

How Much Longer, this Strife?

Today we are into the 15th day of the opposition's non-cooperation movement. Two whole weeks of complete work stoppage is now about to give into the third. The obvious question of the moment is: when will all this end? Time has come for the opposition to start thinking about the impact of its programme on the whole society, especially its economy. If politics is about people, and if opposition parties expect to get public support in the next election, then definitely they will have to think about the overall impact of their programme on the country and its people.

Our two previous non-cooperation experiences were against the British and the Pakistanis, the latter led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In the case of both we felt that the existing industries were meant to exploit us and transfer resources from our hands, so destroying them meant hurting the enemy. But how can that logic apply today? Are we non-cooperating with a colonial or foreign government? Are the industries that are crumbling owned by people who do not belong here? These and many such questions are surfacing in the public mind which the votaries of the movement will have to answer.

The opposition's position that it is the government which is responsible for all this can be sustained up to a point. Yes it is the government which, by refusing to accept for the last two years, the demand for a neutral caretaker government to conduct elections, has subjected the country to this prolonged crisis. There are many other flaws of which the government is guilty. But the opposition has its own share of blame, and the blame of hurting the economy is squarely going to fall on it. With the introduction of the Caretaker Government Bill and the consensus for an election in May, we believe there is now sufficient ground for a dialogue and, at least, a temporary suspension of the non-cooperation movement.

Don't break the backbone of the economy any further. Please remember that a hungry and desperate population is a dangerous lot. Everything may be swept away when their outrage breaks out.

Muktijuddha Jadughar

The Liberation War Museum was formally opened in Dhaka yesterday. This comes as the fulfilment of a necessity. The relics and memorabilia of the great war of the Bengalee people's liberation and its heroes could very well be collected, preserved and exhibited by our National Museum. There is no way to tell the national institution has been particularly aware of its responsibilities in the matter. Now with the establishment of the present museum by some eminent partisans of that war we can say with satisfaction it has been done better this way. For very many successive governments of Bangladesh including the present one are not above suspicion on the point of abidance by the Liberation War.

It is indeed better that the museum is being set up and run by war heroes whose bonafide has remained beyond reproach over the endlessly confusing and diabolically treacherous two decades. The sanctity of the museum will advance in step with the credibility of it. And a hardly better quarter could there be to build that credibility and sanctity — not the government by any chance.

There is no greater event in the millenia-old history of our people — and pregnant with more potential for a nation's becoming than the Liberation War. And within years of its triumphant conclusion it was reduced into a butt of every kind of canard — to build one or annihilate another. There are politicians holding office of this state who believe it was more a foreign nation's machination than the Liberation War that freed our people and gave them a state. Such characters will come and go and the Muktijuddha Jadughar will remain forever to teach posterity of the heroism and sacrifice of 1971 and the true significance of that glorious war.

To the Editor...

"This Must Stop" Sir, I am shocked by the opinion expressed by Mr S Hasan under the heading "This Must Stop" (DS, March 16, 1996). His opinion is indeed more alarming than any I have read so far, for, in between the lines, one reads a defence of state repression in the name of maintaining law and order. This advocacy can only be expected from some one who is a beneficiary of say, a military regime which I am sure Mr Hasan is not. True, opposition activists have not been protesting peacefully all the time. There has been much violent retaliation; but perhaps Mr Hasan is not aware that the law-enforcing agencies glorified in the opinion have on numerous occasions of violence in the Dhaka University campus stood motionless when a certain student wing was on the offensive, only to crack down when opposition activists bared their teeth. The writer is sympathetic to loss of petrol pumps during the agitation; does he share the same concern for the petty traders in old Dhaka who have been subject to vandalism or 'authorities' patronised chandabaji? Or does whatever occurs on the other side of the city become a matter of no concern? I am appalled at such brazen one-sidedness on the part of the opinion giver.

THE economy of Bangladesh is heading for a severe attack caused by the current political crisis. Available statistics from various sources and newspaper reports only seem to point to dusts and graves in and around economic fronts. Serious damage has already been inflicted so far with the lingering political stalemate and the worst is yet to hit in the absence of any amicable settlement in sight. The constitution and the politics of any country are believed to be for the people but in today's Bangladesh just the reverse seems to hold — people, allegedly, are forced to serve the constitution and the politics.

The present brief note aims to deliberate on the adverse impacts that seemingly, crippled the economy and the ramifications of such adversities spilling over to the future. It is not our purpose at the moment to identify or introduce the "hero" or the "villain" of the drama but to present the costs of the drama itself on the lives of the teeming millions for whose interest the drama is arguably staged.

The first victim of the on-going political gimmicks seems to be the reform programmes that were promised to be completed. Many of these had a good start but had to be stopped in infancy. Reforms ceased to work or implement since the days of Mayoral elections. The half-hearted and half-completed reforms apparently inflicted more pains than a polar situation (i.e. corner

Whither the State of Economy!

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solutions) could, perhaps, impose. In its thirsty bid to hold on to power for a second term, the ruling party has long been forgotten of macro-economic stability and, allegedly, tinkered with policies to suit their own political pursuits. With the 15th February drawing closer, the reforms were shelved for a distant future, and with the outcome thereof, the programmes seem destined for a demise.

The agricultural sector — still the largest sector in terms of value addition and employment generation has been faring poorly over the last few years. After a certain spurt in late 1980s, a sign of stagnation brewed over and the country now stands to be a net-deficit in foodgrains. The fertilizer crisis of this year, that may adversely affect boro output, appears to have been caused by two important factors: (a) disruption of communication links due to hartals and non-cooperation movement which dislaid any movement of inputs and outputs. Farmers not only failed to receive inputs at a fair price but also were forced to dump their produces in the wake of huge stocks of the perishables; (b) the crisis, allegedly, were also fuelled by the lack of any grip of the government on the overall distribution mechanism. This failure had its roots in two important aspects. First, when the crisis

was on, the government was seemingly off from having any legal authority to exert its influence of governance. The country, as of today, seems to be ruled by the signals of the opposition and not by these who claim to be empowered in doing so. Second, allegedly, politicisation of dealerships also, to an extent, aggravated the situation. Third, fixation of fertilizer prices at a much lower level (then market clear-

ing equilibrium one) also appeared to have caused the fire to flare up. An apparent 'boom' to farmers (on the eve of election) interms of lower fertilizer prices thus turned out to be a 'bane' on them. By and large, agricultural sector would suffer a setback and that might be reflected in upcoming lower boro production. The size of the food deficit might then grow higher with its serious implications on foreign exchange reserves.

On the external front, the sordid state of the garments sector is well known and discussed elsewhere. It is re-

ported that garments worth about Tk 2000 crores ready for shipment have been lying dumped in different factories. Foreigners are redirecting their orders to other countries. Thus the target of \$ 4 billion for 1995/96 from this sector may not be achieved. And with a virtual collapse of communication and shipment facilities, other exportables are also poised to face the jolt. The

development work, of the country had been stalled sticking serious ramifications in terms of growth-related activities and productive ventures. At the current rate of price rise, concerned quarters tend to argue that the inflationary rate might knock a level of two digits — perhaps, first time after a much lower level at the start of, early 1990s. This higher rate might adversely affect, among others, the exchange rate and hence might necessitate a major devaluation of the Taka. With export earnings showing a distinct dip and import surge taking place (mostly due to imports of food) the current account deficit might roll back to the state of the 1980s. And as said earlier, the budget deficit is also likely to show an unfavourable movement. By and large, the state of the macro-economic indicators with which we felt hopes, seem to lead us to a state of hopes.

With a 'non-representative' and 'incredible' government in power, allegedly, the flow of aid commitments might also get hurt. This would be exacerbated by the lower level of utilisation of earlier committed funds into this country. It has become a serious doubt whether a national budget could be presented in the wake of non-commitment of donors to the aid kitty.

The economy or Bangladesh

is, thus, set for a bleak future. Of course never it had experienced any boom of a kind that economic literature would possibly accept but the beginning of the 1990s seem to have injected some hopes in the ocean of despair. As it appears, the growth rate of GDP could be as low as 3.5 percent in 1995/96. The next government of Bangladesh to be thronged through a neutral, caretaker government might have to grapple with these lots of economic misshaps.

The most serious blow that the country faces now is in terms of its image outside. Whether it is aid, trade or investment — the image counts the most. The benefits of our bad image in being reaped by the neighbouring countries. It takes a hell lot of time to regain a lost image. Even if everything goes well from tomorrow, it would take few months, even few years, to forestall overseas confidence in our business, trade and industry.

We, therefore, would like to see a full-stop to the on going crisis. If the current crisis continues for another month or so, needless to mention, economic hardships of the people would so mount that any government in power might find it difficult to tackle. The switch in time and government bill in time and save nine of the pains that we are faced with. The same stitch by the same party now seems to save none. Should we not expect more statesmanship?

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



flow of remittances, another important item in our export basket, has been reduced due to the stalemate. Imports of raw materials of industrial production have been jeopardised causing immense economic hardships to the industrial plants.

The Annual Development Plan (ADP) for 1995/96 had an ambitious target to fulfill. It is being reported that the Finance Ministry is set out to cut that, size short and it is no wonder that the revised size of the ADP (1995/96) might stand behind that of 1994/95. This would indicate that the

disance under Article 93 providing for the neutral caretaker government and refer it to the Appellate Division of the SC for verdict and to referendum for ratification. Unfortunately, this interpretation seems to be based on assumption. This has no legal standing. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh does not envisage any addition or alteration to any provision through an ordinance. It does not allow any authority other than the Parliament to make any amendment. The provision for caretaker government cannot be maintained under Article 93 read with 48. The President has the power to promulgate an ordinance under Article 93, but this ordinance cannot make other laws excepting amendment to the constitution. For incorporating the provision for administering elections under neutral caretaker government Article 56 has to be amended through a Bill to be passed by the Parliament under the provision of Article 142 of the constitution, and then ratified in a referendum.

After strenuous struggle against rigged and flawed elections in Bangladesh, we could establish a unique example of legally free and fair election in the one of February 1991. To maintain that tradition it would be an excellent act would be able to scrap the rigged election of February 15. But since 90 days were already over after the dissolution of the 5th Parliament and there is no scope now to hold

PM's Offer versus Opposition's Five Points

by Dr K M Saiful Islam

TODAY'S political proxy-rim emanates mainly from the bizarre circumstances under which the February 15 election was administered and its flabbergasting, baffling aftermath, and the PM's national address of March 3.

Although the prior warnings possibly went unheeded, the insiders of the ruling party in particular and the people in general must have by now come to a realization that holding of the said elections by-passing the mainstream opposition parties was a fundamental mistake, shortsighted decision and failure of statesmanship. The nation is paying for it.

In the backdrop of reportedly widespread rigging, stuffing of ballot boxes surpassing all previous records, overcasting of votes against only 9-10 per cent actual turn-out, non-return of polling officers, non-acceptance of complaints, and abandoning investigation against charges of malpractices, the PM's expression of 'gratefulness' and thanks for sincere and brave role of the people to responding to her call for participating in the elections and the success achieved, gave rise to sharp reaction amongst the opposition in particular and people in general. The PM would have earned laurel of the people, and gained the fast receding confidence of the masses should she have said that she was sorry for the low turn out of voters because of non-participation of the opposition, and the charged, sulfoating atmosphere under which the polls were administered.

Why Two Elections?

The ruling party's hypothesis built up around two months ahead of the polls to hold two elections — the 7th parliament under a neutral government — meaning bypassing or defeating the opposition's dictates and clamour, and the resultant 'victory' of the government again was a fundamental mistake tinged with sophistry. Politics is basically a science of diplomacy and compromise, give-and-take formula. Had the ruling party been endowed with farsighted advisers, perhaps the political scenario would have been entirely different today. Had the government accepted the caretaker arrangement earlier without clouding the issue instead of creating opportunities for general assumption that it has

climbed down to accept under pressure, it could discreetly cut the opportunity of the claim of opposition's victory, and could enjoy people's support which has now evinced a phenomenal decline. Above all such an acceptance could avert the onerous and ultimately catastrophic. Moreover, who will bear the cost of another 300 crore taka for another election? Certainly, if you are a true patriotic citizen of this poor country, you must not allow it to come from national exchequer! Why should Bangladesh as a welfare state achieved through bloody revolution bear the brunt of huge economic losses only due to the follies of some myopic leaders?

Politics of Negativism

Now the other side, Parliament is the best constitutional platform to fight for realization of the rights of the people who vote for their representatives. But only for a seat at Magura-2, quitting the parliament by resigning en masse (Dec '94) to take to the street for capturing power by toppling a legally elected government two years ahead of the completion of its term was ill-conceived, hazardous journey and nothing short of politics of negativism.

AL president's persistent and vociferous demand for PM's resignation, seemingly as the only solution, and her protracted nostalgia to sit with the PM make one sceptical if she is at all interested in developing a political system for the welfare of the people, or indeed fighting more for the oyster of an individual to capture that position! If it is primarily for a person, the ultimate result may not deliver the goods, to the nation; decision taken by the PM in running the state administration may not emerge from the individual, but from the ruling party as a whole which is, of course, suffering from marked inefficiency and intellectual bankruptcy, from the very inception, in taking major decisions. When personal acrimony overshadows greater values of politics and welfare of the people, it is no longer politics in its real sense, and the consequence of such a design is liable to be fraught with danger.

Non-cooperation Against Whom?

The concept of non-cooperation movement in this sub-continent possibly sprang from the famous non-violent non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi against the colonial British regime. The celebrated leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's non-violent non-cooperation movement of March 1971 was against the West Pakistan rulers who had different ethnic and cultural base and who were behaving like aliens. Hence the non-cooperation movement is historically non-violent and against colonial rulers. But now 'non-cooperation movement' against whom? Is it not the other name of 'hartal' which cannot be called a movement, rather an anti-people exercise — the only play in the hands of the opposition — to cripple the state administration and economy regardless of the sufferings and agonies of the general population? If it is against violent and non-intimidatory, how many people would support it? Could it be above 10 per cent? Such a movement must be spontaneous participation of the people. Some people may cooperate, while others may not, but this must not be forced on the people. When forced, it takes the shape of violence culminating in terrorism and anti-state activities, a crime punishable under law of the land leading to death penalty. How could you call the acts of burning of petrol pumps, banks, hurling petrol bombs at motor vehicles plying on the streets and wounding passengers, and examples of 'non-cooperation movement'?

Are not these acts examples of sabotage? Can the opposition expect any support of the masses by indulging in such anti-people activities? If such terror tactics are not shunned, the whole act is liable to be boomerang and ultimately go against the opposition. How a shop owner will earn his livelihood and how will he pay salaries to his workers? How a rickshawpuller earn his minimum means when there are no passengers? How fertilizer can reach the farmers if trucks are not allowed to move? Is there any further intellectual crime than depriving the children of obtaining education from schools? The opposition should not create such a sulfoating, bitter situation when the common people (the general voters) and the businessmen will be constrained to take to the street for their existence and resist the already decaying forces of opposition for the vexatious strike. It would therefore be patriotic as also a diplomatically wise step should the opposition immediately withdraw this strike considering general people's miseries.

Order like 'people's' curfew, 'formation of people's caretaker government by the opposition' if the President fails to do it, 'quit, or face movement' (means nothing but 'hartal' and destruction) — are not certainly the language of a democrat.

Opposition's Five Points

As a sequel to the PM's national address of March 3, the AL president advanced five points proposal to solve the present political predicament. Let us now examine the plausibilities of these points.

1. Release of all opposition leaders and workers by March 9 and withdrawal of false cases and warrants. Many leaders have already been released, and others are in process, but again fixing a specific date, i.e. March 9 sounds irrational and more of an 'order'. All the innocent detainees must be released, but persons against whom specific charges of crimes (including property destruction) exist, should not be released, but be tried, under law of the land since terrorists are enemies of the nation no matter to which party they belong.

2. Stoppage of repolling, cancellation of February 15 election results, and resignation of the government. Because points 2 and 3 are consecutive, to make the study brief, let us analyze this under 3.

3. Formation of a neutral non-party caretaker government by March 10 after President's meeting with all political parties and completion of parliament election by May. Any proposal coming down from the top hierarchy of prominent party must be backed by sound rationalism, and must not smack of a type of boastful order. Formation of a new form of government has to go through an arduous path of consultation with jurists, dialogue in RTC for modalities, passage of legislation, best choice of people, reference to SC, or passage by the parliament, ratification by a referendum and so on. How can you visualize the completion of all these processes only in four days? However, on PM's instruction (March 8), the President started parleys (March 10) with the opposition leaders and eminent jurists and legal experts and the demand for holding election in May was also accepted.

According to some constitutional experts and lawyers, to solve the present political impasse, if a void is created by the resignation of the PM and dissolution of the parliament, the President under 'doctrine of necessity' or by exercising his inherent and residuary power can promulgate an Or-

derance under Article 93 providing for the neutral caretaker government and refer it to the Appellate Division of the SC for verdict and to referendum for ratification. Unfortunately, this interpretation seems to be based on assumption. This has no legal standing. The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh does not envisage any addition or alteration to any provision through an ordinance. It does not allow any authority other than the Parliament to make any amendment. The provision for caretaker government cannot be maintained under Article 93 read with 48. The President has the power to promulgate an ordinance under Article 93, but this ordinance cannot make other laws excepting amendment to the constitution. For incorporating the provision for administering elections under neutral caretaker government Article 56 has to be amended through a Bill to be passed by the Parliament under the provision of Article 142 of the constitution, and then ratified in a referendum.

After strenuous struggle against rigged and flawed elections in Bangladesh, we could establish a unique example of legally free and fair election in the one of February 1991. To maintain that tradition it would be an excellent act would be able to scrap the rigged election of February 15. But since 90 days were already over after the dissolution of the 5th Parliament and there is no scope now to hold

the pools again for the 6th Parliament, and that a parliament is a must for passing the said bill, the opposition has no other alternative than to accept, with generosity, its existence just for a day only to get the bill passed. After passage, the vexed parliament will thus stand automatically dissolved.

4. Necessary compensation for political leaders, workers, students, teachers, journalists, professionals and commonman victimised by the government-sponsored terrorism and repression. This should not one-way, but both-ways. Repression in power, but nihilist acts like setting fire to the TNO office, Palashbari Exchange office, residence of BNP MP at Gaibandha, PWD, T and T office, several banks, and damaging banks Khulna City Corporation (on March 9), murder of government employees at Pabna, manhandling and locking up of MP in a room at Sunamganj, ransacking of Saikupa Government College Students Union office, and College hostel at Saikupa, damaging Sub-Registrar's office, Railway office, and TNO office at Kaliganj (March 10); hurling petrol bombs at DC's residences at Rajshahi, Chandpur and Barisal (March 11-12); burning MP's residence at Kishoreganj, assaulting DC of Rajshahi, Labdur and Manpower Minister and damaging his car in Dhaka, exploding crude bombs injuring 10 people at Sadarghat terminal; hurling bombs at Circuit House, Judge Court and Zila Parishad office injuring 11 persons including five police-

men at Jessore (March 13) — are not only acts of terrorism but are anti-state activities carried out by the rowdies of opposition under the 'camouflage' of 'agitated masses' which are not only destroying the country, but are also eroding the image of the opposition.

5. Security of life and property of the people and improvement of law and order situation. This is mainly meant for the opposition, whose hoodlums and mastans are out to destroy national property as partly described earlier. It is not conceivable that government can destroy property of the nation or of the people security of life and law and order situation arise when there is reign of terror let loose by opposition forces. Improvement can be done only when such terrorism is stopped.

Conclusion

If Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea could develop so much with initial limited resources, why Bangladesh cannot flourish with more if not enormous resources? Because ethnically Bangladesh is more congenial, we stand a better opportunity to flourish provided we are able to guard the unending greed of our disgruntled political leaders, establish a stable government, and create healthy avenues for development. If Israel and Turkey could rise through coalition of two major parties, why can't we?

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Dhaka Day by Day

The Ubiquitous Rickshaw Repairing Centres

by Morshed Ali Khan

A wooden box under the shade of a tree by the roadside, attached to the box is a range of tools at the end of an array of metal chains, and a single man is at work on a flat rickshaw tyre or on its ballbearings — this is a rickshaw service centre of the city.

For an estimated 100,000 rickshaws plying the city streets, the network of the manual three-wheeler service centres is phenomenal. Every other road of the city has got one, two or more of these service centres. The rickshawpuller of the city is hardly feeling the absence, wherever he is in the city, of such a stall.

For most minor breakdowns the customer himself is required to do the repairing at these centres by using a tool — a hammer, a plier, a screw driver or a purper which are firmly attached by the chains to the box. The owner, a rickshaw repairer himself, takes this precaution to avoid theft.

Charges for this self-service repairs may vary depending on the time taken by the customer. For instance, inflating a wheel would cost Tk 2, use of hammer and other tools would be Tk 1, greasing joints and bearings up to Tk 5 and if the customer uses more than one facilities he is charged accordingly.

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Major repairs such as wheel alignment, change of spokes, ballbearing repair of leak, brakes and releasing the rickshaw of joint

ported from India and the quality is 'not so good'. He added that Chinese parts were also available in the market but they were 'little dearer'. Nobody exactly knows how many service centres there are in the city but for the thousands of rickshaws in the city, the service is always in sight.

