

Shibir Onslaught

The Islami Chhatra Shibir's (ICS) attempt on Thursday to capture two Jahangirnagar University (JU) halls gives credence to the reports carried in different dailies in the past on the blueprint the anti-liberation force is pursuing to implement. Their blueprint is that they will gradually establish an almost unchallenged control over all the universities first; and then down the line of educational institutions. That way they think the state power will be theirs to take.

While the second part of the anti-liberation elements' programme looks somewhat outlandishly impossible, the first part no longer surprises anyone. The Shibir built up its own empire in the Chittagong University and every other student organisations, general students and progressive teachers there have virtually lost their battle against these goons. After Chittagong the ICS targeted Rajshahi University and quite successfully made their stronghold there. It is no different in Islami University, Kushtia. A long day's preparation has brought them in direct confrontation at JU. Their elaborate preparation shows what they are exactly after.

It all shows that the Shibir is fast closing the circle and its final target is obviously going to be Dhaka University. The Shibir may have failed to materialise their plan this time, thanks to the university authority of Jahangirnagar. But there is no cause for celebration yet, for the ICS cadres doggedly pursue their course until they reach their goal. Now that the cadres have been arrested — according to some reports as high a number as 40 — with such weapons as SMG, rifles and explosives, here is chance to root out the poisonous fangs once for all — at least at JU. If a notorious president can be put behind bar on the strength of the existing arms act, these Shibir goons too can be well taken care of by applying the same act. The government has long pretended not to see the rise of the Shibir. Now it is time to hit back. After all the JCD is now on the Shibir's hit list. To put an end to a bizarre student politics and a spiteful violent saga of rivalry between student wings, this is the least the government must do.

A Reminder

Yesterday passed the Noor Hossain Day with a number of meetings commemorating his sacrifice. It is possible that some of the speeches were sincere and at least some speakers meant some of what they said. But this yearly exercise on November 10 does not help clear some very crucial questions.

If we were serious about Noor Hossain's supreme sacrifice and its catalysing a hesitant anti-autocratic movement into a regular avalanche — have we at all tried to enquire into how he was killed and who killed him. This hasn't been done by the biggest beneficiary of Noor Hossain's sacrifice — the BNP government.

Noor Hossain Day, of course, provides us with an occasion to stop and ponder over our performance in quest of that elusive chimera — democracy. The only established act of democracy from the moment Noor fell to this day was what is known as the Shahabuddin election. Although the present government had nothing to do with that act save becoming a beneficiary to it, its constant posture over all of these years was that democracy that was at play at its genesis made it democratic without, perhaps, its needing to adhere to and practice and develop democratic principles. No black law was repealed and control and abuse continues of the electronic media. Police excess, to which Noor Hossain fell, is also being repeated.

In a thousand ways we are failing Noor Hossain and the nation's overall performance is falling far too short of vindicating his martyrdom. November 10 comes as a reminder of this all.

A Gentleman's Decision

General Colin Powell has surprised everyone. He was the Republican Party's surest bet against Bill Clinton returning for a second term. In fact, most opinion polls gave him an easy sailing against Clinton if the polls were held now. Suddenly on Wednesday, in a hurriedly summoned press conference, he said in his usual taciturn, unambiguous and very soft way he would not run for presidency or as a running mate in the 1996 polls. About the 2000 polls he said, with evident unenthusiasm, future is future, giving no ground to media to build wordy castles on.

His standing aside certainly makes Republican hopefuls Dole and Gingrich and a pair of others happy although the chances of the party as a whole takes a heavy dent. But it was not this handful alone that got back their peace of mind. There was an air of unexpressed relief in the White House club. Surprisingly it was the admirers of Colin, a big and broad swath of American political opinion, who liked the decision and it evidently brought more Americans to admire him than ever before.

Although the popular general said he did not feel quite up to the presidency height lacking the passion and commitment that were required by the job, no one seemed to take him at his words. The presidency politics was so down and dirty all the way that Colin found nothing in it to enchant and lure him. This was one theory. The other was that United States tradition of assassination of men at the highest office of the nation had daunted him, made all the more poignant by the murder of Yitzhak Rabin only days before. Mrs Powell's denial that this was no factor in the Colin decision only underscored its probability.

Whatever his true reason, General Colin Powell has opted not to become the first black president and make history. Such an opportunity would not possibly present itself in another two or three decades.

Are Costs of Inflation Inflated?

A country needs to update its CPI index by allowing the inclusion of factors that tend to subsume the actual impact of inflation. Inflation should be tackled to promote growth but the means should never end the end itself.

There is very little disagreement to the thesis that inflation — a sustained rise in the level of general prices — hurts economic growth. Inflation is unpopular and where elections have a say by voters, politicians tend to downsize it adoring it as a prime objective. No sensible policy makers could be found to condone a higher inflation to erode their support among people. The ways that inflation adversely affects growth are also clearly spelled out in existing economic literature. Uncertainty about future prices that in turn affects decisions about spending, savings and investment and thus misallocating optimum resource allocation; borrowers gain at the cost of the lenders which in its tenure discourages savings etc.

The statistical evidence with respect to the above episode is crystal clear. Scatter plot of inflation against growth for a number of countries do point to a crude line of best fit where the line is observed to be sloping downwards implying an inverse relationship between these two variables, inflation

and growth. However, as some economists would tend to argue, the scatter diagram so drawn fails to consider many other factors that directly or indirectly contribute to economic growth. So long one can strip away these other factors, the task of establishing a true relationship stands with serious doubt. As there is no dearth of 'other factors' of economic growth besides inflation, so is there no shortage of ways in doing the exercise. The prevalence of many factors and many ways do in fact tend to confuse econometricians vying for a true relationship.

Robert Barro, (a renowned professor of economics from Harvard University) seems to show the quite opposite to what has been discussed before. Mr Barro chose the period 1960-1990 (30 years) and 100 countries (both rich and poor) to examine the inflation — growth nexus. He observed a cyclical connection between growth and inflation with a rise in both during the booms and a fall during the slumps. According to Mr Barro, inflation is one of a panoply of factors that affects growth. The other factors, as we all know are int-

other end of the spectrum also, e.g. growth to inflation. Using 'instrumental variables', he attempted to isolate the effects of these 'exogenous' changes on growth. The findings show that if inflation hikes by one percentage poi-

cent, it could see that its growth rises by only a little more than one-tenth of a percentage point. One should however take also into consideration the 'costs' of lowering inflation since that claims loss of output and jobs. Mr Barro argues that the magnitudes may not be that large but over the long periods, an apparently small change in the average growth rate may have dramatic effects on standards of living. Enpassant one would possibly recall that Mr Barro's estimates are at a lower side when compared with some other studies juggling with inflationary impacts of growth.

The fight against inflation is, again fraught with many pitfalls. How to measure the changes in the rates of inflation? In general, in every country whether rich or poor, CPI index is used to weather the change. But the rationale of using a stipulated basket of commodities with-

out showing any respect to the changes in quality of products, technological improvement in production process etc. is construed as unqualified submission to the monster. Suppose a country experiences an inflationary growth rate of 3 per cent annum and to that effect aims to index the wage level by 3 per cent per annum with a view to keeping real wage constant. The pertinent question is, what happens if the inflationary growth rate so assumed is unable to portray the true picture (say 2 per cent actual vs. 3 per cent as shown). That country, obviously, might face a huge budget deficit which would aggravate its inflationary situation. An accurate measure of inflation is thus called for before embarking on a wage indexing or some other steps to subdue the impact of inflation. That, in fact, is the crux of the problem. A country needs to update its CPI index by allowing the inclusion of factors that tend to subsume the actual impact of inflation. Inflation should be tackled to promote growth but the means should never end the end itself.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



Real incomes, educational attainment and life expectancy; aggregate government spending; the extent of the rule of law and democratic rights; investment etc. Mr Barro tends to argue that the causal connection may not emanate directly from inflation to growth, rather each of them might be jointly influenced by some other variables or the causation could run from the

rate of economic growth would dwindle by 0.02 or by 0.03 of a percentage point per annum. This implies that an inflation rate of 100 per cent a year would rob a country of a growth of two to three percentage points. The amount sounds substantial from growth perspective. But if that country aims to cut down inflation rate from, say, seven per cent to two per

'Million-Man-March': What Message it Carries for Americans — Black and White?

by A M M Shahabuddin

The historic Million-Man-March held on 16 October in the heart of the US capital Washington, called by 'Nation of Islam' leader, Luis Farrakhan, has sent a loud and clear message to the Americans, both black and white, about the upcoming national shape of events and things. Farrakhan has made a clarion call to the American blacks (to use a modern nomenclature, 'African Americans'), to stand up and speak out what they want and what their grievances are. It's another milestone on the march of the African Americans towards their common destiny with the whites as an American nation, a march left unfinished by Martin Luther King Jr in the '60s. The new leader, in his 'thunderous sermon', called for the end of white supremacy and establishment of rule of humanity, demolishing the dividing line between the two Americas — one white and the other black, a long-standing legacy that America couldn't get rid of since the days of the Civil War (1861-1865).

Where Farrakhan Leading the Country? Undoubtedly, Farrakhan's message has created a consternation and commotion in the minds, particularly of the white Americans. Many eyebrows have been raised. Many frightful questions are being asked by some political pundits as to the consequence of such a 'provocative' call: where Farrakhan wants to lead the country — unity or destruction?

But the tone and tenor of Farrakhan's speech doesn't convey any rancour or 'malice' as apprehended by President Clinton, although he had 'guardedly' praised the aims of the 'march'. It must be admitted that Farrakhan, known as a robust fiery orator, has not called for the 'Doomsday' for America. Rather like a sober and mature leader, calculatively, he has named his march as the 'Million-Man-March', neither a 'Black March' nor a 'Black Muslims March', although he leads a Muslim organisation. He has spoken out for the entire African Americans, keeping in view the greater interest of the American nation. He has unequivocally declared that he was not going to float a third political party (meaning, besides the Republicans and the Democrats as billionaire Ross Perot wants one), but he wants to present the political strength of the African Americans as a "third politi-

cal force" that, he said, shouldn't always be taken for granted. It's totally a democratic approach to solve a national problem with greater flexibility and as equal members of a consolidated nation.

A Renewed Voice, a Sharper Tongue

What Farrakhan has said is not anything new. He has just repeated the centuries-old hopes and expectations of the African Americans, given out in a renewed voice and in a sharper tongue. He has called a spade, a spade, rekindling the aspirations of millions, as once echoed by Martin Luther King Jr about three decades back. So what some American intellectuals are apprehending doesn't hold good. Some columnists of the US press have already expressed great concerns that Farrakhan is throwing the American nation 'on the brink of the racial divide'. And some have discerned in his speech that "danger signs of a sharp racial division are multiplying". Such hasty conclusions are not only baseless but to some extent provocative, which are liable to do more harm than good to the American nation.

Institution of Slavery

There are indeed valid reasons for the African Americans to react violently to the existing socio-economic situation which tilts more mercilessly against the blacks than the whites. In a recent analysis, a columnist in the Canadian daily *The Toronto Star*, has said: "The deep structural inequalities that affect every aspect of American life begin with the institution of slavery which made African Americans a permanent 'other' in the American life. The divisions that slavery created have never been resolved, they continue today." The columnist pointed out that the "racial inequality is a central, not a peripheral feature of American life." This clearly indicates that social inequality in the US has gradually deepened and there is hardly any robust sign of its early recovery. This just can't be pushed under the carpet. And it would be suicidal to give any 'colour' to the growing unrest among the deprived and disadvantaged black community of America, which manifested itself boldly in the recent 'Million-Man-March' in Washington. In fact, the obnoxious legacy

Uncle Tom's Cabin 'Exhibits'

Here it won't be out of place to recall the heinous tragedy of slavery in America, as described in the world famous book titled, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe in which a living character, Rev. Josiah Henson, who was both a slave and a preacher, has been immortalised as the central character. The curse of slavery was brought and institutionalised in America by its British rulers, by importing hundreds of thousand workers from Africa to work in their cotton and sugar plantations as 'dumb-driven cattle'. They were used more as 'animals' than human beings, as portrayed vividly in this book. To give it a more lively picture, a museum has been established with 'exhibits' of instruments of torture, as described in the book. At the museum are displayed the iron manacles, hand-cuffs, bull-whips and neck harnesses — the routine instruments of slavery. The museum, which stands at a place named Dresden, in Ontario province of Canada, where Rev. Henson took shelter, along with his family, slipping from the slavery to freedom in 1830. Slavery was banned in Canada much earlier than in America. The museum contains an antique drawing which shows a ship, filled to the brim, with 'countless, nameless, faceless black slaves', being taken to a US harbour. According to one estimate, millions of Africans were shipped to the Caribbean and America between 16th and 19th Centuries, but 'only 15 million survived the nightmare journey'.

Slavery and American Civil War

The question of slavery gradually assumed such a dangerous shape that the unity of America reached a dithering point. In fact, the US was on the verge of dividing into two separate states — the northerners, supporting the abolition of slavery, later known as 'abolitionists', and the southerners, as die-hard supporters for the continuation of slavery. It went to such an extent that some of

the southern states revolted against the Union Government in Washington, by declaring the establishment of a 'Federated States of America', against the 'United States of America'. It was a terrible shock for Washington. But just as every Pharaoh has his Moses, there appeared a great saviour and deliverer of America — Abraham Lincoln, a dedicated 'soldier' who vowed to put broken America together again and abolish the cancer of slavery from the American society for good. His dream came true during his lifetime — he became President of America in 1861, when began the Civil War against the secessionists and the war ended in 1865 with the capitulation of the rebel forces on 9 April the same year. And the USA again emerged as one country under the dynamic leadership of Lincoln. He returned in Washington as a triumphant soldier but he didn't know that an assassin was waiting for him for retaliation. He fell at the hands of that killer on 14 April the same year.

Perhaps the ghost of the assassin is still haunting America, depriving the African Americans the fruits of the abolition of slavery. The benefits have trickled down very slowly to the victims. That is why America witnesses upsurges from time to time to settle the score, of course, peacefully. Thus came Martin Luther King Jr in 1963 and the recent 'Million-Man-March', under leadership of Luis Farrakhan.

From Here to ... ?

But where America goes from here? The 'Million-Man-March' has sent out its clear message and a signal for the US government and the people to appreciate and react positively. Much depends on the flexibility and magnanimity on the part of the so-called white Americans who had enjoyed so far most of the privileges and opportunities in different aspects of socio-economic and political life. They should now be ready to share them with their much-neglected neighbours since the days of independence. They shouldn't forget that it was a white President who had to wage a

five-year bloody war to clean 'ugly' America from the virus of slavery and for this tremendous national job to succeed thousands of white Americans sacrificed their lives. It's true that the ghosts of the slave masters are still haunting and dominating some Americans. They will have to be exonerated in the interest of the American nation. It's no use to ignore reality or the upcoming gathering storm by assuming an ostrich-like posture by hiding its head in the sand. Nor it would be wise to push the 'ugly things' under the carpet to put up a show of cleanliness around. The slip will be showing all through.

Let the new generation of Americans begin where Abraham Lincoln ended and complete his unfinished task. It is one thing to say that America champions the cause of democracy and human rights around the world and it is something else to practice it at home. Isn't it a pity that a country like America is yet to see a 'Black President' in the 'White House'? Let the historic message left by Martin Luther King Jr and now by Luis Farrakhan move the American people to a new path of peace and prosperity, through reconciliation and understanding.

Hartal — in Quest of a Different Meaning

by Ulfat Hussain

"HARTAL is interesting, isn't it?" so said my nine-year-old son. "I don't have to go to school, no homework, no reading, no maths. Wah! What an interesting day". All these he said at a breakfast table on a hartal day. My wife, who hardly wants to go out of home, said, "We will go out for a walk in the afternoon". My sister, a university student, told she would miss her friends and gossips in the campus. However, hartal was pleasant in a way that the roads would be clear from jams, no unnecessary honking of vehicles, no smoke pollution, no rattling sounds of worn out trucks and minibuses, and no unnecessary shouts and yells of rickshawallahs. Best of all, we would not listen to incessant loud songs of the restaurants and music recording shops. These comments throw light in quest of a different meaning of hartal.

Strikes and hartals are democratic rights; it is a part of our political culture, and perhaps, a part of our life. I don't know when did hartal really begin. After the industrial revolution and with the growth of workers' class, strikes have been called to register protests or bargain for wages, etc. It is not a new culture in human civilization. But nowhere hartal was used as frequently as was in this sub-continent. In the days of unpartitioned India, Gandhiji popularised hartal as one of his weapons of non-violent, non-cooperation movement aimed at the British Government. Later, Bangabandhu used this against the Pakistani regime, also as a means, primarily to press for demands. The principle of hartal proved to be a successful weapon, of late, against the autocratic Ershadian era.

Hartal has become our political culture. It's taking root in our social life, too. People make their plans in accordance with the hartal schedules. Visiting friends who live within walking distance, drawing room gossips with friends and relatives, etc. are becoming popular. Women, specially working women, get an opportunity to attend to their backlogged household work. Working fathers give time to their children. The children feel happy as if it were a holiday. Serious students get an opportunity to complete their HWs. The young men play cricket and football in the streets while the boys and girls join them or ride bicycles around.

Day before longer hartal days, railway station, bus terminals, and launch terminals become busy with people going to their village homes. Railway, bus and lunch walls get a bumper sale on the eve of hartal. City shopkeepers, specially grocers, butchers, poultrymen, fishermen, all make some high profit — a sort of Eid sale.

Usually mornings are more politically active than afternoons. In the afternoons, men, women, and children stroll in and around the locality. Elderly people, specially those that doctors prescribe walking a must, find it an ideal time free from crowd. My friend, a university teacher and his family were with our party. After the lights were on, the streets of our city looked really beautiful with a very small number of rickshaws plying. "How nice the weather is!", he said. "At least we can take a deep breath, now".

Who does not know that Dhaka is a fast growing city with environment pollution caused from putrefaction of kitchen wastes thrown out on the streets. Fume-belching minibuses, piercing sound of one stroke engine scooters and tempos, and their ghostly black smoke release mingled with unplanned market places, specially the vegetable, fish and meat markets, and the continuous digging of roads by different departments make the environment and the atmosphere simply unhealthy. Rickshaws are a great hindrance to the speedy movement of traffic.

Dhaka is expanding fast; dependence on rickshaws as the chief source of public transportation is definitely an outdated idea.

Whether hartal is good or bad is a political question. There are arguments for and against. All governments are against hartal. In democracy, today's govt is tomorrow's opposition; they will use the same weapon of hartal to press for demands, and vice versa, unless we discover an alternative. You may doubt these arguments, but doubt not that hartal obliquely does at least one good thing — it gives a clean and healthy atmosphere, and a chance to city dwellers to walk and breathe, at least temporarily.

Our politicians do not seem to have any plan to save Dhaka. We have not seen any party manifesto on this issue. Of late, in Thailand, the party which own in the election had given people a clear programme to save Bangkok from traffic jams and, consequently, environment pollution. The party got people's mandate.

Recently, The Daily Star started "Save Dhaka" campaign. This is a recognition of the people's growing concern for a healthy atmosphere. The atmosphere or the sphere of breathing is vital to human, animal and plant existence. Polluted air causes great bodily distress.

The environment we live in is also the stage for scenes of great beauty, sometimes quiet, sometimes gorgeous; think of the deep blue sky, the passing clouds, the wondrous variety of flowers, the lush green trees and plants, the running streams, the sunset glow, the lunar haloes, the shooting stars, the mammoth mountains, the surfing seas — all are nature's gift to us. This realm of beauty can be craved to be viewed with the eye of poet or a painter, a romantic or even a scientist, but alas not by our politicians. Once the political differences are met, will our leaders give serious thoughts to this growing problem of ours, besides their own — hartals?

To The Editor

What a farce!

Sir, Recently, I saw a newspaper notification by RAJUK that called upon the owners of residential houses in Gulshan and Banani to desist from using their houses for commercial purposes. The RAJUK also gave a listing of such holdings which are being used not in terms of lease with RAJUK.

So far so good. I was delighted that soon our travails may be over and the most notable disrupter of Banani in terms of traffic, noise and nuisance will have to find new quarters. But alas! that was not to be. The expected establishment escaped listing. I have no idea how the most disruptive business managed not being on the list. May be the concerned person of RAJUK who notified the list knows. If he does not, I invite him to take a

walk in the vicinity of the building which is a school during opening or closing hours on any day. He is advised to leave his car about two blocks away. Even on one's legs the going is rough as well as tough.

May we expect that by bold action on the part of RAJUK, our peace will return.

A Resident, Banani, Dhaka.

Hartal and dictionary

Sir, The word 'Hartal' is now internationally known. For its rapid global popularisation credits goes to two lady politicians. However, it is surprising to see that this word hasn't yet found its place in English-Bengali dictionaries published locally. On the other hand, I found this

word in a dictionary published twenty-five years ago by university press, London which defines it: "Closing of Indian shops as political gesture."

Even the much talked-about English-Bengali dictionary published in early-1993 by Bangla Academy doesn't contain this word.

Last but not the least, almost all dictionaries published from Delhi, Lahore and such places contain thousands of Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Arabic words and each new edition includes some more new words. I wonder how and why Bangladeshi compilers and publishers are not including words like 'Hartal' in English-Bengali dictionaries. Are they suffering from some sort of complex? KR Zakhmi, Khulna