Dhaka, Monday, February 5, 1996

Rethinking Time for BNP

Slowly but surely politics is becoming violent. Everyday more and more reports are pouring into the national dailies from all over the country about clashes between the ruling and the opposition parties. The climate for a peaceful election is definitely receding. The latest attack on the students of Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University(DU) marks a turning point of JCD's (BNP's student wing) relation with the general students of DU. The ferocity of the attack and the indiscriminate way in which all students were mercilessly beaten up have left everybody wondering whether or not the ruling party has taken leave of its senses. The initial sympathy that BNP enjoyed because it appeared to be defending a constitutional position, is sharply declining at this point. With the passage of each day, BNP is surely and certainly becoming more and more isolated. The more it is becoming so, the more it is having to depend on the assistance of law enforcing agencies to carry out its own political activities. Time has come, we think, for BNP to assess what they have gained and what they have lost in pursuing the policy that

This paper appealed to the PM to rethink the opening of Ekushey Boi Mela, saying that she could do so with the help of the armed police and the BDR, but would it be wise for her to go in that direction? In retrospect, we think we were right in advising a caution. She and her party, will have to ask themselves as to what they have gained by performing that opening ceremony, and what they would have 'lost' if PM had stayed back.

they have so far.

BNP leaders must have realised by now that they are becoming more and more dependent on police and BDR for their own political activities. This dependence can only further isolate them from the public. It is our view that just before the recent events, BNP had gained considerably from the anti-hartal sentiment of the general public. This it has lost first due to going for a one-party election, then for using the police and BDR for its electioneering, and now finally for the completely indefensible attack on DU students. Putting these together it's imperative for the BNP to do some serious introspection, and reassess its strategy. The question is, does it have the maturity and self confidence to do so? If the past is any guide, then the answer is a resounding no.

Rickshaw's in Focus

Rickshaw as a mode of transport may account for the least value addition but taken together these non-mechanised three wheelers have the highest contribution to the country's GDP. A survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reveals that the country's 12,73,391 rickshaws had a total value addition of Tk 67.39 billion for the fiscal year 1993-94. Country boats' contribution comes with Tk 49.30 billion.

One thing is clear: the manually driven transports — rickshaws and boats — carry the major burden of the movement of passengers and goods. This overwhelming reliance on the slow moving vehicles is bound to have its reflection on the country's economy. The manhour lost in terms of mobility can work out to a staggering figure nationally. The slow transportation of goods on the riverine routes creates a number of economic and marketing problems.

It is, however, futile to carry on a campaign against rickshaws in Dhaka city, given the realities of our transportation situation. If we had really cared to develop our economy on firm basis we would not have ignored infrastructural development in the first place. Faster and better communication can radically change the shape of our lives, make our people more efficient and our economy stronger. Even more growth — in agriculture or industry — is no guarantee that the full benefits of it will be enjoyed by the producers without a transportation system to ensure proper marketing of goods.

Collapsing Godowns

The string of godowns on the fast eroding western bank of river Shitalakkhya in Narayanganj are in danger. Already six of them have collapsed with their piles of goods killing three and hurting 150 labourers. A school building, five salt crushing units and several living quarters await the same fate. The collapses usually occur in chain one leading to the other in a seemingly endless progression.

The vulnerability of the buildings is a given factor in that these are considerably worn out tin-shed structures whose dilapidation should have prompted an evacuation of the workers and dwellers by how. Basically though one had expected a timely construction of protective wall on their backyards to the water line.

Since erosion of a river bank cannot just be wished away it is the human response to such a vagary that is so crucial to saving life and property. We display an incurable habit waiting till the dangers strike us and then wake up to deal with the rest half-heartedly. The owners of the godowns should have led the way by closing these down some time ago and moving their business to safer places. The users and tenants would have felt impelled to evacuate in that event.

Basically, the construction of structures along the river banks need to follow certain rules.

Japan's Hashimoto and Kakuzo's Dreams

appeared on the world stage : one was the new Italian Prime Minister and summit host, media-mogul, Silvio Berlusconi and the other, the Japanese Minister for International Trade and Industry. Ryutaro Hashimoto. Mr Hashimoto as Finance Minister in the cabinet of Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu was instrumental in the Japanese contribution of 13 billion dollars in financial assistance towards defraying the costs of multi-national force in the Gulf War. As Trade Minister in the cabinet of Tomichi Murayama, Hashimoto played the role of 'prima donna' both in Naples and Halifax summits and later in his successful negotiations with the US trade Czar Mickey Kantor on

trade related matters with

the US Government. Adorn-

ing the driving seat of world's

second largest industrial

power was only a matter of

time: his becoming the prime

minister of Japan on January

N July 1994 at the

annual G7 Summit in

Naples two leaders

11, 1996, did not, therefore, come as a surprise. With about a 5-trillion-dollar economy. Japan is a success story and that too a successful Asian story. Like in any democratic dispensation. Japan, also took time to have a consutution where sover eignty resides with the people. The movements spear headed by Itagaki Taisuke (1857-1919) and lOkuma Shigerobu (1839-1992) both Samurats, and inspired by French radicalism and English liberalism helped establish the structure of democratic institutions in Japan. With the Emperor. claiming the longest imperial dynasty in the world, and its 'Imperium' captivating the people, Japanese democratic institutions slowly but inevitably struck its root in the body-politic of modern Japan. The remembrances of 1868 Meiji revolution only assisted the process. General Douglas MacArther's efforts in implementing the terms of Potsdam Declaration were

not so difficult after all. Minister Prime Hashimoto's task is not going to be every easy either — like his immediate predessors.

As a developing Asian country, Bangladesh is also benefitting from the generous support of Japan. From Kafco to Meghna Bridge, from BIRDEM to Cardiovascular Institute to Hotel Industry, Japan is a major player in our development plans. Japan is now our number-one donor and number-five trading partner closely following the US, Germany, Italy, France and England.

With the collapse of the Soviet Empire, the chancellaries of the world are restructuring their agenda, their list of priorities. Japan faces a particular problem because like the Bourbons, their memory is very long. But the difference is that the restored Bourbons learned nothing and forgot nothing. The Japanese learned everything and forgot nothing. Where as the Chinese Government want a 'mea culpa' from the Japanese in the shape of mega investment in China for Manchurian occupation of 1905 and 1932 the other South Asian neighbours including South Korea, the Phillipines and Indonesia. want their share of guid pro qus! Former Prime Minister Muryama offered apologies for the alleged excesses committed by the Japanese troops and for the generous use of 'comfort girls' by the occupying forces. A student of Japanese history realises how heart-wrenching it was for premier Muryama to say sorry. But that is not enough. If corruption, as Gibbon said. is the most infallible symptom of constitutional liberty. Japan has certainly proved that. But then their sense of traditional honor and dignity gives the Japanese leaders a special place for their ability to uphold the sanctity of freedom and liberty granted by the constitution. Leaders of all shades and opinions have always stepped down the moment their was a whiff of rumour, real or imaginary. about their lack of accountability and transparency. Premier Hosakawa made history by resigning his office. Reportedly, a decade ago Hosakawa borrowed some money from a family friend and repaid the amount in time: but he was not required to pay interest. It may not be termed corruption in the measure conventional

full. But when faced with a question whether the same facility could have been obtained by a common Japanese, Premier-Hosakawa was faced with moral dilema. Nobody could take him to court, nor could anybody have him chargesheeted today or tomorrow. Nonetheless, the Japanese Prime Minister went into a meditation and then stunned the Diet and the world by offering to resign. in the eye of law he was not guilty, but to his conscience he felt small and diminished. Not long ago a Japanse would commit harakiri for a mistake which was not always necessarily his

the Japanese could go and learn from Europeer and later North America transformed them from good imitators to creative innovators. Their economic success was phenomenal. While copying and imitating, they added a Japanese touch and created something better than the original. This is the Japanese genius.

The Asians as the cradle of much older civilisations, did not attack importance towards the utility of technological innovativeness. The Europeans borrowed the art of printing and gunpowder from the Chinese, the turbine movement from the Tibetans

Waliur Rahman

own. Hosakawa's decision was made in the same tradition. Guarded by impenetrable ocean the Japanese, in their isolated splendour, perfected their arts, their religion, and their mode of life. While the rest of Asia fell under the colonial swoop, one by one, the Portuguese in Japan were restricted to just being traders. Not that the other Europeans did not make attempts to create chinks in the Japanese fortress; their xenopholic defence and the Portuguese buffer, kept them successfully away. Astute Japanese came to the conclusion that the success of the Europeans lay in their superior technology. Thus they made the famous imperial decision that the Japanese would go to Europe to imbibe Western education — some

two hundred years ago. It is said that Japanese are extremely good imitators. and they are so polite that they even copy the mistakes f The impaired decision that

and the clookwoot from the Byzantines. But as Panikhar concluded, if was only after the sepoy armies of the English East India Company had defeated the Moghul soldiers at Buxor that the coun try-powers in India began to train their troops in Western fashion. Similarly the Dutch at Deshima were made to teach the Japanese the se-

the Jesuit fathers had to become ordnance experts in try, Japan is a major player in in its early years, the Japanese, while investing in auto industries, even invited designers like Pininterina from Italy - the designers of Ferrari and Masserati Ironi cally today, from GM to Chrysler, and other impor

crets of casting cannon, and

Japanese their management the dimension of cooperastructure and economy in production. While the Japanese secu

rity was being guaranteed by

the American Nuclear um-

tant Western auto-makers all

are learning from the

deserves serious consideration. In the context of larger and more durable role to be played by the Security Council. addition of countries like Japan and deserving countries from Asia, Africa and Latin America would render brella. Japan devoted all its the highest decision-making nomic base. Inspite of the body in the UN more democratic, more responsive. present difficulties in the Paul Kennedy's apprehen-Japanese economy which are primarily structural, they will very soon move towards further economic success. With the change of political and security climate. Japan is in-

seat in the Security Council

sion about what he said Japan's omnidirectional peaceful diplomacy or 'policy of being all things to all men' seems to be misplaced. In her gradual assertive role in the world arena Japan is determined to address the bogev of 'scissors effect' reaction against its export-led economic success. Japan is tackling simultaneously Asian NICs as well as the hostile American and European reaction to the 'seemingly inexorable penetration of their domestic markets by Japanese products in this carefully calibrated bolley Japanese strategists in MITI and MFO have no doubt taken what the German mercaniffist author Von Hornigk said - Whether a nation be today. mighty and rich or not, depends not on the abundance or security of its power and riches, but principally on whether its neighbours pos-

sess more or less of it. Scholars like Herman Kahn are so impressed that Japan, in their assessment, will be the number-one economic power in the twentyfirst century. Unbelievable as it may seem, with only 3 per cent of the world population and 0.3 per cent of its habitable land. Japan has already reached a level of development which brings her in the vicinity of political scholar's prediction. Like other island states of the yore, states with greater strategic depth and larger resource base, will eventually eclipse Japan: but that may not happen before -mid-twenty-tirst century.

- in the beginning of this century. Japanese artist Okakusa Kakuzo started the world by declaring - "Asia is one." Premier Hashimoto seems destined to lend resonance to Herman Kahn's prediction and Kakuzo's dreams.

Not Your Marriage Party

HERE are many reasons why one should avoid a marriage party: you may not like the rich food, you may not have enough heart or money to buy a present, you may not have been invited, it was supposed to be your marriage, and so

Despite the odds, come wedding day, you somehow end up wearing your best clothes and smiles to match the occasion. There you are grinning like an idiot under the shamiana, greeting people you know, shaking hands with those you don't, getting introduced to creeps, yet yearning for the opportune moment to rub shoulders with that cute little thing you have been eyeing since getting off the rickshaw an hour

There is solace in the myth that an evening's Fakhruddin will not kill you. that maybe you will buy a present someday, that perhaps the invitation card went missing in post or they didn't know you have shifted to Kayettuly, and that this could be the right situation to see what your paramour has bargained for by ditching Your Excellency.

To me any marriage is like a walking department store. Everything in the shops and more is on display here. There are some chaps who will wear a three-piece horror whatever the weather forecast. Occasionally, the squares on the suiting material are so large you might carry your own set of pieces

and ponder whether to go for a Sicilian opening or a Caro-Kann defence. This indulgence might prove difficult if the *fhentelmann* is ticklish in the midriff area.

day-to-day dealings. After all

he returned the money in

Then there are mannequin-like ladies who can hardly walk because of the weight of their sarces, some can't look right or left because of their jewellery. Most of them are, however, looking straight at their husbands who are eyeing some other mannequin.

Clothes, trinkets, the latest shawl from Kashmir But, I thought Bhaaabi. there was a war going on

** I see you have been reading the papers lately. Mrs. Khan. Actually, this is from the Kashmir Shawl House in Patuatuly.

So, as I was saying. clothes, trinkets, shawls from Patuatuly, flashy shoes, flashier ties, the latest toothpicks, half soaps, some unwashed towels the launderer (ex-dhopa) forgot, are all for you to check out. And with so much of ha-ha hee-hee going around, even the good work of local dentists are on dis-

Sitting quietly at your table your head rotates like the camera of a closed circuit TV. It focuses on the bridegroom who seems unable to bear the odour around him. While you gauge your successful "rival" (the bugger could have used a better handkerchief), it is perhaps all right to bite deep into the beef and pull, and pat yourself gently





for not bringing that present. There's this man swaving uselessly a giant pankha six feet from the bridegroom. A fly continues to bother you. They are laying the groom's table. You scrape some polau

from the top to avoid the grease. The groom sits in front of a roasted goat with its half-open mouth stuffed with an apple. Poor goat. never had an apple when he

was alive, dancing in the vil-

lage green. No prizes for guessing whom I would like to stull.

creasingly taking part in in-

ternational peace-keeping ef-

forts. They started with

Kampuchea where Yashushi

Akashi, a veteran Japanese

diplomat, made significant

contribution in lending a

broad democratic base to a

war-torn country. The

Japanese soldiers for the

Golan Heights was another

step towards playing an ever

greater role in matters of war

and peace. With the memo-

ries of Nagasaki-Hiroshima

and Pearl Harbor still fresh in

the Japanese psyche, their

defence expenditure is al-

ready second highest in the

world. As the Japan, believ-

ably, now spends more on

defence and security than any

other country other than the

US. Japan's defence budget

in 1995 was 856 billion with

France's \$37 billion and UK's

\$34 billion and Germany's

country. Bangladesh is also

benefitting from the gener-

ous support of Japan. From

Kafco to Meghna Bridge.

from BIRDEM 40 Cardiovascu-

lar Institute to Hotel Indus-

our development plans. Japan

is now our number-one donor

and number-five trading

partner closely following the

"US, Germany, Italy, France

and England; several highest

level visits have been made

and areas of further co-opera-

tion "are being explored.

Honorable Hayakawto -

would have been happy to see

even a greater role not only

in Asia but the world at large.

Her effort to get a permanent

Japan is destined to play

As a developing Asian

\$35 billion.

_ tion.

The food looks okay but your table mates don't. The bloke next to you picked his nose before filling his glass with borhant to the oring. A couple of the others change their pieces of chicken from unattended plates. They delve deep into the luming dish of rezala, their eyes meet yours as they test the plasticity of the beef. All you can think of is how to get the hell out of there, Your thoughts are interrupted by the pungency of sweat as the waiter slams the mud-saucer of sweet in front of you. This is a definite signal from the host that it is now time to stop cating and leave. although you are only into the second bite of your rich meal.

By the time you finish licking the last bit of payesh from the tip of your index finger, there is a long queue at the basins. A grinning waiter with one of those "long forgotten" towels hanging on his shoulder, a bowl of water and a (believe it or not) full soap in his hand is most polite as he literally begs you to wash your hand then and there. Don't touch his water or the soap unless you have a twentier in your pocket. Never ever touch his towel, even if it was your pay-

You look back at the basins. Unless you hurry you will miss the grand display. The problem is scores of others also want a good and close view of the show.

There's this fellow who is trying to match the call of a welf in labour, another is pretending to be an elephant scooping the water with his trunk. (glah glah glaaagh) one of them displays how to take a bath in a basin, Again. it is advisable not to contact the towel. Why of all things ani'l obsessed with a stupid towel? Well, once upon a time, in a public eating place like this I saw a guy putting the towel into his mouth and brushing his teeth with it. plucking out bits and pieces Go ahead, touch it.

So, as the show goes on, you find it more convenient to take a glass of water from the table, forget the soap, go to where the uninvited bare children are peeping from underneath the side screens. and wash the remnants of a hearty meal.

It is now time for a paan but all you are likely to get is some shuparees and lots of choon, a clear sign that other humans were there before you. Just as you light a cigarette to conclude the evening, you are face to face with the bride's father. It's no wonder he never approved of you. Before he realises he has seen you somewhere before, it is always a good idea for the beyadab to vanish into thin air.

In the cool night as your rickshaw passes the flowered Mercedes of the groom, you are mighty glad this was not your wedding. Ayejey rickshavalah bhai. clgarette

Again, the Bangabazar

Sir. We cannot complain against an accident as none is directly or consciously responsible for it. But an accident is no more so if it happens again and again and hence the fire at Bangabazar Monday night - 2nd time in three months cannot be called an accident.

The unlucky hawkersturned-shop owners who had to lose everything in the November fire took heart and are is the way of rebuilding their lots. Most of them owe money to their friends and relatives as they had to begin all over again. The first fire caused them to lose everything they had but the losses were only objective. But the second one (on Monday 29 January) gave them the final blow. They are now robbed of their mental strength. There is now no light, at the end of the tunnel for many. The Eid is very near, and the Bangabazar traders have been turned into paupers. What will they feed themselves and

That the fire tragedy was a sabotage a: ' so was the previous one is getting clear gradually. Perhaps a section or people failed to get allocation of shops in the market and many are, therefore, jealous of the market's liveliness. It is also reported that the shop-owners had been receiving anonymous phone-

their dependants?

calls threatening their lives. So it is time, the authorities should find out the culprits through proper investigation

and punish them accordingly. Should we let the Bangabazar traders die from the reason which they might not have caused even at the cost of their own lives? Razzak Raza

S M Hall. University of Dhaka.

Drudgery

Sir. Cleopatra's days have reincarnated in Bangladesh; only 'they' come in pair these days; in tune with the natural law of day and night, winter and summer, sun and shade, but not male and female. The nation is beset with "gender" problems, a word much in currency in the world of NGOs.

The look (in ancient Egypt) that could sail a thousand ships, cannot navigate a dozen Aricha ferries: but is capable of denuding a developing parliament. Men may come, and men

may go, but 'they' seem to stay on forever. The future generations would read with awe 'their' reign in Bangladesh before the close of the 20th century. There is another problem : the flow of history is said to be politically silted. The ship of state is also stalled. Dredge or drudgery - it makes little difference. A Husnain

Love for the country

Sir. On January 23, 1996. at 6-30 pm, people of Bangladesh waited in front of radio and television sets with drawn breath to hear Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's address to the nation, hoping against hope that it will contain solutions to the present political crisis. But no. we had to become bitterly disappointed as she made it clear that the next general election will be held on February 15 as scheduled and as the opposition political parties are still adamant in their demand for a caretaker government. election will be held without their participation.

We are afraid of a very bleak future, immediately after prime minister's address violence began - many vehicles were damaged and some were set on fire. It puzzles me, why those political parties, who are professing that they are demanding election under a caretaker government for our sake. think nothing of destroying huge private and public property which is a great blow to our economy. Is this the right attitude of persons who really love their country?

The leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina is constantly saying that she is continuing agitation programme to give the people their right to vote and bhat, but boycotting the election she is actually depriving peo-

ple to vote in a congenial atmosphere. If all the major political parties refrain from the election, people will lose enthusiasm and Sheikh Hasina even warned that those who will go to cast votes will have to do it at the

risk of their lives. The Election Commission has taken many steps to ensure free and fair election, voters' list has been made in a different system and in many places identity cards have also been provided. We think that with all these preeautions it would not be possible to cast false votes.

Those who waited eagerly at home for persons from the **Election Commission and be**came delighted to become included in the voters' list. have become very disap-

pointed as all seem useless. I want to evoke the memory of Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina of a popular story. It goes like this — two women were quarrelling over the custody of a child, at one stage they took the dispute to a judge. Listening to both sides, the judge decreed that the child must be halved and be given each a part. He aing this one woman became very excited and implored to give the child to the other woman, she would be happy if the child remains alive

nothing matters more to her A country is like a child to those who are at the top and control its destiny. We hope our political leaders have

enough love for their country to save it from destruction. Nur Jahan (191) East Nastrabad, Chittagong

Room for Cabinet meeting

Sir. The Cabinet sits for a meeting presided over by the Prime. Minister regularly on every Monday, Glimpses of the Cabinet meeting is telecast on the BTV. Cabinet meetings used to be held at Bangabhaban, where former President Ershad, with his usual extravagant flamboyant style, set up a special room for Cabinet meetings with latest electronic gadgets by spending fluge amount of

money. Recently, we find another high-tech (with space-age setting) Cabinet meeting room has been set up in the PM's Tejgaon office by spending over Taka 3 crore. It is very difficult to think such a huge amount has been spent to make a Cabinet meeting room where the meeting is held only once a week. What has happened to the room at Bangabhaban? Has it been dismantled, converting it for some other special purposes?

Cabinet meetings could have easily been held in the facilities in the conference centre which is in fact part of PM's office complex. This poor country has more miseries to suffer due to flamboyant qualities of leadership.

May Allah save this country. MRR Khan 38, Naya Paltan, Dhaka-1000.

The BOI guide Sir. The Board of Investment (BOI) has published a guide called ."Guide to investment in Bangladesh." Our class teacher suggested to buy that guide from the cell of BO! at the international trade fair. But when I went there the guide was not available: A representative of BOI requested me to come to their office to get the book without any cost.

I went to the office of 24th January and I got a signboard on the table saying that Applia Kathai Applake Anek Gurutto Dewa Hobe (you will be given more importance if you are precise in words). I met the deputy director sitting at the table and requested him to deliver me a guide. He asked me to be

sited. waited accordingly for about one hour. He was doing nothing important except making some (less importantl telephone calls. And after one hour he left the office room silently and never came back. I was very surprised at his behaviour. My question is: which one should be changed - the inscription, or the behaviour of the director?

Sheikh Shahjahan Accounting Department Dhaka University.