

Six-day Hartal

For six days last week, we counted our freedom in hours. For varying length of the day our freedom was curtailed, and we were denied our most fundamental rights of free movement.

We have said so earlier, and we repeat now, that work stoppage is a luxury we can no longer afford. We know of no other country in the world, to indulge in such luxury.

Privately, most opposition leaders admit that hartal hurts the economy. But they say, this the only weapon they have to fight against the government. Hartal is a moral weapon.

Shibir Attack on JU Halls

From reports of what is going on at the Jahangir Nagar University, it does not seem, as if, we have a government in the country. For the last several days, armed gangs of Shibir activists (student wing of Jamaat) have been trying to "capture" a few residential halls of the University.

This is not a question of a few miscreants doing some mischief in an isolated place. This is a deliberate defiance of the law, of the government, and we think, of the state itself.

It is not only in the case of Shibir that we ask for such stern actions. We think all student gangs which are armed should be rounded up and given severe punishment. Here the government's record is abysmal. It is known to all that in number of armed gangs, or having members possessing fire arms, JCD's position is paramount.

Golden Find

At 6 on Wednesday morning natural gas flowed out of one of two wells being dug for two years at Shahbazpur, only a short distance from Bhola town. Although prospectors were maintaining cautious optimism, it looked like Bangladesh has definitely struck another natural gas reserve — sizeable at one trillion cubic feet volume and worth around a hundred billion taka.

Only decades back the fact that this alluvial region was very poor in natural resources was a constant theme for lamentation. How could a state be viable here, thought many. Well, that is no more a fact. The Bhola strike confirms again that we are lucky in this most significant area — the area of energy resources.

Our record so far is bad. We have not exploited our gas resource, quite big at over 10 trillion cubic feet, in the most economic manner. Most of it is being wasted on our kitchen needs on a scale that known reserve would be exhausted in another 20 years' time.

The Bhola gas is till today a hundred per cent Bangladesh affair — investmentwise, prospectingwise. Can we not keep it up to regular production and distribution and even industrial exploitation stages?

The Bhola strike will certainly interest foreign prospectors. How shall we handle them? Let old bungs in the matter not repeat and private pockets not lined at the cost of our nation's future.

Balanced-Budget: Trimming a Tall Tree?

America needs an imminent solution to the current financial impasse since the world financial market is also linked to America's financial performance. Let politics alone not be the determinant of the "balanced budget" economics.

YES are now cast on the US the most powerful economic giant of the world — that apparently faces a financial fiasco. The tug of war between the Republican dominated Congress and the Democrat dominated White House over the "balanced-budget" approach seemingly tends to cripple the functioning of the federal government.

Others Own, America Owes. It is, possibly, a surprise to note that America is the richest as well as the most indebted country in the world. In fact it is only the rich who can afford to be indebted too.

which is roughly one-tenth of America's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). And of all the contributors to the annual changes in net external asset (viz. current account balance, the flows of capital across borders and changes in the value of existing assets and liabilities), the current account deficit of USD151 billion last year is alleged to have mostly jerked the ship.

Roots of the Row. The current row between the White House and the Congress relates to trimming down the budget deficit. The Republicans tend to argue that such huge debts are the products of reckless federal expenses like on big federal bureaucracy, medicare, social security etc.

get over the next seven years — a budget that would allow Americans to cut their coat according to their cloth. To this effect the Republicans, by virtue of their majority in the Congress prepared a trillion-dollar deficit reduction bill that aims at slashing, among others, medicare, social security expenses one

dorse the same. First, Mr Clinton, like his opponent Republicans, is also inclined to cut spending and taxes and hence balance the budget but he and his party would like to see the slash come slowly.

series of complications in the tax code that might breed tax-anarchy in the whole system.

The veto on the bill exercised by Mr Clinton seems to have allowed him to recapture some of his lost political support. As newspaper reports suggest, opinion polls tend to show that more than half of the Americans feel that the president is right in vetoing the Congress proposal, while one-third sharing that the Republicans are right.

Economics vs Politics. By and large, the Republican Revolution seems to hold less water as far as today's America is concerned. Apparently, Mr Clinton appears to seize the opportunity for a better sailing in the upcoming 1996 presidential election where the senior citizens and other beneficiaries of the current government expenditure programmes stand as vote banks.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



the one hand and ensuring heavy tax cuts on the other. There is, perhaps, no doubt that the bill by the Congress is the need of the hour as far as America is concerned. It also seems bold enough in the sense that the attempt is the most serious effort in two decades to put Washington fiscal-house in order.

for the old but, allegedly, by-passed the "whole forests of middle-class subsidies and tax breaks and thickets of welfare for business and other favourite constituencies, largely untouched by the axe".

Dialogue : Back to Square One

by Muhammad Quamrul Islam

MORE than 20 months have elapsed since the start of the current political stalemate on March 1, 1994, and now in mid-November 1995, we find both the party-in-power and the opposition parties are steadfast in their respective stands without yielding whatsoever.

Election Commission could perform its duties independently, without fear or favour, then the crisis might not have arisen. Had there been mutual confidence between the government and the 'opposition', an Article to ensure free and fair election would have been inserted in the 12th amendment of the constitution.

shook EC's credibility, for wide-spread allegation of malpractices, manipulation in declaration of results and a mini-media coup. Question was also raised if fair election was possible under a party-government. Then, came elections to four city corporations in January, 1994. The opposition AL candidates were elected Mayors of Dhaka and Chittagong; which was perhaps not liked by the policy makers of BNP.

parties alleged wide-spread rigging, and other malpractices against the government party, observed half-day hartal on 23 March '94 and besieged secretariat on 7 April, '94 for cancellation of the result of Magura by-election. The people, at large, presumably, lost confidence in the EC and felt that in case of future elections under party government, the CEC would leave the constituency like Magura.

considerable electoral procedural works are awaiting completion. The opposition programme to press their demand for neutral caretaker government, as announced on 21 October, '95, is in force and being observed. In search of a formula, acceptable to the government and the opposition, and to arrange a dialogue, one should not miss the vital point of ensuring free, fair and impartial election. We can hardly forget that the understanding between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina is a means to an end, and not an end in itself.

To the Editor...

Hartal : What and why?

Sir, In Bangladesh hartal has turned out to be the most-used political lever; every now and then hartal is called by one political party or the other. The country is passing through a political deadlock emanating from the modality of the next parliamentary elections.

Mahatma Gandhi of India introduced hartal or "Bandh", as it is called in that country, as a political lever to make the British accept its demand of Swaraj.

In our country hartal paid off good dividend in the movement against Ershad in 1990. An elected government is now at the helm of affairs; but to be elected and to be efficient are not the same thing.

getting that the subject matter of the controversy are none other than the people; right to vote freely and fearlessly. If patriotism, service to the people, or welfare of the people are the objects of politics, there should not be any hindrance to a consensus that cannot be overcome.

Hartal as a means of political lever has been too used to be credible and efficacious; and when the country is run by its own elected people, it is suicidal in terms of production and social order. The politicians should ponder over this. They should hesitate to take up the programmes that would adversely affect the education of the children and would disrupt social equilibrium.

Al-Ameen, Eskatan Gardens, Dhaka

Murders up in city

Sir, This refers to your monthly round up entitled "Murders up in city" of October 04, 1995. A month has passed by, so I think it is time we took stock of daily realities, rather brutalities. Three persons left dead in Dhupkhola Math, a bloody gunfight in the premises of the most popular vernacular daily of the country, the shooting of a student activist in the very premises of the Dhaka District and Sessions Judge Court and the most daring train robbery in recent memory, that too on an Inter-City train. The incidents go on and on with obvious impunity of the "parties involved."

Does this cycle of violence reflect decay in our social fabric given the context of the present political and economic situation? Or is it just another manifestation of the painful transition from the Pakistani days of "basic democracy" to our current quest for real democracy that we seem to have accepted as a harsh reality for better days to come.

Ask a thousand questions and of course it is impossible to put one's finger on the cause or root of this "doomsday" phenomenon. More so because most of the time we hardly hear anything in the aftermath of such incidents. Both the authorities and media have their share to blame for keeping the general public in the dark. The authorities inadvertently fail to keep us informed on post-

incident developments and the printed media feel their responsibility ends after the first day reporting.

Incidentally hacking to death with kitchen utensils like 'dao', 'bothi' and of course the masta's machete is currently in vogue for committing grisly murders. Mrs Nurunnahar and her daughter were hacked to death by their maid servant with a bothi in Lalmita, Dhaka. Advocate A H M Mohiuddin of Faridpur was chopped to pieces by local mastans and more recently a youth tried to hack the members of a household in Mohammadpur with a dao. For God's sake, where are we all heading to?

In all the above cases motives behind the murders or attempts thereof are pronounced by the law enforcing agency(s) in the print media as 'hazy' or non-existent. Well then please follow up and keep the citizens abreast of what measures and actions are being taken to apprehend and rehabilitate such psychopathic killers, most of them seemingly at large. This might call for a tall order but my immediate circle of relatives and friends do not at all feel secured out in the once friendly streets of Dhaka. I am gradually descending into the same syndrome against the best of my interests.

May be you, Sir, should organise a special roundtable with the current viable scenario as an exclusive priority agenda for 1996 to elicit public opinion and garner mass support to fight against this incomprehensible sort of pervasive violence.

Mohammad Saifullah Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205.

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Whose God is It?

The people I worry about the most are those who commit acts of violence in the name of God. The zealots maintain that people can do anything they want as long as they claim that it's God's will. The next question that must be asked is, "Which God?" It turns out that when a religious cause is involved, there are different Gods for different people.