

Burning of EC Office

Whatever may be the differences of views between the opposition and the ruling parties, we are convinced that everyone believes in elections as the best way of bringing about changes in government. In that case we believe that no one will condone, and everyone will condemn the attack on the Election Commission's office in Chittagong last Saturday.

But having said it all, we believe that the attack on the Election Commission's office has been a most unfortunate and sad development. We believe that all concerned should unequivocally condemn it. All political parties should immediately let their workers and supporters know that such activities are totally opposed to the ideals that their parties stand for.

We should not throw the 'baby along with the bath water' which is what it amounts to when we denigrate the Election Commission itself just because we happen to disagree with what it is doing now.

Towards Human Rights

The nations of the world observed the Human Rights Day yesterday. Although there is every chance of its getting lost in the crowd of so many days, nothing can detract from the significance the day has in the becoming of man with a capital M.

The beauty of the document lay in its couching the highest and best deal for all mankind, down to the last individual, but in supremely achievable terms, eschewing all echoes of utopianism. By the terms of the Declaration, all existing states and societies fall short in various degrees.

Nigeria has earned for itself universal condemnation for murdering Ken Saro-wiwa and eight fellow rights activists. The human rights declaration has brought the world to such a level of awareness and sense of responsibility in the matter that it has been easy for nations to join in denunciation of the dastardly act.

Poverty and war are two great sources of human rights violation and about the elimination of these no realistic optimism is possible. In Bosnia and certain states of Africa and Afghanistan both are active in limiting human rights to little better than nothing.

In the Bangladesh context the breeding ground for human rights violation is made up of social imbalance and the legacy of wealth related inequality. These socially built-in defects do infect and cripple modern institutions of politics and government.

Market Manipulation

If there are some genuine grounds or reasons for effecting a price hike, no one knows where the limit of the uptrend will be. Now the combined impact of hartal and disruption of ferry services on the supply of goods between the northern region and the rest of the country and also between the capital and the south-western districts is being widely felt.

This is a dismaying puzzle enough; but the spectre looks even gloomier for the future. On the eve of Ramadan which is little over a month away, another round of price escalation is bound to occur. The thought that pervades most people's minds is how they will cope with the galloping price. Manipulated prices have tremendously harmful effects on individuals and society, both in terms of economic and moral health.

Aryan-Dravidian Synthesis: Fear or Hope?

We are living at a time when momentous changes are taking place in the world. The established order which had so long provided the threshold of the socio-economic system in some parts of the world has all but disappeared.

Yesterday's icons are becoming memories of distant and evanescent past. Biblical Judea and Sumeria pass into the hands of the Palestinians. Nelson Mandela says goodbye to the supremacist policy of apartheid with racist generals facing trial in South Africa.

Meanwhile, the global perception of geo-strategic constant as seen through the eyes of Mahan and Mackinder also has undergone a change. Today's global as well as regional concern is with technology, capital, resources, investment and, above all, communications.

Both Hitler and Napoleon earlier had attempted to unite Europe under German and French hegemony. But their ways were unacceptable as they were devoid of idealism.

The SAARC geographical region with one fifth of the global population, shares overwhelmingly a leaven of homogeneity unmatched by many regions of the world. The economies of these countries, if harnessed to full potential, can become a locomotive of growth...

Europe was born and cemented, as suggested by Paul Valery, by the positive-some game of Greece plus Rome, plus Christianity — the Greek sense of the importance of individualism, the Roman concept of law and state and Christianity linking the church with state power.

Both EU and later ASEAN through cooperation in larger freedom succeeded in achieving accelerated economic growth. Today's economic prosperity of both these regions is unmatched in their history.

The SAARC geographical region with one fifth of the global population, shares overwhelmingly a leaven of homogeneity unmatched by many regions of the world. The economies of these countries, if harnessed to full potential, can become a locomotive of growth with unlimited possibility in improving the quality of life of the people of the land whose indigenous civilisation even predates the arrival of the Aryans.

Viewed in the above context, the proposal mooted by Bangladesh did not come a day sooner. The Dhaka Declaration adopted in 1985 at the first summit set out the future vision in unmistakable

terms. If there is sharp contrast between Helsinki and Palermo, with catholicism and protestantism reflecting on manners and styles of attitudes in Europe, South Asian countries also present a variegated mosaic of religions and attitudes. Both Europe and South Asia can trace their roots to a distant past: a culture and civilisation they can pride themselves with.

Bahasa Malay, on the other hand, seems to have played an important role in bringing the ASEAN countries together. Added to that was the shadow of external aggression that helped them close ranks.

The year when Vasco De Gama landed at Calicut on the south west coast of India in May 1498 is an important landmark in the context of the South Asian contact with Europe and the subsequent western domination.

French Revolution was the other most significant influence in the interaction of Europe and Asia. As Panikkar has said, 'Negros in Haiti, Tipu in Mysore, Dutch radicals in Indonesia, all felt the ripples of this movement. Lord Wellesley's aggressive policy leading to the conquest of large areas in India was one consequence, for it was the fear of the revolutionary French that provided the main motive of his policy of conquest.'

Chinese official philosophies tended to be materialistic. We should not underestimate the mystical and metaphysical strain impacting on the people of the areas. India as the crucible of history has absorbed various influences over the centuries. The Greeks and the Kushians instead of influencing India became Indianized.

South Asian history is, therefore, closely linked with the history of the West. The influence of Bhagavat Geeta, Upanishads and Sanskrit on the Western ethos with Islam and crusades playing the role of grand communicator in facilitating the efflorescence of



ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman

European Renaissance is borne out by facts. In addition, the influence of the legal system (Roman Law) and interface between literary giants like Tolstoy, Roman Rolland, Maxim Gorkey, W B Yeats on the one hand and Rabindranth Tagore, Madhusadan Dut on the other, have been complimentary.

If we take a closer look into the history of India, our ability to understand the prevailing doubts permeating the body-politic of the SAARC countries and their state craft, secular or non-secular, will become far more easy.

Alongwith the existence of the civilizations of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa we know of similar civilizations in the Sultaj Valley in Rajasthan, in Ahmedabad, and also in the area which now constitutes North Bengal. In the scale of civilizations, the Aryans were perhaps inferior to the people of Mohenjo Daro, but their more aggressive character, and their superiority in the art of warfare assured them victory over the local

population. Chandra Gupta Maurya, whose Empire stretched from Afghanistan to the borders of Bengal, received envoys from foreign Kings and potentates as reported by Megasthenes. As legend has it, Alexander took away with him numerous Indian scholars, some of Bengali origin, at the behest of Aristotle, who wanted to learn more about the Indian solution to the problems of metaphysics.

In India, the civilization that we inherited can be termed as an Aryan-Dravidian synthesis. It can be said that in India, and the present SAARC countries, the ancient culture is almost as extensive as civilization itself. In ancient India the higher civilization of the pre-Aryans suffered military defeat at the hands of the invading Aryans but in time transformed the Aryan mentality itself by enriching the cultural life of the conquerors.

Back home in India the Muslim victory resulted in the synthesis and reconciliation of the great cultures: The emergence of Ramana and Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya and Mohiuddin Chisty is the outcome. As many historians agree, the growth of Vaishnavism in Bengal can to a large extent be attributed to the fusion of these two great cultures.

Sher Shah opened up through the Grand Trunk Road the whole swath from Kabul to Chittagong. In spite of the internecine quarrels

Not a very reassuring situation! A brief percu of our history and heritage, our mores and morals is noted if only to recall and reinvent our past: Unless we learn to accept, through courage and statesmanship, our legacy of the past, our roots, we may find it difficult to reconcile our conflicting positions. An agreement on the irreducible minimum is possible if we pay heed to our history.

between the Hindus and the Mughals, many Rajput ladies happily married into the Mughal royalty. The great Akbar introduced Din-e-Elahie and Aurangzeb, the epitome of piety and faith married a Hindu lady — the Prime Donna in the palace.

The mutual tolerance and grand vision displayed by our predecessors seem to be in low premium today.

In a recent seminar at the BISS a participant, while reflecting on the unresolved Farakka issue, termed South Asians as the most suicidal maniacs in the planet today! The problems of South Asian countries juxtaposed against the economic backwardness of the region lends a sense of urgency towards the need for a reasonable solution in a reasonable timeframe. Another resource-person at the same meeting said, 'North-East of South Asia is the world's poorest swath of poverty. We must collaborate to get out of the situation: UNDP's latest annual Report on South Asian HDR only corroborates this.'

The resulting thraldom reminds one of the situation arising out of the intractable Schleswig-Holstein question. Lord Palmerston is reported to have reminisced in the wake of the failure of a negotiated settlement. — 'Only three people understood this problem — one of them is dead, one turned lunatic, and I am the only living person — but I have forgotten all about it!'

We are observing a decade of SAARC with the launching of SAPTA. SAPTA may have opened the way and we must not hesitate to seize this opportunity.

Europe recognised its Graco-Roman past, ASEAN reinvented their umbilical link. There is no reason why South Asia should falter.

Ershad's Last Address — II

Ershad played his last card by offering resignation but made serious mistake by making it conditional. He was confident that this would save him again. I did never know if he had got assurances from any opposition leader.

URING my discussion on board the helicopter, one point I repeatedly stressed to the former President that decision to resign without any condition should not be changed. I apprehended it knowing his habit of changing decisions. He fooled me: I believed him. He could not rise above self, party and clan interest. He could not overcome greed for power which he enjoyed for the last nine years.

Ershad played his last card by offering resignation but made serious mistake by making it conditional. He was confident that this would save him again. I did never know if he had got assurances from any opposition leader.

After recording of the address, President Ershad went to meet ministers at the draft-

ing room of ICC. All ministers were summoned to meet President. The atmosphere was very tense. I saw gloom in everybody's face. President Ershad explained his next courses of action and gist of his address. There was no discussion and the meeting ended hurriedly. All were told to go back to their residences and listen President's address on Radio or TV. I left office at about 10:30 pm when Ershad was still busy with two/three ministers in his office. Curfew was already effective in Dhaka city. I saw Police, BDR and Army patrols en route at different points. As I was proceeding towards Bangabhaban, my mind was deeply absorbed in visualizing consequences of his last decision.

Ershad played his last card by offering resignation but made serious mistake by making it conditional. He was confident that this would save him again. I did never know if he had got assurances from any opposition leader. He put some of his trusted men for negotiation with them. He heavily banked on AL and thought that Mr Nazir Rahman and Anwar Hossain would be able to do something good for him. He even em-

ploved Gen Abdus Salam (his PSO) to meet Sk Hasina. Unfortunately, nothing worked, things were too late and anti-Ershad movement had gone too far on the street which was beyond control of any one leader or any one party. This time probably all political parties and leaders without exception comprehended correctly — if they listened to Ershad they would be doomed for long.

In the last over eight years then, President Ershad had



bluffed, betrayed, allured, coerced, tricked, deluded and fooled political leaders, government servants, businessmen, student leaders and even some of his close friends. He was master of deception and falsehood. To achieve his purpose he used military-civil bureaucracy, religious sentiments, social connections and even foreign links. Through nice behaviour, sober and excessively polite manner he could impress anyone. But by

that time he was fully exposed, had exhausted all his evil means and was finally caught into his own cobweb. In 1986 general election, he managed to convince AL that election would be fair and free and agreed for returning to parliamentary system of government. But when the election was held, AL learnt its worst lesson of trusting Ershad. Election rigging was so widespread and well-planned that even Sk Hasina, the AL chairperson, lost her seat to

JP candidate. Many AL seats were lost mainly due to personal intervention of President Ershad.

On 3 December there were many incidents and events like meetings, demonstrations, clashes, firings and deaths. Movement to oust Ershad was at the peak. His offer to hold general election for Parliament and President on same day, conditional resignation, withdrawal of State of Emergency and few other nominal con-

cessions could not change mood of the movement. The movement rather got additional upswing. Everyone understood now that Ershad's base was shaken, with little more pressure he would finally fall. Ershad's offer was out rightly rejected by all leaders and political parties. But from 4 December morning, government machineries in the capital were more or less nonfunctional.

Law enforcing agencies took passive and noncommittal posture. Army withdrew troops from city. There were large meetings in Bangabandhu Avenue, Baitul Mulk Square and in front of Gullistan cinema hall crossing. According to BBC and VOA reports on that evening, the people of Dhaka were united against Ershad's autocratic rule. He had no chance to survive this time. Dhaka was under grips of rumours and speculations. Bangladesh Radio and TV were not broadcasting news of the movement and untoward incidents. All newspapers of Dhaka and rest of the country had stopped publication since 27 November in protest against declaration of Emergency. People were not getting

true picture of the happenings in the capital. They were depending on rumours, gossips and wild speculations of all dimension. Foreign radios particularly BBC and VOA became main sources of information for the people. They became command voice of the movement. People started believing their version of the news and movement leaders started giving direction of the movement through BBC and VOA.

On 4 December morning I went to President's Office at 08:30. President Ershad reached after 30 minutes and entered straight in to his office. I went back to my office and remained tied to my chair. I made few telephone calls here and there to know what was happening. There was unusual inactivity around President's Office on that morning. No outside visitor except Minister Nazir Rahman went to meet him. He met him quietly, stayed for a short time and left quietly. I was feeling restless and suffocated for not knowing what was happening. Remaining so near to the highest seat of the government but knowing nothing and doing nothing was more frustrating. Neither the President called me nor did I go to his room to meet him.

Tomorrow: Developments in Army Headquarters

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

7th SAF Games

Sir, As the 7th SAF Games is approaching nearer, our sports fans are waiting eagerly to enjoy the colourful event, with Bangladesh as a major participant. But it is most unfortunate that in certain sport, we have fallen far behind from some of the neighbouring countries against whom we could once proudly boast. For instance, in kabaddi even in the recent past Pakistan was a minnow but now seems to be a contender for gold against India. It is a pity that today we have to fight for the silver medal against the newcomers in a game which is our national one. In basketball and volleyball the picture is too grim. A couple of gold and silver

medals in athletics and shooting may be our true achievements, and of course, as usual we are sure to bring home most of the bronze medals from wrestling and boxing events as the losing semi-finalists!

Once again, our main target lies in soccer where we are yet to win the gold. This year we have been placed in the 'easier' group with the Maldives and Nepal. But presently the Maldives is also faring quite well. Our boys, spirited with the recent success in Myanmar, would have to take all the teams as equally strong opponents. A dream result in SAF games would certainly place our soccer in a prestigious position in the Asian soccer arena besides in the hearts of the millions of local

fans. Finally, hoping for success, wish all the best to every player and official of the Bangladesh contingent!

Aziz Amirul  
Uttara, Dhaka-1230

Thoughts on Bangladesh politics

Sir, Some of your readers may recall when I spoke out publicly in 1971 against Pakistani atrocities, and in support of Bangladesh's independence struggle. Working with other American friends of Bangladesh, I took the fight to the floor of the Congress, resulting in a cut-off of US foreign assistance to Pakistan. I worked in the refugee camps around Calcutta and have continued in the 20 years since, to return regularly to Bangladesh in support of numerous organisations and the government. For most of my adult life, I have held an abiding love for Bangladesh and its

people. Thus, you can imagine how pained I am to watch the steady deterioration of the nation under the guise of political activism. In spite of its broad base of international goodwill, Bangladesh is tarnishing its own image across the world, making a mockery of democratic processes and institutions. It is time for your political leaders to shoulder their real responsibility of properly informing and guiding the public, insisting that democracy does not work through hartals and street demonstrations, but rather through informed debate and orderly recourse to the ballot box. Those harmed by the incessant work stoppages are invariably the poor, while political forces play out a struggle for power. Meanwhile, the developing economy along with global sympathy for Bangladesh crumbles.

I am confident that responsible citizens can raise their voice in unison whatever their political party, calling for an end for this misconduct and demand that orderly demo-

cratic processes prevail, resulting in free and fair elections at the appointed time. Only then will Bangladesh fulfil its promise to join the truly democratic nations of the world and preserve the rights and a bright future for its people.

Jon E Rohde, M.D.  
3 UN Plaza  
New York, USA

An observation

Sir, There is a saying, 'A pie saved is a pie earned'. It is true that one has to earn money before he or she spends. Spending of money requires that one should have money in one's pocket beforehand. One cannot think of purchasing anything so long he or she does not have money sufficient to purchase the thing he needs. When one allocates a fund to purchase a commodity and spends an amount lesser than what he or she kept as allocation, the

difference is left in the pocket to be available in future for any purchase. Thus the saving can be termed as earning. It can very rightly be said that we can plug the loopholes of wastages at least, if we cannot do much to promote earning.

Attainment of growth requires proper atmosphere. If commercial establishments and manufacturing and export houses are not given proper atmosphere conducive to good work performance, due advancement cannot be expected. It is needless to say that establishments engaged in dealing with imports and exports of various commodities earn the much-needed foreign exchange which adds vigour to country's economy.

Strikes, hartals, abaradh, work stoppages and such other negative factors that obstruct economic activities must be shunned at all costs, if we are to survive as a progressive nation

M Shaikh  
5 Islampur Dhaka