

Call to Session

President surprised us all by his sudden convening of the first session of the highly controversial sixth parliament. Only a day or two before he spoke of the possibility of a reference to the Supreme Court if there was a political consensus.

The calling of the parliament session sets the game plan of the ruling party into operation and closes all other options towards a political settlement except through the amendment route, already rejected by the opposition.

We do not know who will win out of this continued conflict. But we sure know who is losing out from all this. It is the country and its people.

What is obvious is that once again we have lost an opportunity for a peacefully negotiated solution to our political problems. We seem to have an endless capacity to prolong our conflicts, drag on our differences and increase mutual hatred.

Missing his Leadership

Had Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman been here on his 76th birthday what would have his banner read? In 1971 it proclaimed — Ebarer sangram muktir sangram, Ebarer sangram swadhinotar sangram — electrifying the whole nation with its message of freedom and independence.

For over two decades both the quantity and quality of independence of our people have progressively been shrinking instead of travelling up to the point where civic and economic rights would have dawned and tinged the life of every individual citizen.

It Surely was Love

Abdur Razzak, 32 and a farm hand in Shibganj, Bogra had only a very ordinary conjugal life. It was perhaps routine that his young wife Jyotsna would somehow displease him and get a good beating. At least their day started in that fashion on Saturday. And Razzak had gone as usual off to his farming chores in the fields after a morning of quarrelling and beating.

There was a pair in medieval Italy, or precisely in Shakespeare's early drama, both of which died as a result of misinformation. Although the newspaper report in a vernacular daily does not say anything about how Jyotsna reacted to the news of Razzak's death the episode cannot but remind one of the raw Shakespearean tragedy — Romeo and Juliet.

Thermidorians and Girondists of the World Unite

The moderates of the world should unite to secure peace in the Middle-East — a comprehensive and lasting peace. Saudi Arabia and the other ACC countries did well by attending the summit since on the specifics of the solution the Jury is still out.

DURING the reign of Darius II, early 5th century BC, a Jewish colony was established in Elephantine, in Egypt. The Egyptians deeply resented the exclusiveness of the Jewish religion.

About two and a half millennium later, 29 world leaders met at Sharm El-Sheikh, the Egyptian resort town on March 13, and discussed not the destruction of the Jewish colony, but the security-guarantee of the country inhabited by the children of Abraham.

The Palestinians and the Jews, both sons of Abraham, both Semites, have made great strides in co-habiting side by side, in the Promised Land, thus holding the prospect of ending the diaspora of Abraham's children.

The word terrorism is deeply emotive and it evokes as many visions in as many minds and climes for the way it is used and for the case it is abused. The world has not yet forgotten the blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem on July 22, 1946 by the Zionist extremists with a tally of 91 deaths.

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World Trade Centre by some Islamic militants is a grim reminder of the fact — how fragile the civil-urban peace can be. A little back in history one clearly remembers the terrorism, let loose by Robespierre and his cohorts in the name of Revolution; although the moderates — Thermidorians and Girondist suffered temporary needs, good sense prevailed in the long run. Leaders like Condorcet, Madame Roland



dubbing some state action in the name of law and order as state terrorism. But there is a gradual, though, slow, acceptance of a common declaration of what is terrorism and state terrorism. Almost everybody today agrees that Nihilism is DURABLE — something that is violent will never survive.

The same year, King Hussein of Jordan summarily dismissed the British commander of the Jordanian Army — Glubb Pasha, thus incurring the wrath of both Anthony Eden and Foreign Secretary Salwyn Lloyd.

The twists and turns of these dramatic developments in the Middle Eastern politics are but the gust in the mill of strategists and diplomats of today. President Clinton's one-day visit to Israel was a symbol but he and his advisors were still aware of the fact that the Middle East peace process, if derailed on the treacherous quicks and of Arab politics, could not only hurt the peace, but would hurt his November election as well.

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The Ganges Water Issue — on the Record

by Anjad Hossain Khan

While negotiating the Ganges water agreement of 1977, Bangladesh could foresee the Indian game. That was the reason Bangladesh insisted on the long term data of the Ganges at Farakka as the basis for sharing.

PRIOR to the 8th SAARC Summit meeting in New Delhi in May, 1995, Pronab Mukherjee, External Affairs Minister of India, underlined the need for regional cooperation among the member countries.

After the summit, P V Narasimha Rao, Prime Minister of India had a meeting with Begum Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister of Bangladesh on the Ganges water issue. This was followed by Foreign Minister level meeting between the two countries and two rounds of meetings were held by the two Foreign Secretaries of Bangladesh and India.

Pranab Mukherjee, the External Affairs Minister in a press briefing after the summit described the relation between Bangladesh and India as excellent. On the Ganges water issue he said that India wanted to find a solution and referred to the ongoing Foreign Secretary level meeting.

Mukherjee in another press interview with PTI said that the Farakka issue is a complex problem and that India would take initiative for a solution of the Ganges water sharing issue.

Eight months have passed with no forward movement in deciding a date for a meeting of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission. As reported India took some move initially to have an early meeting in August, 1995 in New Delhi. Bangladesh proposed

Ganges at Farakka as the basis for sharing. It was agreed to share the Ganges water at Farakka based on the discharge data at Farakka between 1948 to 1973.

The unilateral release of Ganges water by India below Farakka has gradually declined and in 1993, only 13,000 cusec was available at Hardinge Bridge till last week of March.

A new controversy has been raised by some experts about the future water sharing of the Ganges as India is going to construct another Barrage on the Ganges at Kanpur. What should be basis of water sharing based on which data? They have suggested average availability of water at different points at the Ganges including Kanpur and Farakka.

India may construct any number of Barrages as they want, but permanent sharing of the Ganges at Farakka must be made based on the agreed data on availability of the Ganges water at Farakka between 1948 and 1973 with 100 per cent guarantee.

The third suggestion of unilateral release of 25,000 cusec in lean months pending agreement is ominous. Such hints were widely published after last Foreign Secretary level meeting. They did a wonderful job after three rounds of talks to refer the matter to the Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission.

The situation in south western region is also similar. The Gorai river dried up in January, 1996. The salinity has increased in Khulna area and there is acute shortage of water for irrigation and drinking purposes. The environmental damage is much more than expected.

In this connection it is interesting to note the recommendation of J N Dixit, ex-Foreign Secretary of India that India should release the Ganges water unilaterally. He has also suggested that technical discussion on long-term water sharing should continue.

In an article in the Indian Express, he suggested that India should try to help Bangladesh in solving the economic problems. Without creating a controversy on the issue, India should try to create an atmosphere of confidence to re-

mediate the mistrust and misunderstanding with Bangladesh. Without political will the water sharing problem cannot be solved. So far, this was lacking from the Indian side.

Without any clear directions from the political masters, Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission will not be able to submit any concrete proposal. The augmentation issue must be delinked from sharing.

The permanent sharing of the Ganges and the Teesta and other border rivers should not pose any serious problem for the two countries. The agreement of 1977 on Ganges water and respective shares of

every moment is precious, every move should be cautious and thoughtful. But how to do it and who would do it? Nobody knows apparently except urging all the politicians to resolve the crisis through negotiation. But we brothers about our agony and economic hardship? Who would compensate the losses incurred by the people individually, nationally and internationally?

Who would give back our children the time they are passing idly when they should have been vibrating in schools, colleges and universities — learning and acquiring knowledge and achieving for themselves and for the nation. Who could console a day-labourer when God forbid, he/she could not see the burial of his/her beloved parent let alone be at his/her death bed because of the transport strike? I am not mentioning about the killings and deaths of the political activists as it has, sadly, become a standard feature of the political movement. You cannot progress in the movement until and unless you have corpses!

Nobody knows the answer to these questions but realising that this can not go on we do not deserve this. We are all unhappy, depressed and helpless. We are all hostages in the hands of the politicians and caught in the dream of attaining democracy! But if democracy cannot guarantee us our unalienable rights like — liberty of living and pursuit of happiness then what is its use for? Successful democracy breeds literate people and economic development. How can we achieve these keeping pawn our own economy and education. Certainly we do not want to go back to the period when we were called a bottomless basket. We need to understand how the politicians could think that they would be able to run the country once its economic structure is broken beyond repair?

Now that the garment-factory workers have seen good days, thousands of boys and girls have started earning, somebody will have to provide them more the opportunity to earn. But the scenario is otherwise, and once the garment factories are closed down (some are already closed) no government who would come to power in near future would be able to provide the jobs and bring economic and social stability in the country. We shudder to think of that situation and perhaps the politicians too. They are the leaders — supposedly more intelligent, more knowledgeable and should know the answers. May be they have the solution and have kept it under their sleeves. If so they should assure us that nothing would happen to us if the ports and economic institutions are closed for an indefinite period, and the factories and industries will be closed down. They would solve all our problems whenever they are in power. They would return the cars broken or burnt without any fault of the owners, they would give back the investment fund of a poor hawk, which they have lost due to hartal or strike.

Most of us, I assume, are not concerned about constitution and legal implications. Most people vote for the system without understanding the efficacy of their voting power. What they really want is that their leaders should be worthy of public trust and responsibility, and behave rationally, reasonably keeping public interest above their own ego.

Now time has come for the politicians to understand and undertake programme to provide economic security to ease suffering, to develop human potential. And such programmes should include, among other things, civil rights laws, minimum standard of living, medical care for all and, above all, education. Unless we have educated citizens who can think for themselves, democracy would be useless. I am afraid, whatever the politicians are sure of achieving from this political tug of war; whatever good intention they have of giving us back a free and fair election atmosphere, one thing they can never give us back, our children's valuable time which they have snatched from them, which the children could have used properly for learning, taking training, for achieving for themselves, for the nation. Our children are weeping in anguish — and along with them the whole country. Can't the politicians feel it and spare the innocent victims these hartals and non-cooperation?

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meeting in September at Dhaka in August was not convened to them. Since then political compulsions in both the countries have accelerated with political turmoil in both the countries.

The Indian Foreign Minister in his meeting with Foreign Minister of Bangladesh on 20 December, 1995, again raised the water sharing issue along with other bilateral issues.

The following issues have been raised by India: a) Joint monitoring of the discharge of the Ganges at Farakka in India and at the Hardinge Bridge in Bangladesh.

b) Water of the Ganges at Farakka will be shared without any agreement but based on the present availability. c) India is willing to release 25,000 cusec of Ganges Water at Farakka in the lean period pending agreement.

The Farakka Barrage has 3 main structures through which water can flow. The Barrage, the Feeder Canal Regulator and the Navigation Lock. The water released in all three structures has to be monitored jointly. How does it help is not very clear if there is no agreement on water sharing, and the water available at Farakka is shared. Since 1975 agreement, India has started extensive withdrawal of water in the upper reaches of the Ganges above Farakka. That was the reason India while signing the MOU on water sharing deleted the guarantee clause of 1977 agreement and introduced the concept of sharing water as available at Farakka.

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viewing the country's Constitution merely as a scrap of paper! Some of them are trying to invoke the doctrine of necessity to bring even fundamental changes in it. I do not understand how they define the term 'necessity'. Is Bangladesh at war with any country? Is there a devastating earthquake which has obliterated the capital city of Dhaka? No, nothing of this sort. May be, we have a bunch of sick and greedy politicians who are ruining the country's polity and economy for the sake of their selfish motives.

The story of the last two years of Bangladesh politics is nothing but a tale of irrationality, and now, some people are trying to sanctify this irrationality even at the cost of our cherished Constitution. When our politicians try to out-power and not out-wit their opponents, it can be anything but a rational act. Unfortunately, this type of irrationality is gaining an upper hand in our body politics, leading to a situation when we may have to say

'good-bye' to our nascent democracy and welcome intervention from extra-constitutional quarters to save the country from total ruination.

As such, my appeal to our political leaders and the intellectuals would be not to encourage the present trend of irrationality in our political arena. Any doctrine of necessity incubated out of irrationality can perhaps make one party or the other the winner, but our country, our people and our democratic process will be the ultimate losers. We will be all dead in the long run!

Ahmed Ghani Dhaka

A boring situation

Sir, It is a tiring thing to be sitting at home doing nothing every day because of hartal and non-cooperation. I can't see my friends or play with them. We miss out so much in studies at school and the teachers are afraid that we can't finish

Sniggy A student of Class IV Surbarban School, Dhaka

To the Editor

Doctrines of irrationality?

Sir, I am an ordinary citizen of the country. Obviously I am neither a politician nor an intellectual (!) but I hope, I am neither sick nor I lack common sense. So long we have been told by the political scientists to believe that the Constitution of any country is always sacred, and it is highly undesirable to bring any fundamental changes in it at whim. This does not mean that it cannot be altered in the greatest interest of the people. By our experience, we have seen changes brought by the successive regimes, although the most crucial amendment was brought by a democratically elected Prime Minister, which ushered an era of one-party totalitarianism on the freshly-dug graveyard of democracy. But were these changes accepted by the people?

Coming to the present context of our sick politics, I simply feel awed when I see our politico-social thinkers