involved.

The developments in Eastern Europe has a strange resemblance to the revolution of 1848. The 1848 revolution repudiated throne and alter. Equally they repudiated the existing state and frontiers and the treaty settlement of the Congress of Vienna. After 40 years of peace and stability men, as it were, were bored — they wished to

translate into real life the poetry of Victor Hugo and the music of Berlioz! Most of the leaders were 35 and 40. They represented the generation which had caught only the echoes of Napoleonic Empire. The Eastern Europeans after over 40 years of the Yalta arrangement almost got tired and fatigued. They were inspired by the idealism of Walesa and literature of Havel and the poetry of Urban, and they repudiated one after another the Yalta arrangement.

The historic nations — Italy, Hungary and Poland — announced their claims in 1848. They were, of course, overshadowed by Germany. The German movement was at once the most romantic and the most radical and 1848 ushered in the German century which ended in 1945.

The historic nation had a

bourg dynasty as the protector of the Slav peoples from Germany. "If the Austrian Empire did not exist it would have to be created in the interest of Europe and of humanity." This famous sentence launched the programme of Austro-Slavism, the idea of maintaining a modest national existence under the wing of the most traditional dynasty.

With perestroika and glasnost sweeping over Russia and Eastern Europe there is the torrent of rising expectations and the slackening of the power of the Soviet authority. As Gorbachev has suggested repeatedly, he would like all these countries to find their own measure of freedom and liberty, and he ensued by staying the hands of the Soviet men and material in these countries. His primary concern was to save resources and convert them

make it. The next Parliament should play a more important role in this regard.

January 16, 1547 is an important milestone in the Russian history. On that day, in the Uspensky Cathedral, Ivan IV known as Ivan the Terrible, was the first Russian sovereign to be crowned Czar. As legend goes Roman Emperor Caligula made his dog his advisor! Ivan IV reportedly hacked to pieces an elephant that refused to bow to him! Like Caligula, Ivan also has been the subject of curiosity of many philosophers and writers. Many of Dostoyevsky's novels represent various traits of the Russian Czar. Alexander I seems to have played the character role of Ivan Karamazov to his father Paul's leader Pavlovitch. Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great belonged to an opposite tradition by killing an eldest son and an heir. But then it is a matter of fact and history that Romanov Czar were more German than Russian by origin. Therefore, to discover autocratic tendency in the Russian Czar cannot be explained only as the creation of Russian national ethos.

Catherine II, known as Catherine the Great, 1762 to 1796, followed many of her decisions with extreme precision and seriousness quite in keeping with her German origin. The drafting of the instruction largely based on Montesquieu's Spirit of Laws attempted to give her a propaganda advantage. She also showed a lot of creativity and novelty in choosing her Beaux, such as Gregory Orlov, Gregory Potemkin, and the Polish Poniatowski. Of these Potemkin was known as Cyclops because one of his eyes was blind! With her passion for power and men, Catherine the Great added a third love for arts. She imported, inter alia, the great Italian architect Giacomo Chaurangi. Hermitage in St Petersburg with the works of the great European masters which include Van Dyck, Rembrandt, Raphael and Titian still speak of contribution to the development of the great Russian ethos. Some of the great works of art and crafts of Western Europe still found in the Russian museums, like the Hermitage or the Kremlin can no longer be

found in the museums of their original countries, as they were destroyed, looted or melted down to pay for costly wars!

Czar Alexander I taunted Napoleon for good reason. Having lost the war with Russia, Napoleon had to settle for much less at the Congress of Vienna. Alexander dealt with Metternich, Talleyrand and Wellington with confidence and grit.

Napoleon tried to win over Alexander even by suggesting that had he been a woman Napoleon would have fallen in love with him! To feat Napoleon at his own game the Russian Czar brought with him advisors, most of whom were Germans, Poles, Greeks and Corsicans!

The Crimean war under Nicholas I of course demonstrated the military and administrative weakness of the Czar, but it gave the world Tolstoy and his War and Peace!

The tragic disappearance of the Romanov dynasty is still a matter of historic interest and curiosity. The Romanov dynasty collapsed not because of any coup d'état but because of the collapse of the authority and the lack of will on the part of the Czar himself. The bread march and Rasputins unconceivable atrocities, and sinister rumours associated with him, further led to the weakening of the respect for authority. The Russians, by and large, liked their Czar but hated the people surrounding him. Czar Nicholas II knew that there was something wrong in the state of Russia but the establishment was so firmly cemented along the age-old traditional lives that he could not make that fateful crossover. We know that Pasternak was a communist by conviction but in his novel he could not withhold his deep anguish at the news of the death of the Czar — a sort of silent, inner sorrow felt by all.

A great country as Russia is, it encompasses both the Asian and the European civilisations. The effort of the Western democracies to lend a helping hand is well-timed and well-conceived. It will add another dimension to this great country since history has amalgamated and striven to take the best. Remember Peter the Great! And — do not laugh at the bread lines of today, for isn't it true that Russia has more often than not had the last laugh?

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



literature and intellectual class; their appearance was expected; the surprise of 1848 was the appearance of the unhistoric nations: the submerged Slav peoples of the East, Central Europe. Emancipation of the peasants brought to life nations without aristocrats or burghers — their only spokesmen were educated sons of the peasants. The historic nations, challenging the traditional order of Europe, were themselves challenged by the unhistoric nations. Slovans and Croats disputed the historic claims of Italy; Croats, Serbs and Romanians (not a Slav people but with similar social conditions) repudiated greater Hungary; the Czechs questioned German predominance in Bohemia, the Poles fought in both camps — they resisted the claims of the German's in Romania, yet to the East, their own historic claims were challenged by the Russians or Ukrainians!

Palacky, the first historian of Bohemia and the creator of the Czech national conscience repudiated allegiance to Germany and said, "I am a Bohemian of Slav race" and looked instead to the Haps-

into productive purposes to shore up his own country. When Mr Gorbachev declared in the meeting at Campidoglio in Rome — the old Municipal Hall, where the treaty of Rome was signed in 1957, that the Helsinki conference should be held this year to give meaning to perestroika, many people were surprised.

Today Russia, in spite of its reduced size, is these second largest nuclear power. It may have temporarily lost the status of a superpower but it is potentially still the number-two superpower. The economic difficulties are there but the management of the economy, with the Harvard spin doctors is bearing fruit. Inflation has gone down and the ruble seems to be gaining more and more respect in international money market. The economy is producing more goods and services than before. President Bill Clinton has shown great statesmanship by granting the economic assistance that the new Russia requires to jumpstart its economy. There is a long way to go but they will

For a Better Society

POSTSCRIPT

by Neeman A Sobhan

from our responsibilities, denying the system of clean, new blood and failing to produce enough leaders and representatives from our ranks. Thus, distancing ourselves from the very forces that shape our politics and our politicians, is it any wonder that we get the kind of leaders who ignore us, and the kind of politics that causes all of us suffering, frustration and also embarrassment. When the rational segment of society hides its head in the sands of intellectual escapism, how can we be surprised that we have a populist political tradition of the Personality cult — sentimental icons to please the masses: someone's widow, someone's daughter, and not the politics of the Platform, of vital issues, of planned progress. If we abandon our children at the formative stage, taking no responsibility for the kind of people they will grow up to be, then we forfeit the right to permaon the fact that our offsprings have grown to be brats and monsters.

So looking at the national crisis, I am less surprised by

the behaviour of the political leaders than at the profile that emerges of our class. Either our threshold for tolerating nonsense is very high indeed, or we obviously must be the most passive and politically unconscious and inert bunch of people who, in spite of our intelligence, are being manipulated by more politically motivated and devious groups — all in the name of Democracy. And so it has come to pass that we are that slice of society that no one listens to, whom our elected representatives ignore totally, giving a damn to our opinions and sentiments. By having no power base of our own, no leverage, by being absent we have also become invisible. I can understand the poor, working classes being manipulated, exploited, neglected, but that the most educated, valuable, advantaged class become the politically dispossessed or politically orphaned, is an irony that we have brought on ourselves.

We rile against the fact that we have no control over our lives, much less over the governance and fate of our

country, but in the end, by force of habitual indifference, instead of organizing ourselves into civic pressure groups or seeking other mechanisms by which we could make ourselves heard over the din of the opposition and the contrived deafness of the ruling party, we merely shrug and hope that someone will find the right solution, by and by. It is beyond our ken to dare think or believe that we ourselves may have a role to play in moulding public opinion, influencing the social and political forces of the day, providing other perspectives, options, perhaps even solutions.

Today, floods are only a visible national problem, the more critical one obviously is that we are being inundated by a manmade wave of destruction that threatens to swallow up our economy and take us completely under if we don't take some action now. It is for us, the rational, responsible citizens to stop this nonsense of hartals and create a mass movement towards a different solution. Since the ruling and opposition parties have tied themselves into knots of apparently irretrievable positions, perhaps it is time for the "concerned citizens" to act as the moderate and mediating segment of society to rescue

the country from the childish and inept factions who are out to destroy Democracy in the name of either the "constitution" or "the people's right to vote". Perhaps it is about time that we organized ourselves into pressure groups and took a strong stand, demanding dialogue towards a solution within the shortest possible time.

One thing is adequately clear: we should never again leave our world to be shaped by people who have proved by now that they are incapable of using the most fundamental tool of the civilized, rational man, for resolving issues: reason, logic, tact, dialogue, exchange of ideas, formulas et al. If we could by our unity, strength, originality and powers of persuasion, bring the contending forces to the negotiating table, not only would both parties be victors of the Democratic process, but we as a class, as a people could redeem ourselves as being worthy of being called citizens of a Democracy. But, of course all this is wishful thinking. Perhaps, we are doomed eternally to be the silent majority; the intellectual yet the most ineffectual, indifferent and helpless class in the country. Perhaps after all, we get what we deserve. Well, back to the whipping post, I guess.

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.

Computer error and SSC result

Sir, On the kind blessings of Dhaka Board, two students earlier declared to be occupying 9th and 11th positions in the merit list have now been placed in the top positions. Further, 28 students in the General Science group and 10 in Social Science group have also been included in the merit list. The Board officials admitted that due to some computer programming

mistake some students had been deprived of getting their genuine positions in the merit list and good divisions.

Meanwhile, such serious mistakes in the result-sheet have created frustrations among the students as well as to their parents. Many meritorious students are now thinking that they have been deprived of getting their genuine positions. Many are not getting admission into the colleges of their choice because only one mark (genuine) less in their mark-

sheets can cause them losing chance of admission because this year the colleges are admitting students on the basis of marks secured by them in the SSC exam.

Quite a number of students from Dhaka Government Laboratory and other schools whose names were expected to be found in the merit list were unfortunately not included. Most of them have filed applications for re-examination of their answer scripts in Islamiyyat, English, Maths etc.

However, it is sincerely expected that the Dhaka Board authority will do the needful to rectify their result-sheet and ensure that students are not deprived of even a single mark.

The Ministry of Education should constitute an inquiry committee to investigate into the matter and take neces-

sary measures so that this sort of gross mistake may not occur in future.

M Zahidul Haque
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Coast guard

Sir, The government by an ordinance has created Coast Guard to scout over territorial waters, intercept unauthorized intrusion of foreign vessels and protect marine wealth in which the Bay of Bengal is obviously rich. If belated, the step has been in the right direction. Over the years, poaching in the Bay by predatory foreign vessels depriving us of fish worth several billion dollars has been rife. Judging by the huge quantity of fish haul found in the seized trawlers by the Bangladesh Navy on its per-

odic patrols it is a safe guess that the quantity of marine wealth plundered has been astronomical. The marauders took advantage of our small Navy and paucity of patrol craft. The long awaited Coast Guard has, therefore, been an answer to the two-fold mischief viz. trespass on our sovereign territory and pillage of our national wealth.

Although the ordinance was passed more than a year back no palpable headway has been made in the desired direction. Reportedly the Home Ministry charged with Coast Guard has developed cold feet and hit snags over logistics. Only an apology for its headquarters is in place, no significant effort has been taken to acquire necessary manpower, rendering it as yet a paper tiger. Meanwhile, poaching remains unabated depleting the treasure house

of marine wealth. Since the nature of job of Coast Guard will, of necessity, be paramilitary likened to the BDR, immediate procurement of fast patrol craft fitted with long range guns and employment of personnel with Naval background are the need of the hour. The matter merits top priority and brooks no delay in the larger national interest.

Vox Populi
Dhaka

Political Solution

Sir, My solution looks simple: both the Begums may retire, and watch from the sideline if BNP and AL survive.

I vote for the survival of the fittest.
A Zabr
Dhaka