

Stop Political Violence

We are shocked and extremely concerned at the widespread violence that left four people dead and scores injured in Chittagong on the day of BNP's public meeting there. What is even more deplorable is the attempt by both Awami League and BNP to put blame on each other for this needless frenzy. After years of bitterness and acrimony, this is the time for rebuilding their image as the prime parties dedicated to the cause of democracy. People really want to see them behave responsibly and sensibly.

The Awami League leadership's plea for restraint and a fitting reply through ballots has gone well with the people. So has the BNP's recent statements urging unity and tolerance, notwithstanding its initial flurry of ill-directed attacks. If the two major parties fail to practise what they preach, the nation can only have the worst possible consequences to face. They will make the caretaker government's job more difficult and in the process lose people's confidence which is just at the stage of being restored.

We want to believe that party hierarchies of both AL and BNP are committed to democratic practices and are keen to settle the political scores through ballots. Can it be then that the party policies and practices at times fail to correspond with each other only because there are non-complying middle or lower rungs where things get sabotaged? We do not know but we can sense foul play sometimes. This had happened during hartal and non-cooperation programmes when ambulances or vehicles carrying journalists came under attack.

So we feel that the instructions and orders from the top party leadership must get through clearly and precisely. When all the parties have pledged to extend their fullest support to the caretaker government for holding a free and fair election, a violence of Chittagong-style goes against the spirit of that pledge. The Chittagong episode must not repeat anywhere in the country because that will unleash a chain reaction of political violence. We once again urge restraint.

Liquidity Crisis

The moneyline is taut and tense under a tremendous pressure. Lack of business during the long drawn-out political trouble has created an unprecedented liquidity crunch for the scheduled banks. With the economy coming to life again the demand for money has multiplied from all directions. The importers, other traders, industrialists, and depositors including the government itself, are all set to withdraw money from the banks which have not had fund replenishments for quite sometime now.

Poor revenue collection by the government is bound to increase its offtake from the banking sector to meet the current deficit, this adding a critical dimension to the overall liquidity crisis. We can be quickly on the mend if the government-announced austerity cuts are effected in public spendings in conjunction with a stepped up collection of revenues. Public sector borrowing has to taper off to cater to the monetary needs of the private sector which, in a way, holds the key, at this juncture, to quick economic recovery.

The banks seem to have run out of their excess liquidity to come in aid of each other, a fact that is illustrated by the sky-rocketing interbank rates themselves. The banks are looking towards the central bank for a shot in the arm of their declining liquidities adding that they have exhausted their stock of bonds not be able to fall back on them.

The Bangladesh Bank is being urged by the scheduled banks to concede on refinancing through the discount method or reduce the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) required to be maintained with the central bank. Lowering of the CRR by one per cent out of the mandatory five could make a sizable amount of liquidity available to the financial market. One recalls that when the central bank raised the lending rates by way of effecting a credit squeeze a couple of months ago, the banks had demanded some of the above relaxations from the central bank. One has to see if in a changed perspective the Bangladesh Bank would like to be concessionary in its approach, without diluting the monetary management principles.

We put faith in the market forces to accelerate the economic recovery process.

Admission Rush

This year 15 candidates compete for a Dhaka University seat on an average — an increase by three students over the last year's number. And this is despite the fact that the seats have gone up by 244 from the previous 3636 to 3880. So here is a situation where 14 out of a possible number of 15 students will have the door of higher education slammed before their face unless, of course, they try somewhere else.

Now what will happen to the huge number of students who have passed HSC but rejected at the level of university tests? Technically anyone passing the HSC examination is qualified to be enrolled for the tertiary education. But the educational facilities at the level fall far short of the demand. Now here is an ambivalence our education system is finding increasingly difficult to resolve. On the one hand we have a very low rate of literacy and produce more graduates of general education; and on the other, we lack graduates and professionals in the challenging disciplines of science and technology.

The rush for DU seats would have been worth the trouble, had it been a guarantee for reasonably well-paid jobs at the end of the term. Perhaps we need to lesser the pressure on general education and focus more on technical and vocational subjects with the aim to create opportunities for self-employment and encourage private enterprises.

Ensuring a Meaningful Election

The Role of the Advisory Council

Today, the mere presence of a non-party Advisory Council in place is just the beginning of the next round of problems to be tackled before we are home and dry at the completion of a free and fair election which establishes a new parliament. To cope with the immediate problems, the new caretaker government will need to address the following issues in short order:

(i) Re-establishment of the rule of law and restoration of administrative authority.

(ii) Immediate recovery of arms and the neutralisation of all *mastaan bairas* as a force in the elections.

(iii) Reconstitution of the Election Commission and amendment of the election rules to ensure that the Commission can intervene, *suo moto*, to suspend or cancel fraudulent or intimidatory elections in any and all centres, including the entire elections.

(iv) Updating and completion of the electoral rolls.

(v) Putting in place and enforcing a code of conduct amongst the political parties for ensuring a credible, violence-free, election and tackling the issue of money power as a factor in influencing the election outcomes.

(vi) Putting in place a credible instrument from civil society to monitor the polls, which can also have some international back-up to give the polls international credibility. The goal should be to have the institutions of civil society, acting collectively to monitor polls in every single polling centre, as well as at the constituency and national level.

(vii) Immediate measures to put the economy back on track to correct the negative consequence of the events of the last six weeks.

(viii) Measures to ensure not just a free media but also an effective one which can create enabling conditions for a fully participative election.

The Role of Civil Society

Now that civil society has asserted itself in quite unprecedented ways in recent months, in defense of the democratic process they can hardly retire from the field and leave it to the good sense of only those who are engaged in the electoral struggle. Different elements in civil society from individuals, grassroots workers to business and professional groups, should come together to formulate:

(i) Codes of conduct for ensuring free and fair elections and their enforcement. This should include measures to neutralise violence and enforcement of rules on election expenditure.

(ii) Mechanisms to monitor the elections.

(iii) Policy agenda which they expect political parties to address in the course of the campaign.

(iv) Ongoing institutional arrangements to hold members of parliament accountable for their election promises. This should include putting in place mechanisms whereby the voters can take to task their electoral representatives if they violate the trust of their electorate.

(v) Finally, institutional arrangements and mechanisms from civil society should be designed for constantly keeping people's agenda alive in the minds of the voters and before the attention of the new government as well as parliament. All these initiatives by civil society suggest that democracy is too fragile a plant to be left to the exclusive care of politicians. If we want to preserve democracy then ordinary citizens must be prepared to expose themselves to the inconvenience of hard work and even some risk, in order to sustain it.

by Rehman Sobhan

them, the viability of our democratic institutions are at stake. If, at this point, the main parties choose to personalise the issues, seek to settle scores, and divert public attention to such parochial agenda they will only demean themselves and persuade people that all these struggle for the right to vote will only perpetuate the rule of the *mastaans*. In the forthcoming elections it is the party which first rises above these parochial concerns, disowns terrorism as an instrument of electoral politics, raises the level of political discourse in the campaign to focus on issues of immediate concern to common people, not to mention the horrendous problems of the economy, is likely to capture the voter's support. An attempt to sincerely and creatively address such issues by a party would provide some hope to the voters that the next election will be contested over how to solve their problems and not to nourish the egos of the contending parties, thereby trivialising the very nature of the democratic struggle of the election outcomes.

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PEOPLE having speech difficulty, after receiving right therapy, are able to speak well and communicate well. But people with no history of speech difficulty are sometimes unable to pronounce certain words correctly. Even the most learned persons may experience this difficulty. If they are public figures, they are advised to rehearse such words sufficiently so that they pronounce them correctly in public. Besides the individuals, the whole nation or a community may sometimes have such problems and these may persist for long, lingering over ages. These words are called

Jawbreaker

by AKM A Quader

Bofors, Hawala and Polls

It is a tragedy that in the name of caste or religion the blatant examples of dishonesty and deceit are sought to be covered up. The hawala is an opportunity to hold politicians accountable, to find out their assets and to prepare the ground to build something afresh.

SOMEONE asked me a few days ago what would be the main poll issue? The hawala pay-offs were then in the headlines. I thought for a while and replied: 'I'm certain something will prop in.' I was not sure whether the stain that had got stuck to political parties. But the matter may not stay at that. It will lead to the larger issues of corruption: the hawala will be part of it. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's five-year tenure will come into focus — all the scandals, from the Rs 95,000

favour of the Arjun Singh-N D Tewari Congress.

Another case is that of Airbus 320. Indian Airlines signed a deal with Airbus Industrie, France, to buy 31 aircrafts.

There was an allegation of 'commission' paid to top political leaders. Only after the V P Singh government came to power did the CBI register a criminal case in March 1990. A special investigation group was constituted for the purpose.

done well in releasing the CBI from prime minister's control but this action is only in relation to the hawala case. What about the pay-offs in deals relating to the purchase of Bofors gun, Airbus and submarines? The CBI has made little progress, obviously obeying the orders of the prime minister, who heads the CBI.

String together the cases which Rao did not allow to proceed, the election is all about cleanliness, honesty, virtues and leadership. And this is what the electorate must concentrate on. Now the battle on corruption has been joined, it should be taken to its logical end. The polls give an opportunity to the voters to defeat tainted persons, however high. The hawala or the string of corruption cases, deliberately sabotaged by Rao, have distilled the names of certain political parties and individuals; they represent the worst in the nation and should not be allowed anywhere near the seat of power.

'Who says we are in politics, we are a business.' This remark is attributed to a minister at the centre. He was frank enough to make a confession. What he said holds good for most members of parliament and the state legislatures. They are there to make money, and to misuse power.

In Japan and Italy, the battle against corruption began innocuously but it developed into a torrent of anger and horror. Many front rank leaders, including prime ministers, had to quit. Some of them were subsequently tried in law courts and sent to jail.

In India, where a politician has become synonymous with ill-gotten money and demolition of values, the people's assertion is necessary to set into motion a process of cleanliness. It is a tragedy that in the name of caste or religion the blatant examples of dishonesty and deceit are sought to be covered up. The hawala is an opportunity to hold politicians accountable, to find out their assets and to prepare the ground to build something afresh.

The door is ajar. It has to be opened fully. Once that happens, politics may be able to wash off the dirt which has accumulated on it from the pay-offs in the Bofors gun scandal at the hawala.

among the politicians, lawyers, teachers, doctors, engineers, civil servants, businessmen, journalists and so on and so forth. The difficulty with these people is that they truly believe in semblance of existence at any cost. They are perhaps afraid of any kind of change. To them quality of life is not important. They are prepared to compromise with anything and anybody as long as they are able to consolidate their own position somehow. They want to occupy the high offices of the land. This was for opening a bank account for showing that the family was maintaining foreign account without the government's permission. But the whole thing misfired when V P Singh challenged the bank account. The CBI has never questioned Rao although it has been chastising Chandraswamy who, of course, carried out the task of opening the account to the request of Rajiv Gandhi.

Apparently, this was for public consumption. The contents of the note were never disclosed. One can only infer that the Swiss authorities acceded to the government of India's request because of the inexplicable delay in the pursuit of the case. It is yet to see the light of the day. Rao may have thus paid Sonia Gandhi, once threatening to jump into the arena, the price for her 'refusal' to come out openly in

Jawbreaker



Noorjahan Begum went on to champion the spirit of conjugal harmony by bringing out an exclusively women's weekly. Few take interest in 'Begum' today but when it made its appearance it did stir quite a bit of enthusiasm on its own merit.

Rokonuzzaman came to Dhaka with Mohammad Nasiruddin on May 28, 1949 to escape the communal riots in Calcutta. After serving as the press manager of *Saagat* for a brief period, he joined the Daily *Meillat*. His dream of establishing a juvenile organisation received active cerebration at about this time. Although he never parted with his dream he did part with *Meillat* only to join the daily *Ittefaq* on March 1 in 1955 and the rest is history.

The passion and conviction with which Rokonuzzaman remained focused to his dream and succeeded in translating it into reality is a source of inspiration for all dreamers — dreamers who never want to part with their childhood. Yet the man is so incredibly simple and unassuming. Remarkably active and young looking for his age, Rokonuzzaman or everybody's 'dadabhai' still moves around unaided for even the simplest of the jobs. The undisputed leader in the untried path of juvenile interest never got so carried away by his own exploits as to expect the other speaker on the phone to try and recognise him first. It is always him first, 'I am Rokonuzzaman.'

He was instrumental for bringing out *Shishu Saagat* in 1949. However, his involvement with *Saagat* was not confined to professional obligation. Its editor the late, centenarian Mohammad Nasiruddin became his father in law. Rokonuzzaman could have not asked for a more matching life partner because his wife

long here. They have nothing to be proud of and they are lost in the gutter of history.

Famous Kissinger still has difficulty with the name of the country called "Bangladesh", because it did hurt his pride. To the colonial powers, "Independence" is a jawbreaker. All the dictators get their jaw broken with words such as "human rights," "freedom of speech," "democracy" etc. Sometimes a section of the society can cause jawbreaking. Tyrants like Ayub and Ershad would not pronounce the word "students"; it would clamp their jaws and make them go berserk. Certain names belong to such categories: Gandhi to Churchill, Ho Chi Minh to Johnson and Nixon, Castro to US Presidents, Nelson Mandela to the Apartheid regimes of South Africa, Naser to Eden, Sheikh Mujib to Ayub and Yahia, Mugabe to Ian Smith, Ben Bella to De Gaulle, and so on.

The men bearing these names have changed the course of history and destiny of their nations and peoples. They are bestowed with lofty qualities of life such as patriotism, courage, kindness and forgiveness.

I shall start with some common and simple words. "Muktijuddho" (war of liberation) is such a word which jammed the jaws of Yahia Khan and Tikka Khan. "Muktijuddha" is another word feared by those who were rajakars, collaborators and who refused to accept the creation of Bangladesh. Many of our distinguished compatriots' cannot pronounce "Deshopem" (patriotism), because they are still in love with the regime that was 25 years ago.

The liberation of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971 by the ordinary people of Bangladesh was an extraordinary achievement. Many meritorious 'compatriots' all on a sudden discovered that their merit had nothing to do with this glorious victory. This victory and this hour of honour do not belong to them. To them the words "Muktibahini" and "Muktijuddha" have become jawbreakers. They shall never forgive us for their moral defeat. When the national flag is raised or when "Sonar Bangla" is sung and the rest is history.

In the past twenty-four months, a number of words have become jawbreakers for a number of people belonging to different tiers of the society in Bangladesh. They are from

the political prisoners, most of them young students, involved in the famous Chittagong Arsenals Raid Case used to be courteously escorted to the court room by several senior police officers and heavily guarded by armed Gurkhas and British soldiers and how they were offered comfortable seats in the court room by the Presiding Judge.

I particularly remember how these young revolutionaries used to attend the court every morning clean shaven and dressed in spotlessly white and freshly-ironed dhotis and purdahs and wearing shining sandals or pumpshoes. In contrast, from a press photograph I have seen on how one of the most famous political personal-

To the Editor...

Are we a civilised nation?

Sir, On a most graceless farewell meted out to a great man like Justice Shahabuddin immediately after his relinquishing power to an elected prime minister and her Cabinet whom Justice Shahabuddin himself installed in power. I once expressed the view through the columns of your esteemed daily that we are a graceless nation. During the British rule, Indians were more or less slaves and sedition was a grievous crime punishable with death.

As a youngster studying in Chittagong about 60 years ago, I still vividly remember how