

Acid Test

Wednesday's police action on the campus, especially inside the Jagannath Hall, manifested beyond a concern for law and order.

It followed a student procession heading towards the main gate of Bangla Academy to hoist a black flag in protest against the PM's scheduled inauguration of the Ekushey Book Fair the next day.

The entire scenario was infernal, to say the least. Yet it was all so very avoidable. In an editorial on January 31, we underscored the incipient dangers associated with the PM's opening of the book fair and urged her to rethink the programme as she had done in the case of her district tours.

The harder option was taken instead, and thus followed the predictable. But then what has come as an upshot is even worse than we had thought.

Yes, they were flushed out for the PM to do it amidst huge security presence. But at what cost? On the face of it, the university will not work for days and the examinations stand shifted. But down the surface, student politics gets polarised and even more prone to violence than before.

Brutality is neither courage nor is it far-sight. We have already worked ourselves into a situation where the tactical is seemingly getting the better of our best judgement in national life.

This must stop. And all the portents for a spiralling violence should be neutralised here and now. That is the acid test for our leaders.

School for Child Workers

Following the Memorandum of Understanding reached last year between the BGMEA and the ILO and UNICEF, the first school for child workers opened in Khilgaon on Wednesday.

BRAC has been given the responsibility to run this school in recognition of its service to primary education. The school at Khilgaon, however, will concentrate on drawing all the working children from that locality.

To get the benefit of the understanding reached on the child workers' rehabilitation, the process certainly needs to be expedited. The setting up of a school at Khilgaon is but a small step.

Sri Lanka's Trial

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has struck once again. No less than 53 people were killed and 1400 injured in Wednesday's massive bomb attack on Sri Lanka's central bank.

The rift in the Sri Lankan society along ethnic lines is yawning. Chandrika Kumaratunga is determined to keep the military pressure on while at the same time leaving the option for dialogue open.

If South African blacks and whites and Israeli Jews and Palestinians can overcome their enmity and differences, Sri Lanka should also be able to bring peace in the peninsula.

The Rao Factor in Congress Unity

The reason why Rao has gone along with the unity moves is the realisation that Congress, as of today, cannot cross the figure of 100 in the 546-member Lok Sabha. One survey, recently commissioned by Rao, gives him only 76 seats.

EXCLUDED Kerala House comes in handy to Union Industry Minister K Karunakaran for his political activities. This is the place he used when, as Kerala chief minister, he brought round top Congress leaders to choose Narasimha Rao to head the government at the centre.

Helping Karunakaran at that time was Madhya Pradesh leader Arjun Singh, today's staunchest opponent of Rao. And vainly trying for Sonia Gandhi to be India's prime minister, Arjun Singh was all for Rao. For his sake, Karunakaran did not associate Sharad Pawar with the exercise of finding a successor to Rajiv Gandhi.

Little did Karunakaran or, for that matter, Arjun Singh anticipate then that one day they will be in opposite camps. Arjun Singh has constituted a separate party, the Indira Congress, breaking away from the main party. And Karunakaran, after having lost support in Kerala, has been accommodated at the centre.

N D Tewari, heading the Indira Congress, too is no stranger to Karunakaran. Both have jointly solved many crises in the Congress party. They are the ones, who used all pressure, to replace the

then Congress Karnataka chief minister, S Bangarappa with Veerappa Molly. Karunakaran has found little objection to Tewari's reinduction. Rao wants him back and recalls how he tried his best to make him stay.

When it has come to Arjun Singh's return, Karunakaran has run into all kinds of problems. But he should have known this. What he does not realise is that the differences between Rao and Arjun Singh have got so entrenched that the two cannot stay in the same party. It is not a clash of ideologies or even personalities; it is a feeling of betrayal by one against the other.

Arjun Singh harbours the grievance that Rao never gave him his due, although he stood behind him loyally. Rao, on the other hand, nourishes the impression that Arjun Singh, when in the party, projected the image of a better and stronger leader than him. The animosity between the two has not stayed with them alone; it has spread to their supporters, making things still more difficult.

There is no doubt Karunakaran has spanned distances among many leaders in the past. But when he did so, either during Indira Gandhi's regime or that of Rajiv Gandhi, the party had an undisputed leader drawing strength from support at the grassroots. Rao has not graded to that level. He is drawing less and less crowds. The party accepts him but does not respect him. Rajiv Gandhi did not even consider him important enough for the Congress ticket in the

1991 Lok Sabha elections. Rao is himself to blame for dissidence in the party. So long as he stayed within the limits that a consensus leader has and held consultations with the party leaders, there was no problem. Persons like Arjun Singh had the satisfaction of sharing power. But when Rao began to cut his contenders to size, he asked for a fight. Arjun Singh was ignored and slighted deliberately. Still the parting of ways would not have probably come if he had seen the victory of Congress under Rao. The prime minister's ambi-

tion to have a second term further put Arjun Singh off because he expected to step in after the 1996 polls.

It goes without saying that Karunakaran has Rao's nod in his efforts towards unity. He has even the blessings of Queen Mother Sonia Gandhi, whose name he invokes like a mantra. Unfortunately, his ally this time is Environment Minister Rajesh Pilot, who does not have the stature of Arjun Singh but the ambition to be prime minister. Pawar favours unity but he is not happy with Rao who, as Congress president, has appointed 13 vice-presidents, 18 general secretaries and 27 joint secretaries to stoke

the fires of difference in the Maharashtra Congress. Pawar may put up his own candidates if Rao does not accommodate him in the coming Lok Sabha polls.

Karunakaran feels that even single handed he can pull the unity through provided Rao is willing to pay the price. At present, he occupies both positions, one that of prime ministership and the other of the Congress party chief. If he were to give up either of the two, the Indira Congress would immediately join the main party. Both Tewari and Arjun

gone along with the unity moves is the realisation that Congress, as of today, cannot cross the figure of 100 in the 546-member Lok Sabha. One survey, recently commissioned by Rao, gives him only 76 seats. The unified party, the prime minister trusts, may increase the strength to 175 or even more, the number which will give him the commanding position.

True, Karunakaran has kept Pawar in the picture. But Pawar is reconciled to Rao, not enthusiastic about him. At one time Karunakaran also considered the possibility of forging unity between Congress and the National Front. Many Congress leaders argue in its favour openly these days because such a combine has the possibilities of sweeping the polls. Here too the Rao factor poses a problem. He will resist any alliance, front or conciliation if his position is not ensured.

Not long ago, when Rao faced a vote of no-confidence in the Lok Sabha and required seven votes to survive, some well-meaning persons floated the idea of a coalition government comprising Congress and the Janata Dal. But Rao, who is adept in the art of purchase and manoeuvres, said 'no'. His was a stock reply that the Janata Dal could join Congress and share power but not as a separate entity. The proposal did not take off.

The problem that Karunakaran faces is not how to effect unity between Congress and the Indira Congress but how to make Rao realise that he is not an ideal leader. His success depends on the extent he can persuade Rao and his supporters to face the facts.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

And it appears that Karunakaran is working on a formula which suggests one office for one man. The Indira Congress will not agree to anything less. Mere words cannot make it happy because even the initial revolt was born out of dissatisfaction over the distribution of power.

Once Rao is not seen as an automatic choice as leader after the elections, Muslims may also return to the party. They constitute 14 per cent of the electorate, and they can tilt the balance in as many as 200 Lok Sabha seats. The rank and file of Congress knows this. This should have been

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Why the Talks Failed A Psychological Analysis

by Prof. M R Ali

It is a good sign that people have started talking about talks and analysing the causes of their failure. Different analysts have looked at it from different angles. Political, legal, diplomatic and constitutional factors have been searched and researched to find out a clue as to why the talks failed and why the government and the opposition could not agree to an acceptable solution to our political problem.

The failure cannot be adequately attributed to the political stands alone of the BNP and the Awami League, the two main parties in the power-gate. At times it appeared that a solution was very close. Both the government and the opposition came very close to accept the principle of a neutral caretaker government to run the election. But still there was no solution. Why? Perhaps an analysis of the personalities and leadership styles of the leaders of these two parties may throw some light on the conduct of their politics and consequently to their inability to come to a solution which the country needed so much.

Some leadership qualities are inborn and some are acquired. Inborn qualities are those that are inherited during birth such as mood, temperament and intelligence, to some extent. Acquired characteristics are those that are learned through the processes of education, socialisation and experience, such as knowledge, social skills, etc. Some leaders are born, while others are made.

Sometimes situations make leaders. Sometimes a person becomes leader because the circumstances favour him/her. Both Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina are situational leaders. They became leaders because particular situations favoured them. Begum Khaleda Zia became the leader of BNP after the tragic death of her husband, Ziaur Rahman, who was then the leader of his party and the President of the country. Similarly, Sheikh Hasina became the leader of Awami League after the brutal murder of her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was a great leader in Bangladesh and the President of the country.

These two tragic events which were instrumental in making them leaders of their respective political parties made a lasting effect not only on their psyche but also on their leadership styles and decision making processes. History has made us to witness such a unique situation when both these personalities are facing each other. Naturally, we are to suffer the consequences. In future, even if the table is turned in which Sheikh Hasina becomes the Prime Minister and Begum Khaleda Zia becomes the leader of the opposition, the situation is likely to remain the same. The two leaders

will face each other in the same way as they are facing now.

The traumatic experiences through which they became leaders made them skeptical, hesitant and rigid in their behaviours. They tend to doubt even their own party leaders and find it difficult to accommodate the views of others, especially those of the opponents. When confronted with opposing ideas, situations or persons which are perceived to threaten their positions or power-base, they tend to undergo similar traumas which they experienced when they lost their dear ones and they tend to regard those opposing ideas, situations or persons as harmful and repugnant. If we understand these personality make-ups of our two leaders, then it would be easier to realize why they behaved as they did during the negotiation period. From this perspective we are to judge the speech of Begum Khaleda Zia in Bagherhat, as reported in The Daily Star on January 28, 1996, in which she termed the boycott of the election by the opposition as a conspiracy against the independence and sovereignty of Bangladesh.

I have no personal experi-

ence about our two leaders whether they are rigid and skeptical in their day-to-day dealings, but it is evident that they showed high degree of rigidity and skepticism in their political dealings during the last two years. To me Begum Khaleda Zia appeared more rigid than Sheikh Hasina. Another characteristic of Begum Zia is that she oscillates and procrastinates in decision making. She got enough time to solve the political crisis which originated with the mass resignation of the opposition MPs. Another example of her psychological rigidity is found in her constant reference to the constitution as an obstacle to the political solutions. Her rigidity on constitutionalism is understandable if we realise her psychological make-up.

Constitution of a country is something which is to be respected, regarded and obeyed. But it must be remembered that constitution is for the people, people are not for the constitution. It can be amended, if a referendum is held now on the issue of having a neutral caretaker government to conduct the election, about 90 per cent of the people will vote for it. This demand has assumed legitimacy. Begum

Khaleda Zia failed to realise this dimension of the issue because of her rigid personality. Sheikh Hasina was also rigid while demanding that Khaleda Zia should first resign as Prime Minister before the negotiation can be started. Sheikh Hasina should have realised what Khaleda Zia could offer to the opposition once she and her government resigned. Sheikh Hasina, however, became flexible on this point later when she said she was ready to meet Khaleda Zia while she was still the Prime Min-

ister if the meeting was broadcast alive through the radio and TV.

Given the personality characteristics and the leadership style of Begum Khaleda Zia, it is highly unlikely that she can take tough decisions. I can say with certainty that she is far away from taking tough but realistic decisions now to shift the date of election from February 15, and to hold the election under a neutral caretaker government. If she can do these it would be a miracle in the political history of Bangladesh in which her name will be written in golden letters.

The writer is a former Professor and Chairman of the Department of Psychology, University of Dhaka.

OPINION

Matrimonial Match

Munira Khan

The season of marriages, in Bangladesh is almost over. Bridegrooms like migratory birds flew from their working places, chose their brides and left again, some of them could take their brides, some left behind, in the hope to be joined by them in the near future.

It is really interesting to see how parents in Bangladesh like to get their daughters married to the boys who live outside the country. Most of the time they don't get enough time to enquire about their would be son-in-law's whereabouts thoroughly or to get acquainted with the person whom their daughters are getting married to and will be living the rest of their lives. Perhaps nobody would believe if I tell that recently while attending a marriage reception, I asked the bride's mother the name of the bridegroom and the mother looking embarrassed brought out a piece of paper from her hand bag which contained the printed biodata of her son-in-law. She could not remember the name. But she explained proudly that one of her relatives has arranged the marriage and the boy is doing his PhD in an American University.

It really surprises me how a boy who lives years after years in the USA or in England having acquainted with their system of marriage or accustomed to see the custom of premarital dates of boys and girls, agree to marry someone whom he has not met before not to say about mixing. I have seen some prospective bridegrooms along with their relatives selecting their brides from the girls whom he has been meeting one by one.

I know a mother who got the idea that their daughter had been selected by the boy's family until she heard that the boy has been already married to a girl whose father is someone big in the society. Sometimes the girl's beauty or fair complexion, sometimes father's money, job and influence become the criteria of selecting the brides. It is not to be considered whether the boy and the girl are suitable for each other, whether they have the same likings and dislikes, same ideas about living.

This idea of instant marriages does not bother anybody because everybody takes it for granted that the girls would manage whatever gaps in ages exist between them or differences in opinion may occur between them. Re-

sponsibilities lie with the girls to make their marriage successful.

Most of the girls become intoxicated with the idea of living outside Bangladesh, specially in the USA or Europe. They do not appear to bother much about the boy or the future of their married life. The boy and the girl thoroughly enjoy the functions involving the marriage ceremony like engagement, haldi, marriage and reception. It is surprising to see that nobody wants to make it simple and short even to save time or money. Serving the same type of food for the same group of people whom the couple concerned hardly know or would meet in future, although meaningless, is the main feature in a marriage ceremony. However difficult it is to get a place to hold the function or to invite all the relatives (near and distant) and friends in such a short period of time it is to be done.

Nobody can give me a clue why people even little known to the boy and girl will have to be invited who would come to the dinner (and for health) with a gift which will be hardly of any use to them. I have heard that in Indonesia parents write in the invitation card not to bring any gifts other than cash money. The guests put the money in a box kept for the purpose and sign in a book wishing the couple a successful married life. A very good and practical custom, I would say.

But could we do it ever in Bangladesh? Here people are not very practical in their customs and tradition. Nobody wants to take the initiative of changing the pattern of their lifestyles to even for betterment. In 1987 I wrote a letter in a newspaper asking people not to give useless gifts but cash money to the newly-married couples which they need to start their newly-married life. The Asia Week reprinted the letter next week. But I am sorry to say that it has not got any effect on the minds of our people. None of us have so far given any thought about it. Most of us give useless gifts and avoided giving cash money to any of the hundreds of couples whose marriage ceremony we attended and had dinner.

This year I myself bought six carpets at a time to give as marriage gifts. Why I could not save the money instead, I cannot give any explanation to that.

Women's 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.

Why the Talks Failed: A Clarification

Sir, Mr S A M S Kibria in an article published in The Daily Star of January 28th fulminated against my views in an article under the caption 'Why the Talks Failed' which appeared in the January 24th issue of the paper. Normally I wouldn't like to be drawn into polemics. More so because intolerance, indecency and imputation of motive seem to be overtaking a healthy discussion. However, to dispel any confusion in the public mind, I should like to clarify one or two points. Mr Kibria in his earlier article informed us that the talks failed because the government-side took a 'rigid' stand on the issue of date of election. I do not claim to be a constitutional lawyer. But my understanding of the country's fundamental law is that holding the election within 90 days after dissolution of the parliament is mandatory. When I referred to the BNP negotiators 'rigidity' it was only on this issue i.e. the date of holding the election. I still believe, in the absence of a political consensus, if elections are not held within the stipulated time there will be a constitutional vacuum and I really cannot imagine what will follow next. Incidentally, Mr Kibria admits that the opposition parties were seeking 'a solution outside the Constitution' (January 28th).

Why the talks failed and the right to vote

Mr Kibria has discovered in me a happy man 'that there was no agreement', although I have never made any such suggestion either in public or in private discussion. Finally his quotation in regard to an earlier situation is totally irrelevant to the present one. I can hardly imagine a responsible man making any such remark given the changed political climate in the country.

Professor M Maniruzzaman Miah, Dhaka

Foreign humorist

Sir, The broadside against a foreign writer of wit and humour on the scenes in Bangladesh (Letter, Star, Jan 25) appears to be quite misplaced. It should be taken in the spirit it is written. Why, for example, a foreign humorist is popular here - Art Buchwald, appearing since early '50s and revived in the '90s?

The humour (bile) of our political leadership is responsible for the current dispirited state of the mind. They were too serious and critical, to run the country in the idealistic mould. We were never a practical nation thanks to our zamindari mentality. We are trying to be businessmen from the 1990s, but rent-seekers (say,

sovereign country every people has the right to vote. Let therefore all of us, irrespective of BNP, AL, JI, JP and others, pave the way for our people to cast their vote freely and peacefully without any fear or intimidation on February 15, 1996.

If the people participate in the voting in large number we would all accept that people prefer BNP more than AL-JI-JP and others. If the people do not participate in the voting we would accept that the people prefer AL-JI-JP and others more than BNP.

Moreover, after the general elections is over, let the new Parliament amend the Constitution and hold a fresh general election under a caretaker government within next ten months to solve our political crisis for good, for the sake of peace, progress and political stability in the country.

O H Kabir Dhaka

politicians) are barring the way. Lots of bile operation clinics may be set up. The nation has forgotten to laugh with a gun in hand. Denounce the political gunpowder barrels!

Going Crazy Dhaka-0000

Live on the Internet

Sir, Congratulations for dedicating once-a-week page on Internet. This page will definitely provide immense potentiality to E-mailers of Bangladesh and Bangladeshis in North America and Europe.

E-mail Club of Bangladesh in its meetings had been discussing how to interact with overseas Bangladeshis, especially in sharing information and raising topical issues. The Daily Star's page on Internet will definitely give scope for such communications.

E-mail Club envisages to popularise and familiarise the Internet in Bangladesh would also benefit from the page.

Saleem Samad Dhaka

Akhter Hamid Khan

Sir, I support the proposal (Letter, Star, Jan 25) for proper national recognition of the pioneering effort of Akhter Hamid Khan in bringing up the former Comilla Academy (now BARD) with the proper vision. My visit to the centre several decades ago reminded me of the rising sun.

A Mawaz Dhaka