

Daylight Horror at CMC

The Chittagong Medical College was closed since die on Sunday following a five-hour daylight gunfight between elements of Shibir and JCD. At least fifty students were injured in the clash. Most of the 92 students and outsiders arrested in a follow-up swoop were Shibir men. Together with hauling up the Shibir activists police also recovered as many as 80 bombs and cocktails.

For five hours the CMC campus was a hot battleground befitting nations at war. Panic spread far and wide and hung over the city hours after guns had gone silent. The fact of the fight being a three-sided one — with JCD, Shibir and police contributing to the ferocity as well as anarchy of the situation with a mighty generous use of guns and bombs transformed the campus into a death-trap.

Blames for the despicable engagement should be shared by the two sides — perhaps more or less equally. But that is only superficially so. The Shibir-Jamaat preparations as well as mobilisations for a student-level confrontation at a medical college housing also the biggest hospital in the city, as revealed by police raids — simply boggle the mind. Chittagong University is wholly a Jamaat territory and for long, Rajshahi University is also in effect so. They have now Jahangirnagar University under tremendous pressure. And CMC is the latest to fall prey to Jamaat-Shibir greed for power. Each of these places has been turned into a virtual arsenal to be used by fanatics trained to maim and kill. Education — not to speak of tolerance and accommodation — seems not to occur the in Shibir scheme of things for students.

Political exigencies might tend to project the Jamaat and its mindlessly cruel armed cadre, the Shibir, in a somewhat favourable light for some time — but that is wholly wrong. And who calls our attention to the true colour of the Jamaat-Shibir bearers of the mantle of the Al-Shams and Al-Badr? It is they themselves — specially by their bloody designs on the seats of learning.

No patriot can afford to misread a Shibir activist for a fellow traveller, specially on way to democracy. The government's failure to mount a campaign to eliminate Jamaat activity violative of law is a right measure of their growing distance from the duties of a patriot.

Uruguay Round

The Uruguay Round resurfaces in the sleepy clime of Bangladesh after more than two years of hitting the world stage and stirring up public debate across the globe.

This happens not by any design but accidentally with the Commerce Ministry feeling constrained to explain a default: consultants appointed by the government having failed to formulate any response to the Uruguay accords, we are still without any strategic planning in defence of our vital interests in trade and tariff.

We are actually reaping what we had sowed. The Uruguay Round has hardly been subjected to any serious critical analysis, far less broad-based public debate in the country. This stands in stark contrast to what happened in some countries of our region, especially in India, where the parliament, different public fora, intelligentsia groups, lobbies, NGOs, business and industrial circles, even trade union bodies, were involved in a series of discussions leading to a crystallisation of a national consensus on the subject. Such a convergence of opinions must have made the jobs of experts, planners and politicians easier in the end to hammer out a balanced approach to the Uruguay Round.

All is not yet lost for us. The Commerce Ministry is, therefore, urged to immediately go for a series of public debates so as to associate informed public opinion with their decision-making at this crucial stage.

It is a shame that Bangladesh is one of the few countries which evinced such poor interest publicly in the outcome of the Uruguay Round of negotiations. So, public debates must still be held to elicit their opinions on a subject that touches their lives and give them the satisfaction of being involved in a global process.

Fresh Woe for Karachi

The already bristling ethnic situation in Karachi has gone further awry with the murder of MQM chief Altaf Hussain's brother and nephew. MQM leaders alleged that the two died in police custody and that these were vendetta killings following the assassination of Ehsan Ali Shah, the Sindh Chief Minister Abdullah Shah's elder brother.

Vengeance is in the air and more violence is likely in Karachi whose dip into a Beirut-like situation of yesteryears seems imminent.

The law enforcement agencies have come under fire from international and local civil rights groups for "resorting to extra-judicial killings" to crush militant opposition factions.

Seven persons died in police custody during October-November. Deaths while in police hands are the worst things that can happen in a society because here it is the government or the state which by implication gets the very bad name that they like to give others as militants or terrorists. The MQM has been decried as a terrorist group with almost a religious regularity by the people in power. Now, how is the Sindh government or the authorities in Pakistan going to explain the alleged conduct of the law enforcers?

One looks up to the judicial committee constituted to go into the episode to unravel the truth in due course. However, so long as the handling of the law and order situation in Karachi is not reputedly depoliticised, the city has more trouble lying in store for it.

Does Anybody Know What's Going on?

While the PM's wish not to appear to buckle under pressure is fully justified and understandable; for her to appear indifferent, uncaring and dangerously irresponsible IS NOT.

A man tripped and fell off from the 50th floor of a skyscraper. As he was falling down, another person from the window of the 10th floor asked "How are things?" "So far so good" was the reply. Most of us may have heard this joke. But none of us saw it in real life, as we are seeing now. It is so far so good for us. But where are we heading? Do we know? Does anybody know?

For several days now I have been going around talking to the top-notchers (except the very top) of both the opposition and the ruling parties, asking them what's going on, and what's likely to happen? "Wait and see, everything will be all right" say some. "Something is bound to happen" say others. "A last minute solution will surely come" say still others. Behind these inane optimistic 'nothings' they seem to know very little. They all have some idea of who said what, and to whom, even perhaps when. But none had any notion of what is really being done to solve the crisis. When I pointed out that first the vacation of the opposition seats, and then the dissolution of the parliament, (even if we consider that the election schedule can be postponed) have made all our actions time bound, and that we have to act within that boundary unless we want to violate the Constitution, everybody said "We know but what can we do? Tell that to the other side. They are responsible for it."

There is a thinking inside the ruling party, proponents of which believe that there is no need for any understanding. Things will fall into place once the election fever acquires full swing. Opposition, they say, will not be able to resist that swing, and if it tries, it will split. Opposition parties will have to take part in the elections. If they don't then their members will desert them, and join the polls. "We will take full advantage of it, and help that process." For this group, there is no need to exert for any understanding. Already Begum Zia has conceded too much, they feel.

It may be recalled that it is the same group who advised Begum Zia two years back that opposition will not be able to maintain its unity, and therefore there is no need to pay heed to its demand. So BNP for long two years ignored what the opposition was saying, both inside and outside the parliament. At one stage BNP even felt that considering the opposition demand was to give more importance to it than it deserved. So the best thing was to ignore it.

Subsequently when the threat of opposition's resignation came about, the same group said "The opposition can never resign. How can they give up their perks and privileges. Plus when the crunch really comes, their unity will break." We know how terribly mistaken this view was, and how fundamentally flawed BNP's strategy was dealing with it.

Now this group is this telling Begum Zia that the opposition will not be able to pull off its election boycott plan. "When the time comes, either they will be forced to join or the opposition will split on the issue." So there is nothing to worry. Just wait and see.

There are two reasons why I recount the above. First is to show how ill advised Begum Zia has been all through. It was one miscalculation after another by her party stalwarts which she, in her turn, was too eager to believe, that led us to the present mess. If the Prime Minister was not misled as to the seriousness of the opposition's position, if she was given a proper assessment of the strength of the unity against her, if she was told that the concept of the "neutral caretaker government" to oversee the next election has struck a chord with a large number of our citizens, then she might have acted differently.

The difference in her action does not necessarily mean that she would have acceded to the opposition's demands. She would have just handled

things better, and more intelligently. It could have been that she would have made a better attempt to bring her case to the people. It was only the other from when the ruling party really tried to tell the people what it stood for. For a long period BNP's strategy was to "ignore" the opposition's demand. Which in reality meant that the ruling party carried on its business as usual, while the opposition did all the mass contact.

The second reason why I recount the above is because the PM continues to be ill advised even now, as she has so far seen. If seen in totality, the concessions made by the BNP chief is considerable. She has now moved to the position of: a) resigning 30 days before elections; b) agreeing to an interim government on a five plus five plus formula; c) agreeing to the President being the centre-piece of "caretaker"

administration to supervise the elections. These are significant concessions for an elected Prime Minister to make. And yet, with all these 'give aways' she has not been able to get the political and public opinion dividend that she should have got. The reason being that she gave too little, too late, with the result that none of her concessions made the desired impact, and she was left with the political stalemate as before. There appears to be a total lack of any sense of timing. No politician is worth his or her salt, unless she/he knows that in politics what is 'valid' today, may not be worth the paper it is written on tomorrow. Timing is, on occasions, just as important as the substance of the issue.

The Third View

by Mahfuz Anam

fore the elections will be enough for us not to resign. BNP found that too high a price to pay to keep the parliament intact. Yet within 24 hours of the opposition resigning, she made that very same, significant concession, and did announce in public that she would resign. But the difference was that she did not get her part of the political dividend — a full parliament, and the consequent goodwill from the public.

This is not to suggest that the opposition does not have its own huge share of the blame for the present crisis. It is our firm view that resigning from the parliament was a disastrous mistake for which the people of this country will perhaps never forgive those leaders. It was a betrayal of public trust with incomparable political and social consequences. Its other serious flaw was not to have paid sufficient

attention to the constitutional implications of its demands. This one single inattention is responsible for the most intricate legal complication that we now face.

While the PM's wish not to appear to buckle under pressure is fully justified and understandable; for her to appear indifferent, uncaring and dangerously irresponsible IS NOT. She seem to put herself and the opposition on the same plane, thinking perhaps that if it can be irresponsible, arrogant and stubborn, so can she. As the Prime Minister, even in the interim capacity as she is now, it is she who will have to act, and extricate the country out of this crisis.

Let us examine the options before Begum Zia. She has two. First to go for elections without caring who joins in and who does not, in this case meaning the combined opposition. The likely consequences of this course of action are: a) her next government (she is the likely one to form it as the only leading contestant) will be devoid of the moral authority and all round acceptability that an elected government, by definition, enjoys; b) it will be rejected by all the opposition parties, and as such it will be crisis ridden and unstable; c) its claim to adhere to the norms of democracy will be severely compromised; d) her next government will be compared to Ershad's post '88 government. This comparison would be a devastating blow for Begum Zia, especially as she did so much to, first discredit, then topple and finally punish him.

All the above are only relevant if the opposition does not resist the holding of what they call a 'one party election'. And it has declared that it will. In that case what we are looking at is a free for all, violence ridden election in which majority of the peace loving voters will not participate. Even if the army is deployed, and an election process is shown to be completed under its strict supervision, of what political

gain will it be to a leader like Khaleeda Zia? Her reputation as a fighter for democracy, as a leader of the people, as a uncompromising crusader for the rights of the masses, will be significantly damaged, and replaced by an image of someone who destroyed the process of universally participated election because she refused to relinquish the levers of government machinery, while participating in the elections. Let it be clear to Begum Zia that the constitutionality of her arguments will be far outweighed by the suspicion of abuse of power to win the elections. Why on earth will she want such a reputation for herself? This course of action, therefore, is NOT A OPTION for her. Those of her advisors who are goading her to take this route will prove to be as much 'correct' as they did earlier.

The other option for her is to take the steps so far all political parties, especially the major opposition ones, participate in the coming election.

As we understand, a broad agreement on the fundamentals already exist — a government with the President as the centre-piece, being helped by a few non-partisan advisors. The opposition wants the PM to resign first before they sit for talks. The PM wants everything sorted out before doing so. Now this really a logistical difference, and one for which the whole election process cannot be jeopardised. WHY NOT BOTH TAKE PLACE SIMULTANEOUSLY? This is quite possible. Through secret negotiations everything is worked out. Then, in a televised programme, PM resigns and the opposition announces acceptance of an election formula.

We have argued, we have appealed, we have urged and we have pleaded. What do these two leaders want this nation to do, before they will agree to be sensible. Arrogance has led many politicians to disaster here, and elsewhere. That, by itself, may not be all that bad. The tragedy is that they drag the nation with them.

Developments at Army Headquarters

The message was clear: "Army should not support Ershad to hold on power and so more involvement of Army personnel in politics". ... The President was losing support from all corners and the movement against him was gaining ground very fast.

I was sitting idle in the office, lonely and feeling restless. But I knew the streets of Dhaka were taking war like postures. President Ershad was sitting in his office, just few meters away from mine, apparently looking unruffled and placid as if nothing was happening. He had thrown his last card, perhaps eagerly expecting for turning of table in his favour again. I was too perturbed with frustration and bitterness and decided to go to Army Headquarters (AHQ): it was 12:30 pm. I rang up Maj Gen Abdus Salam, Chief of General Staff (CGS), a long-time friend and colleague. It seemed he too was eager to meet me. He said, "Sir, we have very important things to talk to you, please come to AHQ immediately". His words induced both sense of purpose and urgency to me. I went to the President for his consent. He was talking to someone on telephone, seeing me he dropped the telephone and looked at me. I told him of my intention to visit AHQ. He readily agreed and told, "Yes, you should go and find out reactions of Army on my address of last night."

When I entered CGS's office few minutes later, I found Maj Gen Nurul Haq, Director General of Medical Services, sitting with him. Gen Salam welcomed me cordially and said, "We are looking for you and need to talk serious matters. Do you mind if I call other generals who are also keen to talk to you." He called Maj Gen Fazlur Rahman, Quarter Master General (QMG) and

Maj Gen K M Abdul Wahed, Master General of Ordnance (MGO) through intercom and told them about my arrival. They reached within few minutes. Gen Salam told me that earlier in the morning, Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Nooruddin Khan addressed all officers of AHQ in the auditorium. He wanted to apprise them of the current political situation of the country and highlight President's Radio and TV address of last night. After his address, something unpleasant had happened. Perhaps on instruction of the President he wanted to brief the officers. Once it was a routine practice of Presidents, Zia and Ershad, to address officers of AHQ or hold conference with senior officers whenever there were political movements or crises in the country. Scenes of the conferences used to be telecast on BTV in the evening for the view of the public. This time it was an exception when President Ershad did not hold any conference or meeting at AHQ with top brasses of the military and the nation did not see it on TV.

Gen Salam told me that after Chief of Army Staff's briefing, some officers showed open annoyance and resentment. He was showered with political questions relating to Army's continued support to President Ershad. Some said

that the whole nation was blaming the Army for supporting the President and his ministers in their corrupt practices and misdeeds. They were holding on power due to Army's backing. They questioned as to why the Army should take blame and side with him. Some even told that officers and men had become targets of taunt and ridicule when they go outside the cantonments; people jeer at the soldiers and often hurl abuses calling them as men or Ershad. They said that the President should sort out his



FALL OF GENERAL ERSHAD

by Maj Gen Manzur Rashid Khan (Retd)

political differences with the opposition leaders without involving Army. What I heard was not a normal gripe of military to be overlooked by the Army top brasses. It was enough to feel the pulse of the Army, particularly when a strong political movement was going on throughout the country.

It was meant for the Chief of Army Staff to convey to the President. The message was clear: "Army should not support Ershad to hold on power and no more involvement of Army personnel in politics". I

added what was happening in the civil services of the government and informed them that in the Secretariat, officers and staff had stopped working. Foreign Service officers declared that they would not attend office, most of the government or semi-government offices were not functioning. The President was losing support from all corners and the movement against him was gaining ground very fast. He had to support other than the Army's. But what was expressed in the AHQ auditorium should be a clear pointer

now. I expressed my views and said that other than resignation there was no alternative for the President and he should be dissuaded from utilizing the Army for his rescue.

I was happy to find that some of the top brasses of the Army understood the mind of the mid and junior level officers and could apprehend consequences if Army was pressed into action against a popular movement. There was no opposition to what officers vented out in the morning i.e.

Army to be kept away from President Ershad's politics of power. Gen Salam asked me what should be done and if I could do something, I explained that the political situation was fast turning against him and soon he would use Army to rescue him. If the Army supported him this time or somehow he engaged troops to suppress the movement the whole fury would turn against the men in uniform. Moreover, there might be opposition from within the Army creating disorderly situation. Therefore, the President should be given correct picture of the growing resentment within the Army and advised to solve political problem without involvement of the military.

I told that this standpoint should be conveyed to the President by the Chief of Army Staff immediately and I would arrange a meeting. I also suggested that all generals should accompany the Chief of Army Staff. But Gen Salam hinted me that probably the Chief of Army Staff would not agree to it and there might arise some problems. I understood his point. He stressed that other than me there was none to apprise this to the President. I agreed to convey to President Ershad what I heard from them. I greatly appreciated Gen Salam's move to call me and others for discussion and make a move to inform the President. I was confident if President was given slightest hint of disgruntlement within the Army over the issue of Army's involvement, he would quit sooner than anticipated.

Before leaving I apprised them of my discussion with him on 1 December aboard helicopter where he expressed willingness to resign. And though he had changed his mind but would not hesitate to quit if he could be rightly told what happened at the AHQ in the morning.

I left CGS's office assuring that I would immediately convey to the President what I heard from them. I rather felt very encouraged to see that a section of officers expressed their dissensions. Never before, neither during Zia's time nor during Ershad's nearly nine-year period, officers so openly showed such resentment against their Supreme Commander. I had been witnessing power games of two chiefs of staff of the Army since Aug '75. Army was their springboard to ascend to power. It started with Gen Ziaur Rahman who took full advantage of the then political situation. He used Army resources and manpower blatantly defying military rules and regulations. Both found the Army's institutionalized system of obedience and loyalty as easy tools to use for seizure of power first, then consolidating it and lastly to retain. Officers and troops in general had seen who were benefited in the long run. Only a couple of officers close to the boss who towed their line prospered in numerous ways.

President Ershad's policy was to keep military happy and contented. In doing so he transformed military personnel and their families into a privileged class, isolated from rest of the society. They became subject of criticism and animosity of politically conscious part of the population. It was a preplanned and calculated move. Military personnel were provided with few benefits and privileges which served two purposes. Their loyalty to boss was ensured in one hand and on the other, public disaffection was created against them. Rulers are always comfortable if relationship between general public and military is not cordial. Gen Ershad achieved this aim very successfully. But things had changed over the years. Men in military are part and parcel of the greater society of the country. They are bound to react the same way.

After finishing discussion in CGS's office I went to meet the Chief of Army Staff to know his mind. We had very short discussion on the current political situation. I told him that opposition movement was gaining momentum and there was every likelihood of more disturbances of serious nature in coming days. I said that opposition political parties had rejected President's 10 point offer. They did not trust him anymore and took it as a trick to cool off their on-going movement. I hinted that in the long run, the President would involve the Army for his salvation. I warned him if Army, somehow, sided with the President this time, the consequences would be disastrous. He agreed with me and said that he was watching the developments. Surprisingly, he never mentioned anything about his address to officers of AHQ in the morning and the unpleasantness he had to face there. Maybe, he did not want me to know his embarrassments. Since he avoided informing me this important development, I also did not give him any hint of my discussion with Gen Salam and other generals.

Tomorrow: Army Not to Side with Ershad

To the Editor...

Idea of Second Chamber merits attention

Sir, First of all I take the opportunity to thank The Daily Star for the supplement on S M Ali (5 December '95), its founder-editor. Not only The Daily Star misses him but a humble reader like me misses him equally. How enlightening is his writings reprinted, which even in the present complex political situation gives the clue to solution.

Dealing with hartals and agitation by socio-economic groups, he lent the view for an alternative. If democracy is the basis of governance then every region and nation has to evolve it on its own perspective. No models are fool-proof and for all times either. No democratic models are alike in two countries. Whether a parliamentary or presidential form, whether a country is

unitary or federal, democracy in its essence must contain the hopes and aspirations of all sections of people.

So the idea of a Second Chamber merits urgent attention. Had there been a 'senate' or 'upper house' of the parliament comprising businessmen, intellectuals and all professionals then the present crisis could have been averted. The 'upper house' members would have constitutionally constituted the interim government to conduct general elections. But the more important part would have been the participation of the socio-economic groups in policy making. This would bring in the necessary social change and transparency in administration.

May I echo the thoughts of S M Ali and other social thinkers to make provision for a change accommodating social participation in the running of the state? This partici-

pation is wide ranging from law making, policy matters and management and from the highest to the lowest strata of the state and society. So the idea of 'second chamber' needs to be made constitutionally effective and I hope the sixth parliament would take up the issue with all urgency.

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New political party

Sir, Newspaper reports reveal that a new political party would be floated soon and is likely to be headed by FBCCI President Mr Salman F Rahman. This is a welcome news to many specially on the backdrop of miserable failure of our celebrated leaders popularly known as Jana Netri and Desh Netri. It is a misfortune for the nation to have witnessed a thoroughly hostile

attitude by the Jana Netri, who at the very outset and soon after the formation of Cabinet by BNP about 4 years and 8 months back said that she would not allow the government to rest in peace even for a day.

Subsequent events conclusively show that she had very diligently pursued the policy to achieve that end. People have not only suffered great frustration in the political deadlock but also economy of the country experienced a great setback, which is likely to continue unless there is a change in the trend. May be due to non-cooperation by the opposition, BNP failed utterly in running the state show. As such people would of course, welcome a new leadership, since they are fed up with those who ruled the country for the last quarter of a century.

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