

Outbreak: Is this the End of Politics? The Spread of "Politicianitis"

WELCOME to the Evening News. An outbreak of a deadly disease has just been reported by Health authorities in Bangladesh, and confirmed by the WHO and the CDC. Thousands of people have already been affected and it is spreading like wildfire. The new disease's (tentatively named "Politicianitis") primary symptoms are that it makes those affected lose interest in the messages of politicians. Victims of this dread disease are in a manner of speaking politically lobotomized. They seem apathetic about the great affairs of state, who will win the next election, who will run the country, who will shepherd the nation down the road of peace and prosperity.

We start with some background on this puzzling phenomenon. As reported earlier, the first signs of this modern day "plague" (as politicians in-country are terming it) were picked up astutely by that veteran political consultant V V Votegetter who noticed that the crowd reaction

to his client Mr Son of the Soil's soul stirring speech (crafted by V V. we may add) was surprisingly muted. All the exhortations to storm the barricades of corruption and greed were greeted with silence, and some yawns, instead of the usual thundering applause.

Thinking this might be a nefarious plot by his arch rival BB Surevote, the political consultant for Mr Man of the People, (the major competitor for Mr Son of the Soil), V V got BB on the phone and immediately accused him of hitting below the belt. Processions, Hartals, Barricades, Violence, these are the acceptable tools of political campaigns, but Indifference and Apathy, this is really too much. After all there is such a thing as honour among politicians.

Much to V V's surprise, BB accused him (V V, that paragon of truth, and incarnation of virtue) of the basest treachery. Apparently, a torchlight procession organized by his candidate, Mr Man of the People was a signal failure, the common

people, on whose behalf the procession was organized actually refused to join, saying they had work to do, a living to earn — what nerve! What ungratefulness! It must be a plot by V V and Co.

Thus began the strange tale of "Politicianitis". Very soon reports were coming through from all over the country. Participation in political rallies, processions, barricades, Hartals had fallen off precipitously across the whole political spectrum, left, right and centre. Politicians, their campaign consultants, journalists who specialized in political reporting and that shadowy group of citizenry, AKA the Intellectuals were flummoxed. People just didn't seem to be interested anymore.

We now take you live to Dhaka, where our ace reporter AA Amanpore is reporting from the frontlines. 'AA what is the situation like now?'

'Jim, things appear calm outwardly, but there is a storm blowing through the corridor of power and all doors leading to it. I have just spent the afternoon talking to various people in the capital city.'

'What about you, Mr Man of the People?'

'AA, we stand at the cusp of history, at a fork in time, a

moment of truth. At this critical juncture, my party and I stand for, behind and with the masses. We shall willingly go into battle, jump in where angels fear to tread, if need be go where no man or woman has gone before — but we shall defend our way of life, our culture, our heritage. No mere disease shall stand in our way.'

V V Votegetter, BB SureVote, and last but not least, I Q Intellectual, [On a parenthetical note, we tried to get Mr Common Man and Ms Ordinary Woman to participate, but they were not interested. They said, they would rather watch "Santa Barbara". Let's start with you I Q. What do you make of this puzzling phenomenon?]

'A A, one has to see it in context. At one level "Politicianitis" is a disease which must be contained. However at a deeper level it can be viewed as a metaphor, a sign of annul, a cry of desperation. As I wrote in my last book "Political Economy in Bangladesh — Tragedy and/or Farce", we must return to the prince [Machiavelli, I mean] for an analogous situation. In the aftermath of the cold war, "Politicianitis" was a disease waiting to happen, our world needed it. I think...'

V V? You have been surprising quiet so far.'

'A A you jest too much. With all due respect to your pontification, I Q, the real issue at hand is what does this mean for the elections. I am predicting ten per cent participation, I think we can hold the centre, but the periphery is dicey.'

'And you, B B?'

'Well, A A, our projections are that this is a temporary phenomenon, a new phase in the political end game. Scientists will soon find a cure, and things will be back to chaos, I mean normal. We expect to sweep the periphery and thrust deeply into the centre.'

'I [I Q] am not quite sure that this will go away so soon. In the context of the new Globalization of the World Economy, "Politicianitis" may not be easily contained. We at the House for Analysing of Everything, have just been awarded a big grant from the X Foundation to study the problem. I am off to Boston tomorrow to present my paper on "Politicianitis", an Emerging World Problem —

the need for more research', I am of course going to be briefing the government and the opposition on the ramifications of this new phenomenon. I view this...'

'Sorry to cut you off, I Q, we only have a minute to go. Last minute comments gentlemen.'

'[V V] — I predict we will hold the fort and come through — we are after all the party of the people's interest.'

'[B B] — Despite the low projected turnout, I predict a resounding victory for us, "the champions of the masses".'

'[I Q] — I have already started working on my new book, (generously funded by The foundation for a more informed world) tentatively titled "Poetry, Welfare and Justice, the new Development Paradigm". I see this as a breakthrough...'

'That's all for now folks, back to you Jim.'

'There you have it from A A Amanpore in Dhaka. Keep tuned for further updates. Now for the rest of the news. The situation in Bosnia...'

REFLECTIONS

by Dr Omar Rahman



'Mr Son of the Soil, what is your reaction to the spread of "Politicianitis".'

'AA, if I may call you that, this is a dastardly plot, a strike against the common people, a blow against democracy, a conspiracy of foreign agents to deprive the inalienable rights of our citizenry to take part in the political process. I shall fight it, with every last breath in my

body. I, we, shall not rest till this dreaded disease has been completely eradicated from our shores.'

'What about you, Mr Man of the People?'

'AA, we stand at the cusp of history, at a fork in time, a moment of truth. At this critical juncture, my party and I stand for, behind and with the masses. We shall willingly go into battle, jump in where angels fear to tread, if need be go where no man or woman has gone before — but we shall defend our way of life, our culture, our heritage. No mere disease shall stand in our way.'

We now turn to our panel, Africa in 1992.

25. Providing food to victims of emergencies — Over two million tons of food are distributed each year by the World Food Programme (WFP). Nearly 30 million people facing acute food shortages in 36 countries benefited from this assistance in 1994.

26. Clearing land mines — The United Nations is leading an international effort to clear land mines from former battlefields in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Rwanda and Somalia that still kill and maim thousands of innocent people every year.

27. Protecting the ozone layer — The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) have been instrumental in highlighting the damage caused to the earth's ozone layer. As a result of a treaty, known as the Montreal Protocol, there has been a global effort to reduce chemical emissions of substances that have caused the depletion of the ozone layer. The effort will spare millions of people from the increased risk of contracting

28. Curbing global warming — Through the Global Environment Facility, countries have contributed substantial resources to curb conditions that cause global warming. Increasing emissions from burning fossil fuels and changes in land use patterns have led to a build-up of gases in the atmosphere, which experts believe can lead to a warming of the Earth's temperature.

29. Preventing over-fishing — The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) monitors marine fishery production and issues alerts to prevent damage due to over-fishing.

30. Limiting deforestation and promoting sustainable forestry development — FAO, UNDP and the World Bank, through a Tropical Forests Action Programme, have formulated and carried out forestry actions plans in 90 countries.

31. Cleaning up pollution — UNEP led a major effort to clean up the Mediterranean Sea. It encouraged adversaries such as Syria and Greece to work together to clean up beaches. As a result, more than 50 per cent of the previously polluted beaches are now usable.

32. Protecting consumers' health — To ensure the safety of food sold in the market place, UN agencies have established standards for over 200 food commodities and safety limits for more than 3,000 food contaminants.

33. Reducing fertility rates — The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), through its family planning programmes, has enabled people to make informed choices, and consequently given families, and especially women, greater control over their lives. As a result, women in developing countries are having fewer children — from six births per woman in the 1960s to 3.5 today. In the 1960s, only 10 per cent of the world's families were using effective

methods of family planning. The number now stands at 55 per cent.

34. Fighting drug abuse — The UN International Drugs Control Programme (UNDCP) has worked to reduce demand for illicit drugs, suppress drug trafficking, and has helped farmers to reduce their economic reliance on growing narcotic crops by shifting farm production toward other dependable sources of income.

35. Improving global trade relations — The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has worked to obtain special trade preferences for developing countries to export their products to developed countries. It has also negotiated international commodities agreements to ensure fair prices for developing countries. And through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which has now been supplanted by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations has supported trade liberalization, that will increase economic development opportunities in developing countries.

36. Promoting economic reform — Together with the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations has helped many countries improve their economic management, offered training for government finance officials, and provided financial assistance to countries experiencing temporary balance of payment difficulties.

37. Promoting worker rights — The International Labour Organization (ILO) has worked to guarantee freedom of the right to association, the right to organize, collective bargaining, the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, promote employment and equal remuneration and has sought to eliminate discrimination and child labour. And by setting safety standards, ILO has helped reduce the toll of work-related accidents.

38. Introducing improved agricultural techniques and reducing costs — With assistance from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) that has resulted in improved crop yields, Asian rice farmers have saved \$ 12 million on pesticides and governments over \$ 150 million a year in pesticide subsidies.

39. Promoting stability and order in the world's oceans — Through three international conferences, the third lasting more than nine years, the United Nations has spearheaded an international effort to promote a comprehensive global agreement for the protection, preservation and peaceful development of the oceans. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which came into force in 1994, lays down rules for the determination of national maritime jurisdiction, navigation on the high seas, rights and duties of coastal and other states, obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment, cooperation in the conduct of marine scientific research and preservation of living resources.

40. Improving air and sea

travel — UN agencies have been responsible for setting safety standards for sea and air travel. The efforts of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) have contributed to making air travel the safest mode of transportation. To wit: In 1947, when nine million aircraft accidents; in 1993 the number of deaths was 936 out of the 1.2 billion airline passengers. Over the last two decades, pollution from tankers has been reduced by as much as 60 per cent thanks to the work of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

41. Protecting intellectual property — The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) provides protection for new inventions and maintains a register of nearly 3 million national trademarks. Through treaties, it also protects the works of artists, composers and authors worldwide. WIPO's work makes it easier and less costly for individuals and enterprises to enforce their property rights. It also broadens the opportunity to distribute new ideas and products without relinquishing control over the property rights.

42. Promoting the free flow of information — To allow all people to obtain information that is free of censorship and culturally unbiased, UNESCO has provided aid to develop and strengthen communication systems, established news agencies and supported an independent press.

43. Improving global communications — The Universal Postal Union (UPU) has maintained and regulated international mail delivery. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has coordinated use of the radio spectrum, promoted cooperation in assigning positions for stationary satellites, and established international standards for communications, thereby ensuring the unfettered flow of information around the globe.

44. Empowering the voiceless — UN-sponsored international years and conferences have caused governments to recognize the needs and contributions of groups usually excluded from decision-making, such as the aging, children, youth homeless, indigenous and disabled people.

45. Establishing "children as a zone of peace" — From El Salvador to Lebanon, Sudan to former Yugoslavia, UNICEF pioneered the establishment of "Days of Tranquility" and the opening of "Corridors of Peace" to provide vaccines and other assistance desperately needed by children caught in armed conflict.

46. Generating worldwide commitment in support of the needs of children — Through UNICEF's efforts, the Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force as international law in 1990 and has become law in 166 countries by the end of September 1994; following the 1990 World Summit for Children convened by UNICEF, more than 150 governments have committed to reaching over 20 specific measurable goals to radically improve children's lives.

47. Improving education in developing countries — As a direct result of the efforts of UN AGENCIES, over 60% of adults in developing countries can now read and write, and 80 per cent of children in these countries attend school.

48. Improving literacy for women — Programmes aimed at promoting education and advancement for women helped raise the female literacy rate in developing countries from 36 per cent in 1970 to 56 per cent in 1990

The United Nations at 50 Recognizing the Achievements

Here, in brief, is a sampling of what the United Nations organizations have accomplished since 1945 when the world organization was founded.

- 1. Maintaining peace and security** — By deploying more than 35 peace-keeping forces and observer missions, the United Nations has been able to restore calm to allow the negotiating process to go forward while saving millions of people from becoming casualties of conflicts. There are presently 16 active peace-keeping forces in operation.
- 2. Making peace** — Since 1945, the United Nations has been credited with negotiating 172 peaceful settlements that have ended regional conflicts. Recent cases include an end to the Iran-Iraq war, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and an end to the civil war in El Salvador. The United Nations has used quiet diplomacy to avert imminent wars.
- 3. Promoting democracy** — The United Nations has enabled people in over 45 countries to participate in free and fair elections, including those held in Cambodia, Namibia, El

Salvador, Eritrea, Mozambique, Nicaragua and South Africa. It has provided electoral advice, assistance, and monitoring of results.

- 4. Promoting development** — The UN system has devoted more attention and resources to the promotion of the development of human skills and potentials than any other external assistance effort. The system's annual disbursements, including loans and grants, amount to more than \$ 10 billion. The UN Development Programme (UNDP), in close cooperation with over 170 Member States and other UN agencies, designs and implements projects for agriculture, industry, education, and the environment. It supports more than 5,000 projects with a budget of \$ 1.3 billion. It is the largest multilateral source of grant development assistance. The World Bank, at the forefront in mobilizing support for developing countries worldwide, has alone loaned \$333 billion for development projects since 1946. In addition, UNICEF spends more than \$800 million a year, primarily on immunization, health care, nu-

trition and basic education in 138 countries.

- 5. Promoting human rights** — Since adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the United Nations has helped enact dozens of comprehensive agreements on political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. By investigating individual complaints of human rights abuses, the UN Human Rights Commission has focused world attention on cases of torture, disappearance, and arbitrary detention and has generated international pressure to be brought on governments to improve their human rights records.
- 6. Protecting the environment** — The United Nations has played a vital role in fashioning a global programme designed to protect the environment. The "Earth Summit," the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, resulted in treaties on bio-diversity and climate change, and all countries adopted "Agenda 21" — a blueprint to promote sustainable development or the concept of economic growth while protecting natural resources.
- 7. Preventing nuclear proliferation** — The United Nations, through the International Atomic Energy Agency, has helped minimize the threat of a nuclear war by inspecting nuclear reactors in 90 countries to ensure that nuclear materials are not diverted for military purposes.
- 8. Promoting self-determination and independence** — The United Nations has played a role in bringing about independence in countries that are now among its Member States.
- 9. Strengthening international law** — Over 300 international treaties, on topics as varied as human rights conventions to agreements on the use of outer space and seabed, have been enacted through the efforts of the United Nations.
- 10. Handing down judicial settlements of major international disputes** — By giving judgments and advisory opinions, the International Court of Justice has helped settle international disputes involving territorial issues, non-interference in the internal affairs of states, diplomatic relations, hostage-taking, the right of asylum, rights of passage and economic rights.
- 11. Ending apartheid in South Africa** — By imposing measures ranging from an arms embargo to a convention against segregated sporting events, the United Nations was a major factor in bringing about the downfall of the apartheid system, which the General Assembly called "a crime against humanity." Elections were held in April 1994 in which all South Africans were allowed to participate on an equal basis, followed by the establishment of a majority government.
- 12. Providing humanitarian aid to victims of conflict** — More than 30 million refugees fleeing war, famine or persecution have received aid from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees since 1951 in a continuing effort coordinated by the United Nations that often involves other agencies. There are more than 19 million refugees, mostly women and children, who are receiving food, shelter, medical aid, education and repatriation assistance.

13. **Aiding Palestinian refugees** — Since 1950, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has sustained four generations of Palestinians with free schooling, essential health care, relief assistance and key social services virtually without interruption. There are 2.9 million refugees in the Middle East served by UNRWA.

- 14. Alleviating chronic hunger and rural poverty in developing countries** — The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has developed a system of providing credit, often in very small amounts, for the poorest and most marginalised groups that has benefited over 230 million people in nearly 100 developing countries.
- 15. Focusing on African development** — For the United Nations, Africa continues to be the highest priority. In 1986, the United Nations convened a special session to drum up international support for African economic recovery and development. The United Nations also has instituted a system-wide task force to ensure that commitments made by the international community are honoured and challenges met. The Africa Project Development Facility has helped entrepreneurs in 25 countries to find financing

a year in vaccination and monitoring, almost three times the cost of eliminating the scourge itself. WHO also helped wipe out polio from the Western hemisphere, with global eradication expected by the year 2000.

- 19. Pressing for universal immunization** — Polio, tetanus, measles whooping cough, diphtheria and tuberculosis still kill more than eight million children each year. In 1974, only 5 per cent of children in developing countries were immunized against these diseases. Today, as a result of the efforts of UNICEF and WHO, there is an 80 per cent immunization rate, saving the lives of more than 3 million children each year.
- 20. Reducing child mortality rates** — Through oral rehydration therapy, water and sanitation and other health and nutrition measures undertaken by UN agencies, child mortality rates in the developing countries have been halved since 1960, increasing the average life expectancy from 37 to 67 years.
- 21. Fighting parasitic diseases** — Efforts by UN agencies in North Africa to eliminate the dreaded screw worm, a parasite that feeds on human and animal flesh, prevented the spread of the parasite, which is carried by flies, to Egypt, Tunisia, sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. A



Development assistance

for new enterprises. The Facility has completed 130 projects which represent investments of \$233 million and the creation of 13,000 new jobs. It is expected that these new enterprises will either earn or save some \$131 million in foreign exchange annually.

- 16. Promoting women's rights** — A long term objective of the United Nations has been to improve the lives of women and to empower women to have greater control over their lives. Several conferences during the UN-sponsored International Women's Decade set an agenda for the advancement of women and women's rights for the rest of the century. The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) have supported programmes and projects to improve the quality of life for women in over 100 countries. They include credit and training, access to new food-production technologies and marketing opportunities, and other means of promoting women's work.
- 17. Providing safe drinking water** — UN agencies have worked to make safe drinking water available to 1.3 billion people in rural areas during the last decade.
- 18. Eradicating smallpox** — A 13-year effort by the World Health Organization resulted in the complete eradication of smallpox from the planet in 1980. The eradication has saved an estimated \$1 billion

cancer due to additional exposure to ultraviolet radiation.

- 22. Promoting investment in developing countries** — The United Nations, through the efforts of the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), has served as a "match-maker" for North-South, South-South and East-West investment, promoting entrepreneurship and self-reliance. Industrial cooperation and technology transfer and cost-effective, ecologically-sensitive industry.
- 23. Orienting economic policy toward social need** — Many UN agencies have emphasized the need to take account of human needs in determining economic adjustment and restructuring policies, including measures to safeguard the poor, especially in areas of health and education, and "debt swaps for children."
- 24. Reducing the effects of natural disasters** — The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has spared millions of people from the calamitous effects of both natural and man-made disasters. Its early warning system, which utilizes thousands of surface monitors as well as satellites, has provided information for the dispersal of oil spills and has predicted long-term droughts. The system has allowed for the efficient distribution of food aid to drought regions, such as southern

Peace Keeping

development assistance

Discussions and Protests Mark the Second Day

Masud Hasan Khan writes from New York

AS the marathon speech-making continued on the second-day of the UN's 50th anniversary in New York, the world leaders took their time out Monday to do some on-the-field diplomacy.

Unlike Sunday's dazzling opening of the UN birthday bash — attended by some 200 presidents, monarchs, premiers and their delegations — the speeches Monday were sparsely attended.

Most of the delegations were from countries whose leaders were speaking. The addresses mainly focused on unequal distribution of power within the United Nations, the need to reform the world body and attacks on the US and other countries who are unwilling to pay their dues.

Except for the speech, the day's programme included a lunch hosted by the UN Secretary General, a dinner and an evening performance of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra at the Lincoln Centre.

The most important feature on Tuesday is adoption of a joint statement — a seven-page document — marking the end of the three-day function.

The Manhattan area of New York suffered several traffic gridlock because of the outside activities of the world leaders.

Fast pacing New Yorkers, slowed down by the jam, indulged in their favorite pastime: "name that statesman", who were passing by in limousine motorcades.

US President Bill Clinton met with Russian President Boris Yeltsin at the sprawling Hudson River valley estate and reached some accord on the peace plan for Bosnia.

The two leaders sat in the same lawn chairs where US President Franklin Roosevelt forged a World War-II partnership between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Besides Clinton also met with a number of world leaders separately.

Cuban Leader Fidel Castro, a trademark revolutionary attire in a business suit,

moved about the city, gave television interview and kept several business appointments, in an effort to beef up lobbying against economic sanction against Cuba.

On Sunday, he visited Harlem and spoke at a gathering at the Abyssinian Baptist Church. Sixteen years ago, when he first visited the United Nations, the young communist leader set up his camp at Harlem's Theresa Hotel on 125th Street.

PLO leader Yasir Arafat attended a boisterous dinner at the Vista Hotel in Manhattan.

The dinner collected US dollar 3,50,000 for two hospitals, one in Gaza Strip and the other in Hebron in the West Bank.

Monday, he met the top leaders of the American Jews — the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council. It was the first time that Arafat met the American Jews since the Middle East peace was reached.

However, Monday's most spectacular event took place not inside the UN building, but in the sky. A demonstrator from Greenpeace, an international environmental activist group, buzzed the high-security UN building in a jet-powered parachute to protest against French nuclear weapons test in the South Pacific.

And he staged the protest immediately after French President Jacques Chirac delivered his speech at the UN.

Kai Britt, 33, from Germany played the 20-minute, 700-foot-high game of cat and mouse as police helicopters in the air and motorboats in the East River chased him.

However, he managed to unfurl a banner saying, "Stop Nuclear Testing," before being forced to land by the down air pressure from the helicopters.

He was handcuffed and charged with disorderly conduct, reckless endangerment, obstructing government administration and unlawfully flying over the water.