

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 some time 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 inter-bank 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 over 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 lessen 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

by Rehman Sobhan

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 *mastana bahinis* 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 consequences 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 the Political Parties

A number of other issues will need to be addressed which will surface in unexpected ways over the next few months where courage and cool heads in the caretaker government will be required. It is thus imperative that all political parties invest their political authority behind the caretaker government, avoid making it into a battleground to settle scores left over from the confrontation of the last few years. At the same time no one should look to this government to solve outstanding problems, particularly political problems, inherited from the previous regime. This task should be left to the next government elected through the forthcoming polls.

Today the major political parties are on test and through

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 *mastanas*. 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 struggles of the last several years.

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.

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, especially Congress and the Bhartiya Janata Party, would have worn off by the time elections were announced. It has not.

Both the BJP and Congress have gone down in the estimate of voters. The BJP has been the worst sufferer because its base, the middle class, which is finicky about norms and standards, has felt horrified. At one time, the party protagonists claimed 200 seats. Now they admit that even the present strength of 121 would be hard to retain. A tepid response at most places to the *rath yatra* by BJP chief L. K. Advani has jolted them.

Congress too has lost. By spreading the taint wide, Rao has seen to it that his party alone does not look disfigured. In states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, where there is a straight contest between Congress and the BJP, Congress has improved its position. In Madhya Pradesh, particularly, where the Hawala has tarnished both parties, the BJP looks uglier. Congress, which was somewhere near 100, may go up to 120.

The shadow that the Hawala has cast on the Janata Dal is comparatively small. The three states — Bihar, Orissa and Karnataka — where the party has its showing, have no tall partyman involved. Bihar's chief minister Laloo Prasad Yadav may have got mixed up with the cattle feed scam, but he does not figure in the Hawala. Since the CBI is busy examining the scam — and it proposes to submit an interim report — it is difficult to say how the Janata Dal would fare if there is an adverse report. But, to quote Laloo: "I have cemented the combination of the backward and Muslims so firmly that nothing can affect Bihar."

Still, the three states will not give the Janata Dal more than 65. If the arrangement with Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP works out in letter and spirit, the party may get another five to seven seats. Counting some freak wins here

and there, the party may secure 75 seats. Together with the leftists, who may win 55 to 60 seats, the combination can go up to 130-135.

Thus, the Hawala debris has proved heavy for the back of all 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 to the Hawala.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

crore bank scam, the Rs 5,000-crore sugar scandal to the alleged purchase of MPs to survive a no-confidence motion. Also in the fore will be the cases which the prime minister has sabotaged.

When he assumed power in June 1991, he assured parliament that investigations into the Bofors kickbacks would continue. Sarad Pawar, defence minister at that time, said that "there was no let up in the inquiry" which, he said, the CBI "continued to pursue actively."

Then came March 1992. Foreign Minister Madhavsinh Solanki gave the Swiss authorities at Berne a note to go slow on the Bofors case. Although the note has remained a mystery till today, yet Solanki was eased out from the cabinet. (Rao brought him back to a high position in the Congress organisation). Still, the prime minister said in the Lok Sabha in April 1992 that government was committed to get at the bottom of the truth in the Bofors pay-off scandal "without hindrance." He went on to add: "I don't want this government to function under a shadow."

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

The short-lived Chandrashekar government, dependent as it was on Rajiv Gandhi, transferred the officer heading the special investigation group. By then Letters of Rogatory, requesting for information, had already gone to France. The Rao government preferred not to pursue the case. The public does not know whether replies were received at all and what information they contained.

There is yet another case of submarines. V P Singh as defence minister resigned from the Rajiv government on the issue. The CBI took up the inquiry only during the V P Singh regime. But the case has made no headway under Narasimha Rao.

Still pending is the St Kitts case where Rao's involvement is beyond doubt. He has himself admitted that he got connected with the attestation of Ajaya the forged signature of Ajaya Singh V P Singh's son, at the behest of the highest in 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 chasing Chandraswamy who, of course, carried out the task of opening the account to comply with Rajiv Gandhi's request. The Supreme Court is quite right in keeping track of the proceedings against Chandraswamy, but what about Rao? The Supreme Court has

Jawbreaker

by AKMA Quader

JAWBREAKERS

Those who have idea of process or related industries often encounter a number of equipment which are employed to perform hard and arduous tasks. These include jaw crusher, gyratory crusher, stone breaker, pulverizer, hammer mills, grit disintegrator, etc. These are actually robust equipment and they perform satisfactorily under all sorts of odd and adverse conditions producing products of the right specification. If they fail to operate as required, they can bring untold miseries to the operators, maintenance personnel and the company itself. Likewise, words termed as jawbreakers can cause sufferings to individuals, to a particular section of the community, to a group of people, to the whole nation and so forth.

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 rajas, collaborators and who refused to accept the creation of Bangladesh. Many of our distinguished "compatriots" cannot pronounce "Deshpreem" (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 "Mukti Bahini", "Bijoy Dibashi" 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, they find that they do not be-

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

Those who found or still find these names as jawbreakers are self-seekers and believe in slavery and human bondage. Education alone was not enough to enlighten their sight and mind beyond their clan. People got united under these great men and fought to establish the truth and got themselves liberated finally. Afterwards, some of these great men failed to fulfil the aspiration of the people for various reasons. But they proved their worth at the hour of need. They made history for their people together with them.

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

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 exalted positions no matter how does it come. But they at least lack one thing, that is, self dignity. Although it is a hard truth but it is wholly true that a person loses his dignity, at least to a considerable extent, when he seeks an employment. A farmer, a rickshawpuller, a peddler, a "coolie" or a "panwalla" perhaps is more dignified than the most brilliant man who is in employment of an individual or even the state. A servant at some point develops a slave mentality, being used to the whims of his master. He cannot often think that he once 'existed' and had an identity. But a farmer or any one of the kinds mentioned above has no master to please, and always feels he exists, he breathes, and he does not carry the burden of any master.

What are these 'jawbreaker' words that have found recognition in the past twenty-four months? These are: Caretaker Neutral Government, Shaheed Janani Jahanara Imam, Reference to the Supreme Court, Ghatok Dalal Nirmla Committee, Jagannath Hall, Yasmin of Dinajpur, illegal Sixth Parliament, Voterbhin Victory, Vote Dakarti etc. I am ready some of these are pronounced correctly and others still remain jawbreaker. The nation has already paid dearly for these jawbreaker words. Let those remaining words be no more jawbreakers and pronounced correctly right now. Otherwise, it may be too late, and let us not commit self-immolation.

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To the Editor...

Are we a civilised nation?

Sir, On a most graceless farwell 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

the political prisoners, most of them young students, involved in the famous Chittagong Armoury Raid Case used to be courteously escorted to the court room by several senior police officers and heavily guarded by armed Gurkha 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 purjabis and wearing shining sandals or pumphaes. In contrast, from a press photograph I have seen on how one of the most famous political person-

alities of our country, I mean Begum Matia Chowdhury was being brutally dragged towards a police van by some illiterate police constables and also from what I read in various newspapers about the most discourteous manner in which some of our senior and well-known politicians like Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury, etc., were treated by the law authorities, undoubtedly under instructions from their higher authorities, I am beginning to wonder whether we can at all claim to be a civilised nation.

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Everybody's Dadabhai

by Chandra Shekhar Das

HE turned seventy-two last Tuesday. Still brimming with the confidence and drive becoming a youth, he walks into the Segunbagicha office of Kochi Kanchar Mela everyday in the morning and rarely gets back home until it is fairly late into the night. Few would need more hints to recognise Rokonzaman Khan popularly known as Dadabhai, the man who pioneered the maiden juvenile organisation in this part of the world some forty years ago and since then has been revered as the nucleus of all aesthetic activities involving children.

A living document of many vicissitudes, Dadabhai established an organisation of enlightened consciousness on April 2 in 1956 while working as a sub-editor of the popular Bengali daily Ittefaq. On October 5 that year, he brought out a page under the title Kochi Kanchar Pata (the juvenile page) with an unmistakable view to spreading the message of his organisation across the land. Dwells Dadabhai on Kochi Kanchar Mela's emergence, "The whimsical attitude of the West Pakistani rulers led to the fall of the Jukta Front (United Front) government. Martial law was enforced. With the memory of the language movement still very fresh the renewal of repressive measure changed the whole scenario. We badly felt the necessity of an organisation that would imbue the future generations with the spirit of tradition and individuality as a nation. Kochi Kanchar Mela is an outcome of that sense of urgency and necessity."

Dadabhai was born at his maternal uncle's place at Pangsah of Rajbari district on April 9 in 1925. His father hailed from Bheramara of Kushtia. However, Rokonzaman never really lived there being all overish in the rather feudal atmosphere of his paternal

home. So he chose to grow up in the place of his birth with the ceaseless flow of his maternal grandfather's affection and progressive spirit moulding his mind. Rowhan Ali Chowdhury, Rokonzaman's maternal grandfather was the editor of Kohinor, a Bengali daily committed to the cause of communal harmony and the freedom of the undivided India from the clutches of the British.

His childhood also recorded the profound influence of another man of letters, noted writer Yakub Ali Chowdhury, who happened to be a cousin of Rowshan Ali Chowdhury. Through Yakub Ali Chowdhury, Rokonzaman was introduced to the world of books, mostly those of juvenile interest. Perhaps the desire of being a real life Peter Pan or, in other words, the desire of not growing, developed in him from there.

Time passed and although the child in Rokonzaman never grew up, life had to go on. Rokonzaman's first acquaintance with working life was a stint with Bongio Muslim Sahitya Samiti (Bengali Muslims' literary society) as an assistant librarian way back in 1945. Two years later he switched to job. Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy's daily Ittefaq offered a situation of an information assistant and Rokonzaman filled the slot in 1947. A year after joining, Rokonzaman got something up his street. He got the charge of *Mitali Majlis* or the juvenile page of Ittefaq.

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



Noorjehan 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.

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

The passion and conviction with which Rokonzaman 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, Rokonzaman or everybody's 'Dadabhai' still moves around unaided for even the simplest of the jobs. The undisputed leader in the untrodden 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 Rokonzaman."