

Sangsad's Final Session

By all accounts, Saturday was the last session of the Fifth Parliament. Under normal circumstances the session might have been a longer one, and when it would have ended, it would have been a joyous occasion. But then such is not our fate. What should have marked the coming of age of our democratic experiment, a maturing of our parliamentary process, and strengthening of the system of making our government accountable, has ended up with more bitterness, mistrust and acrimony between our political parties than we ever saw before.

There is no doubt that the promise of the early days, especially following the collective action to bring in the 11th and the 12th Amendment, has been lived up to more in its breach than in fulfilment of the aspiration of the people. The House where representatives of the people were supposed to discuss our problems and find solutions so that we could live better, was transformed into a House where the law-makers bickered, fought and settled personal scores and forgot who had sent them there, and why.

History will obviously pass a very harsh judgment on the people who were in the leadership at this time. Howsoever one party may find justification for blaming the other, we the people blame both. Yes, there was sufficient fault on the part of Begum Zia's government, and in her own person, that often did not measure up to the highest standards of parliamentary practices. But the same is equally, if not far more true for the opposition. Together both the sides, instead of setting ever higher standards of parliamentary norms, brought these down to literally street levels, thereby bringing insult and shame to our own considerable tradition in this regard.

As we close the chapter on the Fifth Parliament, we do so with a tremendous sense of loss and regret. This period will stand out as a grand opportunity missed. After the first three years of independence, this was the first chance we got to build a functioning parliamentary system. After the best election for decades, we were off to a great start in all senses of the term. But jealousy, deep mistrust, and refusal to play by the rules of the game destroyed what could have easily been a golden era of our democratic experiment. We do not know what lies ahead, and that is perhaps the severest indictment against our present political leaders.

A Man as Man should be

A police constable in far-out Khagrachhari has been slain in incredible circumstances. Sharif Ahmed could very well be living now had he but refused to react to something he felt to be repugnant — violation of the human person, some violent desecration of the temple that is human dignity.

Sharif was a member of an armed police battalion detailed in the Hill Tracts. And weakened by a bout of diarrhoea he went to the local health complex and was lodged there on November 13.

Earlier on November 10 a child was admitted there for treatment. His mother had to stay there to attend to the boy. On November 16 night the boss of the place and some of his subordinates gangraped the mother. Monwara told Sharif about it all. The culprits beat up and then strangled a protesting Sharif and threw the body in a nearby ditch.

Sharif could just look away or keep the thing to himself. He chose to denounce. And evidently he did not surrender and beg for his life. Sharif was a man as man should be. And it was good that he was also a policeman. When cases of police atrocity, especially sexual crime, started to come to light in the wake of the Yasmin Akhter murder in Dinajpur, we all were telling ourselves that police as a professional group cannot all of it be like that. We believe there are many in the police force as uncorrupted and as morally strong as Sharif. Acts of such courage and sacrifice as his would surely bring back people's confidence without which police cannot play its role.

A Colourful Man

In the death, on Saturday, of Khondokar Mohammad Ilias, Bangladesh lost one of her colourful sons. He was outstanding both as a speaker and a writer. But his was no intellectual's life of insularity. Whatever cause he felt drawn to, he got down to chiselling it out for himself. And there were too many of such causes. The first pasture he tried, together with his younger brother K G Mustafa, was journalism. And this they did when hardly beyond their teens — and in Calcutta. While the junior of the siblings stuck to that profession, the mercurial senior chose to explore the wider world. A catalogue of things he did on his exploration would read quite Mark Twanesque.

A man is said to be known by the company he keeps. What kind of a man should he be who befriended, from close quarters, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Moulana Bhasani, H S Suhrawardy, Faysz Ahmed Faysz, G M Syed, Comrade Moni Singh, Mahmudul Huq Usmani, Mahmud Ali Qasuri — and above all Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman? He would be like K M Ilias.

Like Bibhutibushan he was also to stir up the literary world with his very first book *Bhashani Jakhon Europey* — and what a stupendous bestseller it was.

Our condolences to his bereaved family.

Commonwealth Summit—1995

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personal grounds.

In 1894, a French artillery officer of Jewish descent, Alfred Dreyfus was convicted on a false charge of betraying military secrets to Germany. In 1898 Clemenceau and Emile Zola took up his defence and exposed the horrendous nature and dimension of the conspiracy against Dreyfus and Zola. In 1906, the proceedings were finally quashed. The sordid affair of Dreyfus reflected on the total lack of transparency and accountability of the French Military hierarchy and civil bureaucracy of the time.

The reaction of the Commonwealth leaders in suspending Nigeria from Commonwealth was too little, too late. If they had told the Nigerian leaders to honour the principles of the Harare Declaration well in time the nine valuable lives could perhaps have been saved. The hanging of the nine men left a lot of question marks: first, the trial took place in a Special Tribunal; second, proper defence was not provided to the accused; third, the Shell Oil Company, which is constructing the four-billion dollar LNG facilities in the Ogoniland could not come up with a clear stand of their position vis-a-vis the Nigerian

government. Prime Minister John Major and President Nelson Mandela termed the decision of the Special Tribunal as 'judicial murder'. It leaves us all aghast and makes us wonder. In the words of Alexander Pope: "Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?"

The hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa has some strange similarity, *mutatis mutandis*, with the hanging of Zulfikar Ali

that trials of such nature should always take place in an atmosphere of openness and transparency. Otherwise, lingering doubts will continue. Bhutto's role during the 1971 War of Liberation is certainly questionable but the process of trial was not beyond doubt. Ken Saro-Wiwa may have offended the Nigerian rulers; there might have been good reasons for them to be unhappy with him. A

monwealth organisation represents an important force in moral terms. Bangladesh's admission to the Commonwealth and its subsequent support to Bangladesh remains undiminished. How can we forget the role of the first Secretary-General, a great Canadian, Arnold Smith, in facilitating our admission to various UN agencies. Arnold Smith spent around ten days in Geneva in May 1972 and personally lobbied for Bangladesh's admission to the World Health Organisation in the face of stiff opposition of a number of member-countries. As a matter of fact, it was at an Auberge on the outskirts of Geneva, where the strategy for our admission campaign was finalised with the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the present Secretary-General, himself a Nigerian, too lobbied for us in Africa and the English-speaking Caribbean countries. In addition, Ambassadors Ignatief of Canada, Ine Constantine of Romania, PK Banerjee of India and Madame Miranova of the former Soviet Union joined Arnold Smith in ensuring our successful election with a record vote in its history. Therefore, as in the UN, so in the Commonwealth Bangladesh has always played a positive role and the inter-

national community would always expect her to be in the vanguard of both these organisations in promoting and upholding the universal values of good governance and good international behaviour, for the maintenance of international peace and security.

John Major was also right in expressing his support for the limited level nuclear tests well up to the CTBT in Geneva in 1996. And Prime Minister Paul Keating was less than correct in condemning the limited nuclear tests conducted by France and China. One may not forget so quickly that it was the balance of terror, underpinned by nuclear deterrence of the two superpowers that spared the world the spectacle of a third world war. Nation states are not perfect, as human beings are not either. I am sure that Prime Minister Keating is not unaware of the rich tribute paid by Goethe's Mephistopheles to us the human beings! If the world could wait for 50 years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one more year wouldn't make much of a difference, I hope.

The Auckland Summit should be a point of departure. Since the Commonwealth prides itself on upholding democratic principles and other human values that make us all good citizens, it could extend a hand to the UN, to make this world a better place to live in.



Waliur Rahman

Bhutto in 1979. Both presidents — Sani Abacha and Ziaul Huq — hanged their adversaries in the name of 'democracy' and 'rule of law'. And both were tried in Special Tribunals. In both cases world leaders, including the leaders of the Security Council, appealed for clemency; the appeals went unheeded. In the case of Bhutto I was a witness to the appeal made by UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim in presence of Ambassador Kaiser to the Pakistani leader. The same arguments were given by the then Pakistani leader. Civilised behaviour demands

fair trial would have given the Nigerian rulers international respect.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto even disagreed with President Ayub after the Tashkent accord with India. In a classic hand-written note, prior to his departure from the Ayub cabinet, Bhutto left a rationale for his decision. In this he compared, at one point the art of diplomacy, with *Grecian Urn*. The imagery was, perhaps, too subtle for the like of Ziaul Huq to appreciate and too remote for the Sani Abachas of the world to comprehend! The 52-member Com-

The Name of the Shop may be Democracy but ...

These are the champions of the rights of the people who hold their political rallies in the middle of some important arterial road thereby blocking not only a city's normal flow of traffic but in their trafficking in gangsters and mastans, impede a nation's right to a decent civic existence.

I feel a cold wind blowing, and it's not the onset of winter that I'm talking about. I feel the cold grip of a nameless fear that the rot in our politics, reflected in the deteriorating law and order situation, is slowly seeping right through and setting in; often I dread that Dhaka is on the verge of becoming another Karachi — a hotbed of political and social violence. The city of vermilion Krishnochuras is these days ablaze not so much because of its characteristic flowering trees but due to the vivid gushes of blood, gore and criminal outrages that are streaking and soiling its civic and political fabric.

There was a time when the mild and intellectually refined Bangali temperament expressed itself in violent terms only towards clearly defined social objectives and as a last, and thereby effective, resort. Riots, student led violence, the use of arms and show of strength, all had an aim. All this has changed drastically, irrevocably. Politically motivated and campus related violence, of course are things that we are now so inured to that they are almost institutionalized, but the more reprehensible kind is the one spilling over into the civic and social lives of innocent citizens, calling into question the very basis on which a civilized society rests. If we call ourselves a democracy then the quality of the civic life of the ordinary citizens becomes one of the prime parameters of judging the country's democratic viability. In any society one accepts some degree of social crimes and incidents of violence, but this is normally balanced by institutions that provide protection or support to victims who seek its aid. Bangladesh, the country born out of violence to provide for its citizens a haven from the tyranny at the hands of foreign elements, has today the dubious distinction of being one of those countries where its citizens do not even have the rule of law to

protect them from their own countrymen. At any time any citizen can find his person or property violated by armed miscreants and thugs, without his being able to take recourse to any agency or institution to protect him or give him redress. From vulnerable and violated East Pakistan to this violent and menacing land of mastans, this has been a sad journey and we have come a long way — but unfortunately, not in the right direction, and certainly not on the path of justice or democracy.

And yet we have no dearth of ridiculously posturing political leaders who mouth paeans to democracy and hypocritically talk about the horrendous law and order situation. These are the champions of the rights of the people who hold their political rallies in the middle of some important arterial road thereby blocking not only a city's normal flow of traffic but in their trafficking in gangsters and mastans, impede a nation's right to a decent civic existence.

Every day one hears of atrocious and harrowing stories of goons entering someone's home and robbing them, or bursting upon a class and opening fire on students and teachers, people being attacked, not to mention the ongoing ritual of toll collecting mastans. Most of the time we think of these as unreal characters of the underworld who figure in stories of atrocities happening to someone else, which we read about in newspapers in the safety and comfort of our homes. So most of the time the proliferating problem of mastans becomes only an academic issue, which we can shut out from our lives. It's only when they touch your closer home does one realize how real and ominous this problem is, and how frustrating and intolerable the situation it is for the victims who

have no means of seeking justice, because every avenue in this land is closed by corruption; as it seems, there is sufficient reason for one to believe that law enforcing agents are in the pockets of local goons, and every goon is under the patronage of some politico. Thus, as well as being violated one is also left totally bereft of any illusions about the society one lives in, because the glaring, unpalatable truth lies before us: the people at the top of our political power structure, those champions of democracy are all hand in glove with the underworld of power. These goondas aided, abetted, protected, controlled and used

leaders of all major parties will do nothing to ameliorate the situation, being equally culpable in breeding these criminals to protect their vested interests and to keep themselves in power?

Each party in a bid to win votes points an accusing finger at the other for the state of the law and order situation. But who is being fooled? We all know that whichever way we vote, if we wish to vote at all, we will be getting the same old wine in a new bottle, the cheap variety guaranteed to give the nation a long hangover. We know that the important issues and problems of the day will remain unchanged, unresolved. No new government or party

where the masses merely parrot and the politicians merely spout slogans of democracy, yet the citizens never really get to practice it or enjoy its benefits because this is the biggest illusion in this country, or in any poor, underdeveloped country, whose masses are overwhelmingly illiterate. In a country like ours where the uneducated millions are made to believe that election is the one and only democratic instrument, and arrival at the pinnacle of power the only goal, can we be surprised that the person or party that gets elected becomes a demi-god by virtue of this all powerful phenomenon of electoral apotheosis. Thus the elected person and his party is seen to be the conqueror of the land, until the next watershed of power i.e., the next election when the supreme test of defication or defeat is repeated. The in-between stages of the democratic process, that is, the actual exercise of the power of the people, by the people, is conveniently forgotten. Institutions that protect and empower citizens, give them voice and help them create the right conditions for their evolution as valuable members of an interactive system is totally ignored.

Instead, out of the awe caused by ignorance, we turn our elected representatives, who are nothing but officials working and serving in our place at the nation's most important jobs, into masters of the realm. Instead of respect we give them servility, creating monsters of egos. Because the majority of the people are poor, illiterate souls who are used to being led, we end up under any regime, as herds of cattle led by the nose by the elected almighty, walking the high ground of political arrogance, surrounded by their pet hounds — the mastans in tow.

And we look on as, under the complicity of the all powerful, our neighbours get robbed, thugs enter our schools on a shooting spree, people get mugged, our property gets 'requisitioned' or occupied, while the politicians and law enforcing agents look the other way.

So, while our real rights slip from beneath us — the right to a decent and safe life, we have to make a show of letting the political powers of the day parade the streets, beating the hollow drum on behalf of our empty right to vote and elect, perhaps a whole new series of mastan breeders.

Today I have misplaced my idiot's mask, otherwise how easy it would have been to make him say that what we need is a fresh transfusion of blood into the system, different leaders with other approaches to organizing society. How blithely he would have made the pronouncement that we need a fresh set of political morals, a whole new order which would be more accountable to the public, more oriented towards service and performance, utilising more checks and balances. He may even have said that what we need is a coalition type of government with no one party being allowed to gain total control of the country, thereby becoming unbearably self-righteous, destructively wilful and power addicted. In this rambling journey through the semantics of politics, to the semantics of idiocy, I am not unaware of the baying of the wolves of political unrest, waiting to shred our peace of minds, if not our very civic existence. But it will be a bitterly cold day in the political life of a nation when we pull the quilt of indifference over our ears and prepare to hibernate, just because a hostile season is upon us. So, the eternal optimist in me, close kin to the idiot, insists that we stay awake and keep the torch of hope going, after all: eternal vigilance has always been the price of freedom and democracy.

POSTSCRIPT

Neeman A Sobhan

by our leaders have grown so powerful and cocksure that unlike the Mafia which works indirectly, using its power almost by a sleight of hand technique focusing on the business classes, our local mafioso is more crude and indiscriminating, harassing all classes, except the top echelons of power, quite openly. There are countless incidents to illustrate cases of citizens being held at ransom by this totally illegal and criminal strata of society.

In the past and even today, the use of goons by political parties has gained an uneasy acceptance. But that the ordinary citizens of a country must go totally unprotected because of the corruption and laissez-faire policy of political leaders is too hard a pill to swallow. Yet, what alternative do we have, and how are we going to protect ourselves, since it is obvious that we ourselves have to find ways and means to do this because the political

will place its citizen's civic needs and rights above its narrow partisan interests. Will a change of political party mean a change of policy, or a change in the attitude to power? Will it make a difference to our lives? In answer we know well that we have to stand up for ourselves. Remember we are the real dispossessed, the orphans of politics.

Let's face it, all of us realize that the name of the shop may be Democracy but what is being sold is really a form of Autocracy. And this will remain so until education reaches the masses. In our enthusiasm for democracy we forget that this system is a product of the west where education or freedom from hunger is a basic assumption. We never hear the silent premise but what is really being offered is a form of government of the educated, for the educated, by the educated. Otherwise we have the kind of situation we have now

To the Editor...

Bangladesh soccer team

Sir, I would like to congratulate the Bangladesh soccer team for such a remarkable result in the recently concluded four-nation tournament in Myanmar. It should be mentioned here that this is the first ever trophy for Bangladesh on a foreign soil. This historical achievement will certainly contribute to the development of football in Bangladesh. Our club teams have on many occasions won tournaments outside the country. In this regard I would like to mention Abahani Krira Chakra's outstanding success in India and Muktiyodha Sangsad's success in Nepal. Mohammedan Sporting Club in the late eighties (87, 88) under the supervision of Iranian coach Nasser Hezazi reached the final round of the Asian Club Cup tournament.

However, our national team in recent years has only produced disappointing results. It seems that when it comes to playing for the national team, our star footballers start to lose their interest. The last glory our national team brought for us was in the year 1990. That year, the Bangladeshi national team emerged as the undefeated champion in the President Gold Cup. But that was in Dhaka. Hitherto the Bangladeshi soccer team failed to win a single tournament, even in a mediocre tournament like the SAF games. Our failure to win the gold medal in football in the SAF games indicate clearly the miserable state of our national football team.

Even when our team was getting ready to participate in the four-nation tournament in Myanmar people were totally pessimistic. Everyone was getting ready to grasp another humiliating result. But that was not to be. Contrary to expectations, the national team played extremely well. The Bangladeshi boys displayed outstanding brilliance in the

last three matches. There was no lack of cohesion, no lack of determination and this is probably the first time the Bangladeshi players devoted themselves to the national team. Anyone who has seen the final match will agree that the Bangladeshi players gave the best performance of their lives that day. From the beginning, Bangladesh looked like a different side.

Our boys have shown that they can really play. The final match will remain in the memories of thousands of Bangladeshis forever.

In conclusion I would like to thank all the players, especially Raquib, Ponir, Naquib, Sohel Reza, Sohel Alam Masum and of course our captain Munna. I hope that this result will work as an incentive and help our national team to win the gold medal in the forthcoming SAF games to be held in Madras.

Touheed Feroze Dhaka University

The economy of sick industry

Sir, With the introduction of free market economy and reforms programme almost all the countries are more or less not depending upon the old economic jargon of protectionism. The world is moving fast. The developed countries are getting out from the outdated system of technologies. The industries which are sustaining loss due to old technology are winding up their business and switching over to new technologies to win the race.

But we are nourishing our sick industries and unfolding facilities for the sake of their survival. These industries are already saddled with burden. The sick industries even when rehabilitated cannot bring any momentum in the economy. Because the buyers when making any shopping agreement also examine the nature of machines where from the products are being produced and marketed. With the change of tech-

nologies, demand will also be changed. The sickness will always be there. It will be unwise to put money on the outdated painted horse which the buyer will not like to buy. It is better to sustain loss and wind up the old machines. I think the present global economy is speaking like that.

Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury Kalabagan, Dhaka.

Appeal to Open University

Sir, The SSC Programme of Bangladesh Open University has facilitated the education system of this country. For this we are proud and happy indeed. At present, we have two classes in a month. The teachers of the school have decided to finish the courses quickly, and because of that many students find it difficult to complete the course-materials in time. If the University authority assigned four classes a month, the students could finish the course-materials in time.

In this programme, there are many students who are in-service and for want of time they cannot watch the TV programme or listen to the radio programme regularly meant for them. They cannot even have a private tutor for want of money.

Introducing the SSC Programme for the various types of service-holder persons, Bangladesh Open University has done a good job. For making this education system more beneficial, it is imperative to provide us with two more classes in a month. We hope the authorities would comply with our request.

Therefore, we appeal to the honourable Dean of the Open University to give permission for the introduction of two more classes in a month considering the above situation and thus facilitating our education.

Md Habibur Rahman Habib Tutorial Centre Dhanmondi Government Boys' High School Dhaka.