

They Must Not be Wronged

The computers and their operational systems as used by the four Secondary Educational Board or SSC exam taking set-ups have proved to be jinxed this way or that. The victims have always been the examinees. Nobody has yet been known to get undeserved benefit from the computers but, from the time they are there, many were there who have been hurt by the Board's plunge for the gadgets in the hope of adding efficiency and cutting an error and time of publishing the results.

This year the computer factor seems to have hurt a great number and a great many of them very badly. Examinees doing excellently in other papers have been failed for forgetting to write the set codes on their scripts. So there have been many who have done very well in all subjects and then, forgetting to write the set codes and correctly, they have been failed. Granted this time it is these students whose own mistake has set off the chain of their suffering, it must still be remembered that their mistake has nothing to do with their academic performance. They are being failed exclusively due to not responding rightly to a purely non academic requirement issuing from the introduction of computers in the processing of results.

Those who are conversant with the ways of the computers devised well to sort out wholly a situation, feel that it should be rather easy to spot the scripts with no set codes or wrong one and then trace back their writers and set the whole tragedy right. Exactly that is the reason why the computers are thought to be the most marvellous of man's creations.

If this presents a far too ticklish problem for the computer team because of the bulk of the searchings that must be done, the Boards can very easily fall back on that traditional way of setting a wrong right. Average out the scores on the rest of the papers and treat that for the missing paper.

The point is that the examinees cannot under any circumstances be victimised because of any faults other than academic. It is to ensure this that the machines are there. And examinees are not there to satisfy the requirements of the machines. We appeal to the Boards to act positively to relieve the situation and soon.

Flexibility Missing

The strike at BIRDEM is spoiling the rationed breakfast of its many beneficiaries. The numerous non-patient well-wishers of this specialised treatment and guidance facility are upset, too. Must a good thing built from the scratch by the altruistic visionary and workaholic Dr Ibrahim and accepted as a model in the 'outside world', go the way of other hospitals facing work-stoppages every now and then?

We think not. If the basic reputation of the hospital could remain intact despite the discontent simmering for some time, then there is an inner strength of dedication to a cause at the BIRDEM. This glimmer of hope should not get lost on the employees and the management both. And for the good name of the organisation, they ought to refrain from stressing their differences to a point of irredeemable stand-off.

It is not for us to sit in judgement on the CBA or non-CBA status of the 1700-member Employees Welfare Association of the BIRDEM or the set of recruitment rules typical of that organisation nor are we venturing to blame anybody for the trouble at BIRDEM before the full picture is available to us. But what seems crystal-clear even at this stage is that discussions were on between the association leaders and the BIRDEM officials and before these could meet with any failure that the strike has been resorted to. In fact, the dialogue reportedly produced an agreement of sorts which needed to be placed before the July 28 meeting of the all-powerful council for its final approval. The other positive thing seemed to be the council's assurance to review the employer's demands on a nearer date, i.e. July 24. Who was really instrumental in closing the door for negotiation is obviously a subject-matter for probe, but suffice it to say that if the spirits were good, the negotiations would not have derailed.

Such an example of successful private initiative benefiting thousands upon thousands of people in the country cannot be allowed to atrophy through rigidity and bad blood. Normal work and negotiations can go hand-in-hand with strike put away at a safe distance —utilized only as an extreme measure.

For a Full Picture

We have only words of sincere appreciation for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's express resolve to rehabilitate freedom fighters who remain in distress even after 25 years of our national liberation. Her pledge is all the more greeted because she has quite significantly delivered it at a grand re-union rally of FFs marking the merger of two Muktiyoddha groups into one under the original banner name: Muktiyoddha Sangsad.

Having said that, we have to add by way of urging the Prime Minister to order a long, deep look into the still hanging question of the freedom fighters' rehabilitation and furnish the outcome of that effort to the public in the shape of a White Paper. Much has been said and claimed to have been done by governments all these years; yet, Muktiyoddhas kept making news in the print media with their tales of neglect and deprivation deeply hurting the national psyche in the process.

This is the right time, as far as public expectations of the present government go, for taking a full stock of what has so far been done for the freedom fighters either by offering them jobs or taking them into the fold income-generating efforts or giving them outright grants.

Let all the assets, profits earned, and liabilities of the Muktiyoddha Kalyan Trust and its units be detailed through the white paper in public interest.

Tradition and Political Talent

A CIVILISATION without tradition, as Sinclair Lewis put in *Arbitrar* a self-degenerate into amusing itself only with rubbish. In the context of our achievement of independence through the glorious War of Liberation *Ekushey February, Ekushey Bot Mela*, the 1952 Language Movement, three million martyrs, the six-point charter of demand, the 1969 popular Revolution, March 7 historic Race Course Address, and the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 26, 1971, are all a part of our glorious history, and its tradition. Denying them or downsizing them would

and the missing link with history was the very poor quality of the souvenirs. The souvenirs made no mention about the '52 Language Movement, 69 popular Revolution and the glorious contribution of the Dhaka University to the 71 War of Liberation. Not only that the souvenir didn't even mention the unforgettable spectacle of the hoisting of the flag of independent Bangladesh, nor was there any reference to the four Dhaka University leaders, otherwise known as the 'char khadifas', three of whom are amongst us, and all three are in their respective leadership areas: ASM Rab, Noor Alam Siddiqui and Shah Jahan Siraj, Abdul Qudus Makhani is no

ENCHIRIDION

Waliur Rahman



amount to degenerating history. Two recent events of importance put the above contention in sharp relief: one is the Platinum Jubilee celebration of the Dhaka University on July 19, and the other is the inauguration of the Dhaka City Museum on July 20.

The year-long celebration of the Dhaka University's Platinum Jubilee, starting during the rule of Bangladesh Nationalist Party ended when the Awami League assumed power after long twenty-one years. As a leader in *The Daily Star* of July 20 issue said, "in the quiet unresonant passage of its 75th year, this continuance of democratic spirit probably formed the only silver lining. But then much of the glory was lost because most of the old boys of the university were not informed, nor were they contacted. The most glaring example of lack of perspective

Delhi was not built in a day. It would thus be our efforts to make sure that Dhaka can be made into a liveable city, a metropolis with a human face. Dhaka City Mayor Mohammad Hanif deserves three cheers for facilitating the *Jadughar* effort. He would do well by consulting Ali Sadikin, Governor/Mayor of Jakarta, who modernised the Indonesian capital in record time. These events point up two important lessons with good will and understanding, civil society can work towards the betterment of common men and women. "History is to be judged with objectivity", as the German historian Ranke concluded. As someone said, "Millions have crossed over the centuries the river Rabicon. But as we learn from history, only Caesar's crossing was significant." In writing our story we can ill afford to forget this lesson of history.

Government of Consensus

by MH Rashid

THE unnecessary heat generated during the deliberations of the very first day of the 7th Parliament on the issue of the government of consensus was very disheartening. In our opinion, the treasury side has been wrong in calling its government one of consensus, although it is not difficult to understand what they mean by it. Its rejection by the opposition on the ground that there is no provision of such a government in the Constitution was also too hasty. They could have sought clarification from the other side before rejecting the idea. It is surely not a coalition government and inclusion of a few opposition MPs in the cabinet as a gesture of goodwill does not oblige the opposition parties to deviate from their assigned role in the parliament.

People of Bangladesh, irrespective of their party affiliations, believe that some degree of consensus among the MPs of all shades is essential for solving some of the most serious problems faced by the country to-day. During the past five years, the BNP government was found to be hesitant in taking bold steps on many occasions due to the apprehension that

the opposition parties may take political advantage. However, the statements of the main opposition leaders that they will play a constructive role in the new parliament is very encouraging. The list of issues on which national consensus is essential can be long, but the following need immediate attention. **Terrorism:** If the political parties decide not to give shelter to the terrorists, the country will be free from terrorism in no time. In that case, the parties will also gain in terms of credibility and respect of the people, and the citizens will live in peace.

**Student politics:** Who knows it better than the politicians how seriously the country is plagued by student politics? The old saying that, if you want to destroy a country, spoil its education system, is very true in Bangladesh at this point of time. The long-term impact of the steadily deteriorating quality of education in Bangladesh is frightening, especially in economic terms. On the basis of consensus student politics may initially be banned for at least five years on an experimental basis.

**Privatization:** Government in the past failed to take bold steps to privatise such organizations as PDB, Railways etc., and loss making industries, simply due to the reason that the opposition parties will incite the employees. But it can be done through consensus, thereby saving thousands of crores of Taka in subsidy. The money thus saved can be used in other productive ways.

**Corruption:** The fabric of our society is on the verge of collapse due to corruption of diverse nature. Unless it is brought down to a tolerable limit (if not eradicated absolutely), it will be impossible to bring about any meaningful economic progress in the country and the responsibility for the same will fall squarely on the politicians.

**Welfare alleviation:** Alleviation of the suffering various activities, such as, employment generation, population control, infrastructure development etc., is a gigantic task which the government cannot implement properly without the support of the opposition.

Consensus is beneficial for

One Term for the UN Chief?

Sounds Good

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

The United States, Russia, China, Britain and France — can veto any resolution. The concept of the "veto" is not only undemocratic, it is unethical as well. Are any of these powers divinely more gifted or morally more righteous to make better decisions than all other nations combined? Even going by the earthly rules of "might is right," do the hold-outs of the colonial era, Britain and France, belong there?

SINCE its inception, the United Nations has been graced by some stalwart Secretaries-General. Sweden's Dag Hammarskjold (1953-61), who gave his life in a plane crash, trying to bring peace in Africa, and U Thant (1961-71) of Burma, who did his best to keep the 1962 Cuban missile crisis from getting out of hand. Then there was Kurt Waldheim of Austria (1972-82), possibly a Nazi sympathiser. And now we have the self-serving Boutros Boutros-Ghali of Egypt. Ever since he got elected in 1991, courtesy of a stealth operation led by France, Boutros Boutros-Ghali has been busy seeking re-election and repaying his debts to his sponsors. In the meantime, it is becoming increasingly clear that the United Nations is in dire need of strong leadership, something any Secretary-General seeking re-election is unable to provide. What is more worrisome for Boutros-Ghali is that the world's only remaining superpower, the United States, does not support his candidacy!

The United Nations consists of the General Assembly, which is nothing more than a rubber stamping debating Society, and the 15-member Security Council, where all the decisions are made. Much vaunted "democracy" takes place at the Security Council, where any of the five so-called permanent members — The United States, Russia, China, Britain and France — can veto

Serbian atrocities against the hapless Muslims of Bosnia, and was empowered by the UN to call in retaliatory NATO air strikes. Instead, he decided to please non-interventionist Britain and France remembering gratefully that the latter had won him the Secretary-Generalship in 1991.

Recently, in an article in the *New York Times*, Diego Arria, the former representative of Venezuela to the UN, suggested one term for Secretary-Generals, which seems like an excellent idea. Arria also believes that the UN should be led by a strong, former head of government. As a firm believer in the good that the UN can do, Arria's suggestions should be listened to. (This writer had corresponded with Arria in 1993, when he was one of the few representatives in the UN who espoused the cause of the Bosnians.)

However, the permanent members will not be able to stomach a "strong" or a "former head of government" as the UN Secretary-General. In lieu of that, someone with the inside knowledge of the working of the UN, someone with an impeccable record of advocacy of human rights, someone such as the former representative to the United Nations from Venezuela, Diego Arria, would do nicely!

The writer is a Rhodes Scholar from Bangladesh who currently lives in Princeton Junction, New Jersey, USA.

OPINION

Special Envoy

Hedayat Ahmed

According to a report appearing in your esteemed daily on 21 July hectic lobbying for the post of special envoy is going on among the leading business personages.

We are a very creative people and we claim many firsts in innovations. The creation of the post of special envoy is one such first. In diplomatic usage, the term 'special envoy' carries a special meaning. A special envoy is appointed to undertake a very special assignment which cannot be handled through the normal diplomatic channels. Persons of very high intellectual and professional standing are appointed in such capacity for a specific period. But in Bangladesh we do things differently.

This unique position was created by the former prime minister ostensibly to promote foreign trade and external economic relations, but in actual fact, it was a subterfuge through the normal diplomatic channels. Persons of very high intellectual and professional standing are appointed in such capacity for a specific period. But in Bangladesh we do things differently.

But peace cannot be ensured without putting the criminals to trial. So the peace process in Bosnia is ultimately at stake. Though things seemed to be in order, they may get in complex disorder at any time. Notorious Radovan Karadzic and his general Radco Mladic along with their followers are still at large, and they are the main obstacle on the way of peace. Karadzic is too stubborn to hand over power in an interview with the BBC. He claimed himself innocent and defended himself saying that he did everything for the betterment of his people. And his people are fond of him still he has been trying to convince the world that his presence is necessary in the Bosnian political arena. If we say the western leaders are going to swallow Karadzic's pill, we are perhaps not guessing wrong.

The most ridiculous among the measures that have been taken so far against Karadzic is to issue a warrant. It says that the NATO-led IFOR must arrest Karadzic as soon as he is seen and Karadzic is yet to be seen!

It is an open-eyed boy of the Russians. The Serbs had been backed by Russia since Bosnia declared independence and the Serbs started a genocide soon after. So Russia must bear the lion's share of the responsibility. The Clinton administration is happy that it could involve the Serbs in the IFOR and the Serbs are also satisfied for the same reason. The result of this mutual understanding has recently shown its face. Very recently Russia challenged the right of the NATO-led IFOR to arrest Karadzic. So speculations say that there should be a bad relation between Russia and the NATO

ensures no guarantee to try the war-criminals. The agreement only says that "no war-criminals will be allowed to hold offices in New Bosnia". This is the funniest solution to the most important problem. By this solution it is clearly assumed that the western leaders rather set the war-criminals scot-free. But peace cannot be ensured without putting the criminals to trial. So the peace process in Bosnia is ultimately at stake. Though things seemed to be in order, they may get in complex disorder at any time. Notorious Radovan Karadzic and his general Radco Mladic along with their followers are still at large, and they are the main obstacle on the way of peace. Karadzic is too stubborn to hand over power in an interview with the BBC. He claimed himself innocent and defended himself saying that he did everything for the betterment of his people. And his people are fond of him still he has been trying to convince the world that his presence is necessary in the Bosnian political arena. If we say the western leaders are going to swallow Karadzic's pill, we are perhaps not guessing wrong.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Whither consensus? Sir, Let us call a spade a spade before it is too late. Think before you step to get the result best. It is wise to think thrice. We are happy if we go slow but steady. We win if both sides of a coin are seen.

Turning and after the general elections, our newly-elected Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina repeatedly said that she would run the administration of the country on consensus about the national issues.

Immediately after assuming the office of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina ordered displaying/hanging the portrait of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, declared observance of 15th August as the national day of mourning and changed the name of Radio Bangladesh to Bangladesh Betar.

Many people welcomed the decisions and the dynamism of Sheikh Hasina but many people also were at a quandary at her dynamism in the context of her earlier pledge that she would run the administration of the country on consensus.

It may be mentioned here that over the last 21 years there was no display/hanging of portrait of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, no observance of 15th August as the national day of mourning and no announcement of the name of Bangladesh Betar from Radio.

The people of our country have given a clear mandate to Awami League to run the country for the next five years. The term expires in 2001. In democracy there is no guarantee, no surety which political party would win or lose in the general elections. What would happen if BNP or any other opposition party wins the general elections in 2001? So again no more display/hanging of portrait of father of the nation, no more observance of 15th August as national day of mourning, no more announcement of Bangladesh Betar from Radio.

is a zero-sum game, and has nothing western about it. Moreover, there is a predilection among us to do wrong thing for right cause, criticism is never tied with progress. So politics has been criminalised and the criminals have been politicised. It is not real democracy. It smacks of veiled dynastic rule.

The question is whether Bangladesh society will be content to subsist on the crumbs fallen from the table of West or it will become creative on its own right. In the first hypothesis, the country will become more and more dependent on the West while preserving a past which will become weaker and weaker and end up in cultural slavery. In the second hypothesis, cultural catholicity will begin to emerge gradually in accordance with the fact of life and democracy which would flower will reflect the real national ingenuity. Democracy is not a child of Enlightenment Movement of Europe. It was there before the gurus should be reminded. So instead of following the West, which glitters, let us submit to humble apprenticeship of Japan which might enable us to assimilate and overtake Europe as Japan has.

We expect and hope that both Awami League and BNP would cooperate and extend all possible help and assistance to each other in arriving at consensus on all national issues in the interest of national unity, solidarity, peace and progress.

Our newly-elected Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is pledge-bound to run the administration of the country on consensus. So instead of any abrupt and hasty decision why don't we arrive timely to a consensus on all national issues in the greater interest of the nation?

No one can deny the fact that we are now moving towards a two-party system. Awami League has emerged as the single largest party forming the government and BNP as strongest ever opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad.

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United against Shibir

Sir, The attack by the Shibir activists on July 1, 1996, at Jahangirnagar University to capture the students dormitory was successfully foiled by the spontaneous resistance of the general students. Shibir could not maintain its grip on the hall.

The attack on general student's by the Shibir activists proves that they have adopted a strategy of creating violence and terror on the campus following the defeat of Jammal in the June 12 elections.

The people didn't want them to be in power, so the student's should be united against any evil design of Shibir anywhere.

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Dayton Peace (?) Agreement

Sir, The Dayton Peace Agreement signed on the 15th December last year in Paris possesses some weak points which deserve criticism. But as it was initiated and hosted by the big powers, it was welcomed. No doubt, the agreement stopped the bloodshed but real peace is still a far cry.

The so-called guardians of peace pushed the poor Muslims and Croats to accept the uneven conditions in the treaty while the war-monger Serbs got an open favour. The Serbs were given 49 per cent of land though they are no more than 30 per cent of the total population. They were given some important cities and towns, and they are to share the capital Sarajevo. All these are international deceptions and the Muslims had to cede to those injustices.

Student politics

Sir, The new Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has made some laudable declarations. One of them is that she would like to deliver books, not guns, into the hands of students. "Bravo!" we can say.

But if that is to happen, she should get a bill passed in Parliament banning politics in all educational institutions. To begin with, she must disband her own party's student wing, Chhatra League, from university campuses. At the same time, she should call on other political forces in the country — the BNP and Jamaat — to band their students wings: Chhatra Dal and Chhatra Shibir respectively. The parties should respond to the call; and

The western gurus

Sir, The general election of 12 June 1996, it is claimed, has given Bangladesh true democracy. The western gurus have certified it. Democracy is Uncle Sam's cloth. Parliamentary democracy is John Bull's. It is the product of the western bourgeois culture. The western model has been thrown over the poverty culture of Bangladesh where life

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